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HOW TO CULL THE LAYERS.

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Heavy egg laying is correlated with certain visible or physical characteristics of the hen. This has been demonstrated by studies of trap-nest records of individual hens. A knowledge of these characteristics makes it possible, at certain seasons of the year, to cull the poor layers of the flock with a fair degree of accuracy.

Judging and culling by physical characteristics is not as accurate as the trap nest but it is possible to pick out a large proportion of the unprofitable hens in the flock by this method.

Trap-nest records prove that the poor layer discontinues laying early in the season. The hen that stops laying and molts in July and August is, on the average, a poor layer. She will not lay as many eggs in the following year as the hen that continues laying throughout the summer and early fall. Neither has she laid as many eggs in the months preceding. The hens that have stopped laying in July and August should, therefore, be culled. Hens that have made a poor record in the first year will, generally speaking, make a poor record the second and subsequent years.

TESTS FOR NON-LAYING.

If trap nests are used it is a simple matter to go over the records and pick out the non-layers. In the absence of trap nests non-laying is indicated by:

1. The shriveled condition of the comb, wattles, and ear lobes.
2. Closeness of pelvic bones.
3. Contracted or hardened condition of the abdomen.

Another indication of non-laying, which may be called the color test, is valuable only with breeds that naturally have yellow skin and shanks; as for example, White or Brown Leghorns and Plymouth Rocks. This test cannot be used on breeds of naturally pale or dark skin and shanks, such as the Orpingtons, Black Minorcas, or Campines. Hens of the former breeds that show distinctly yellow shanks and beaks have not been laying for several weeks. If, in addition to this yellow color, their combs and wattles are shriveled and the abdomen is hard they are certainly not laying. The yellow in shanks and beaks does not necessarily indicate non-laying, but it does indicate that the hen has had a rest period for several weeks. They may have started again to lay and the color not yet become pale. It requires several weeks for the color to disappear.

Non-laying is also indicated by the molting of the feathers. Occasionally, however, a hen may be observed to lay while in partial molt in which case the comb and wattles will indicate a laying condition.

In culling by these methods there will be greater accuracy if the flock has received normal feeding and care throughout the year. Any irregularities in feeding or care, or sudden changes therein, may cause a good layer to stop laying and sometimes to molt early. Where the feeding and care have been normal the culling will be very accurate. If the flock should be producing an abnormally low yield of eggs it would indicate that many good layers had stopped laying.

In the average flock, it is possible, during July and August, to cull twenty percent of the hens without decreasing the egg yield of the flock.

CULLING THE POOREST.

Cull in July, August, and early September the hens that show:

- A. Well-developed molting with distinctly contracted comb and wattles.
- B. Contracted abdomen or dry, puckered vent.
- C. Yellow shanks and beak.

Test "A" will usually be sufficient, but sometimes it will need to be combined with "B" to insure greater accuracy. Test "C" alone is not sufficient. It should be combined with "A" or "B".

SELECTING THE BEST.

The above tells how to select the poorest layers. This method, however, does not tell how to separate the medium good layers from the best.

If the poultryman wishes to cull everything but the very best, or those with a capacity of about 200 eggs in a year, he should make the selection from October 15 to November 15 by the following tests:

Keep those hens showing:

1. Incomplete molt, red comb and wattles, and bright eyes.
2. Well-spread pelvic bones, good depth from pelvic bones to keel bone, and soft abdomen.
3. Pale shanks and beak and vent, among breeds that have naturally yellow skin and shanks.

To make the selection with the greatest accuracy, use all three tests.

The high price of feed stuffs, as well as the added expense of labor and other items which enter into the cost of producing eggs, makes it imperative that there should be a careful culling of the laying flock if a profit is to be made by the producer. High-producing hens are making a better profit at the present prices of eggs and feeds than before the war. Poor layers that made little or no profit in the period of cheap feed now show a greater loss than ever on the food they eat.

Culling the slacker hen is in the line of food conservation and helps win the war.

References: Extension Bulletin 21, Cornell University, Ithaca, N. Y.; Experiment Station Bulletin 92, Storrs, Conn.; Experiment Station Circular 197, University of California.