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POULTRYMAN GIVES ADVICE

FARM EXPERT TOUCHES VITAL ISSUES.

Manner of Breeding Best Layers
Gone Over With Care.

Few farm topics excel the question of poultry raising, for it extends farther than the farm. Hence the address of Charles C. Lamp delivered at the Farm Week course before that institution was forced to close up on account of the snow is of especial interest. Mr. Lamp, who is extension poultry specialist at O. A. C., went on to say in the course of his remarks:

Much has been done during the last dozen years in the breeding up of high laying strains of hens by certain experiment stations and breeders. While the average farm hen in the U. S. averages but about 80 eggs per year, we now have many flocks of

considerable size averaging more than 200 eggs per hen. A certain flock of 93 "Oregons" (the new O. A. C. breed of chickens) kept at the state hospital at Salem, laid an average of 225 eggs per hen last year. These flock averages are more important than the exceptional individual records of as high as 314 eggs. This progress has been made by keeping egg production records and mating the best to the best providing the individual possess good constitutional health or vigor.

The only sure and accurate way to get these records is to trapnest. It is not practicable for all farmers to trap nest their flocks all the year, but whenever possible, good returns are realized. It would be very profitable to use trap-nests at least three months of the year.

Let these be November, December and January. These are months when work on the farm is unusually not so pressing and also the time when the best layers will be laying. If it is not desirable to learn the actual egg yield, many of these winter layers can be selected by careful observation. At any rate, use some method to determine which are doing the winter laying and then select from them, those individuals that come nearest to your standard in ap-

pearance to breed from. It has been found that those hens that make a good winter record particularly during the months of November, December and January, are the best layers for the entire year.

The Spring is the natural laying season and you will find the medium and poor layers at work then if they can lay at all. If eggs for hatching are then selected hit-or-miss from the whole flock the eggs from the poor layers as well as the good ones will be hatched and the progress of building up a high laying strain will be impeded. Select enough of the hens having made creditable records and establish them in a breeding pen with the best males obtainable. It is probably more important that the males be sons of heavy layers than the hens themselves have big records. It would be possible to use such males on ordinary hens and thus grade up the flock to a much higher average egg yield. However, results will be obtainable much quicker if only the heavy layers are selected and used as breeders.

A breeder who selects his breeding stock from the egg production records will be sure of using the right birds, but there are other factors which must not be lost sight of. That is, factors resulting from environment are also controlling forces. Along the entire line of successful poultry keeping there is one item of paramount importance—Constitutional health. Without this all efforts in any line of poultry work are nil.

If one fails to produce pullets and cockerels with a good constitutional vigor as the parent stock it will be but a short time that there will be a profit in the work. Healthy, vigorous parent stock is largely the secret, to healthy chicks.

If the heavy layers are selected for breeders usually birds with strong constitutions will be had, as a hen must have excellent vigor in order to lay a large number of eggs. But it is also a great drain on the hen to do this amount of work and unless she is properly handled there is a good chance of rendering her unfit for breeding. Heavy layers that are to be used for breeders should be given a rest from laying for a couple of months before hatching time. They should be put on a diet consisting largely of oats and green food and have plenty of exercise. This will recuperate their bodies and tend to produce good, strong, fertile eggs for hatching. More, in the way of production, is now being required of the hen than of any other domestic animal and her health must have due consideration if she is to stand up under the strain.

There are other factors tending to reduce vigor. Inbreeding will tend to run down the stock and eventually result in disaster. The use of immature breeding stock is also another stumbling block. It is a mistake to use young pullets for breeders. Their eggs are usually smaller and not so fertile as from older hens and undersized, weak progeny result. It is a much better plan to breed from hens in their second year of laying as then we know more about their performance as layers and general characteristics. Also use mature males. Good early hatched mature cockerels can be used on year old hens. This seems more desirable than to use old males. The old males should be used more on good mature pullets when such are used.

Crowding of the breeders in close quarters, lack of exercise and heavy feeding are also harmful to best results. Give as much liberty as possible and feed moderately a good laying ration.

The eggs to be used for hatching should be gathered frequently to prevent them becoming dirty, chilled or heated by broody hens. Keep them in a cool reasonably dry place. Use as fresh eggs as possible for setting. Don't keep them longer than 10 days or 12 days. If kept more than a week turn them over daily. Too much care cannot be taken to the breeding and hatching of the chicks. It is said that a chick well bred and hatched is half raised.

As yet there is no safe and sure way of picking out our best layers entirely from external appearance; the trap nest is the only sure way. However, a great many unlikely individuals can be eliminated by observing those giving indication of having weak physical constitutions. Professors Rice and Rogers, of Cornell University, give some of the following points for culling out undesirable fowls. "A weak bird is usually dull and droopy. It does not scratch or forage actively. The loudness and frequency of the crow of the male and the cackle of the female is an indication of strength. The large bright comb and wattles indicate health, as the fowl carries its health certificate on the top of its head. The healthy fowl has a good bright, clear full eye. The vigorous bird has fully developed tail feathers carried rather high." The weak bird is slow in feathering and the feathers are not close fitting and lack the brightness and sheen of the strong fowl. Look for the bright, well put together bird with the active alert carriage. Select individual with good strong head and beak, body well set on strong, straight legs. There should be good length, width and depth of body with large capacity of crop and in the abdomen. Fowls possessing these desirable characteristics have the possibilities of being good layers but the trap-nest is the final check. The ability to convert a large portion of the feed consumed into eggs and pass that characteristics on to the progeny together with a good physical constitution is for the breeder to discover by record keeping.

It is very desirable to get your breeding hens mated up early. Hatch your chickens in March and April. It is the early hatched pullets that mature quickest and start laying earliest in life, other things being equal. Fowls of the Leghorn type should be mature and ready to lay when six months of age. Fowls of

(Continued on Page Seven)



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