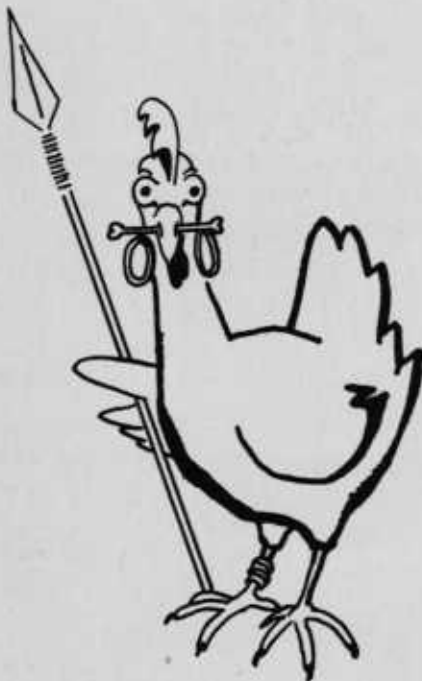


D

CANNIBALISM

In Poultry



Extension Circular 589

May 1955

**Federal Cooperative Extension Service
Oregon State College • Corvallis**

Cooperative Extension work in Agriculture and Home Economics, F. E. Price, director. Oregon State College and the United States Department of Agriculture cooperating. Printed and distributed in furtherance of Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914.

Cannibalism In Poultry

causes

CANNIBALISM among chickens and turkeys—picking feathers, toes, vents, or other body parts—is a vice that develops in many flocks. Molested birds will be killed if cannibalism is not controlled. Even if few birds are actually killed there may be great economic losses, such as lowered growth efficiency and market grades, or reduced egg production.

The exact factors or combination of factors causing cannibalism are not known but certain feeding and management practices appear to be associated with the vice. Observations at Oregon State College reveal that an outbreak of cannibalism may occur at any age after the birds are 2 to 3 weeks old. It may happen even though the best known management practices are carried out, but the control methods discussed in this circular often are effective.

It is always a question whether or not a grower should debeak or use anti-pick equipment before cannibalism actually gets started in the flock. Certainly it is best to do so before pullets reach heavy production if previous experience shows cannibalism is likely to occur. Debeaking or applying specks or pick guards during lay may cause lower production.

Some producers are able to avoid cannibalism through good management with certain strains. If a severe outbreak occurs it is better to debeak or use an anti-pick device than to lose birds. The experienced grower who is familiar with his strain can usually determine the program he should follow under his system of management.

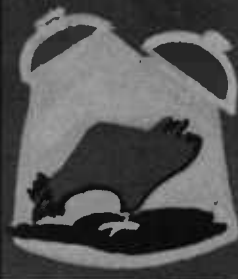
This circular was prepared by Lawrence Johnson and J. A. Harper, Poultry Husbandry Department, Oregon State College.



Crowding. During the brooding period chicks and poults should have 1 square foot of floor space per bird. Allow 2½ square feet per bird for pullets raised in confinement, until they are put in the laying house where they should have 3 square feet.

Chickens need 1 inch of feeder space per chick the first 2 weeks; increasing to 3 inches or more after 7 weeks. For turkeys, provide 1 inch per poult the first 2 weeks and 3 inches thereafter.

Too much light. Toes and blood-filled feathers show up in a bright light. They make appealing targets. Use red lights and darken the brooder house, leaving just enough light so the chicks or poults can see to eat and drink. Poults require more light than chicks the first week. Do not seal air inlets.



Improper temperature and ventilation. Poultry houses that are too hot, or filled with stale air, seem to encourage cannibalism. Start chicks or poults under a hover with the temperature at about 95° F. This temperature can be reduced about 5° F. each week. If the air in the brooder house or laying house becomes damp or foul smelling, provide more ventilation.

Lack of something to do. Birds on wire floors and open-air, community type cages are most likely to develop cannibalism. Birds housed or raised on wire usually have to be debeaked or specked.



Nutritional deficiencies. Adding salt, whole oats, or animal protein to a balanced ration may help to control cannibalism, although this is not a sure control. Beak wiping on the feathers may lead to cannibalism in turkeys. Equip turkey feeders with a tightly stretched wire to enable birds to wipe feed from the beak.

Inadequate nesting facilities. Insufficient nesting space may cause hens to lay eggs on the floor or to crowd up in the nests. This entices the hens to start picking the exposed organs immediately after the egg is laid. Community nests should be dark enough to avoid this. Provide at least 1 nest for every 4 or 5 hens, if using single nests, or a minimum of 1 square foot of community nesting space for 5 hens.



Injuries and blowouts. The sight of blood often starts cannibalism. Remove from the flock any bird that has blood showing, or daub some anti-pick paste on the injured portion. Birds suffering from blowouts should be removed from the flock immediately. Fighting among males encourages cannibalism.

Inheritance. It has been observed that some strains are more cannibalistic than others. This is difficult to determine, because of the many environmental factors that influence cannibalism. Slow feathering, nervousness, and feather coloring are inherited characteristics that may affect cannibalism in both chickens and turkeys.



cures

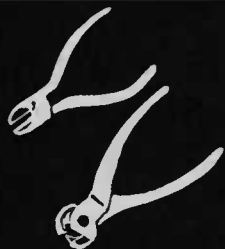


Anti-pick pastes. These can be used to curb cannibalism if just a few birds are affected. A bitter tasting, blood-colored preparation or pine tar daubed on the picked portion is effective. There are several commercial preparations for this purpose. If many birds are picked one of the following methods should be used.



Hen specks or blinders. These can be applied for the prevention of cannibalism in laying hens. They are attached to the nostrils and prevent the birds from seeing straight ahead but apparently do not affect eating or drinking. Specks should be applied to pullets before they start to lay. Several types are available and appear equally effective.

Debeaking. This is the most practical method to use with broilers. Debeaking is accomplished by cutting off the upper beak from $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ the distance between the tip and the nostrils. If less than $\frac{1}{2}$ of the beak is cut off it will grow back within a few months. If $\frac{1}{2}$ or more of the upper beak is cut off it will not grow back, but the lower beak usually grows longer. This makes it difficult for the birds to eat scratch from the litter or to drink from shallow waterers. In this case it is advisable to feed the scratch on top of the mash or in troughs on the floor. Chicks or poults can be debeaked at any age. Any sharp cutting tool can be used to debeak poultry. An electric debeaker with a heated blade to cauterize the tissue is commonly used.



Pick-guards. This device, as the speck, is attached to the nostril and extends over the end of the beak. It prevents the hen from picking forward, but does not hinder her eating. Neither specks or pick-guards are commonly used on turkeys.



Turkey-bits. These consist of a piece of wire placed between the upper and lower beak, held in place by squeezing the blunt ends into the nostrils. The wire prevents the beaks from closing tightly and injuring other turkeys, but apparently does not affect eating or drinking.



Dubbing. Large combs and wattles make attractive targets. Cutting off the combs and wattles of roosters at an early age will cut down cannibalism in breeding flocks. This will also prevent fertility losses due to frozen combs.



Once started, cannibalism becomes a habit. Every precaution should be taken to prevent it.