

The Raising of Turkeys

WITH the coming of the fall our thoughts turn turkeyward, and letters come to the writer telling of the fine success almost everyone has had this year with their turkeys. However, some are also finding that the luck which has been theirs all the summer is now slipping away and some of those want to know the reason why. Mrs. Chas. Jones, the turkey expert, explains this very plainly in one of her interesting talks. She says: "To understand any branch of poultry culture one must know their nature and requirements. The turkey is the only bird or animal that has previously existed in a wild state that has been domesticated to the extent of being raised on farms from the Pacific to the Atlantic and from British Columbia to the Gulf of Mexico. They may be raised further north, but I have no authentic account of the fact. The prairie chicken has never been domesticated. Occasionally wild geese and ducks have been raised, but the turkey stands alone as a wild bird domesticated, and because people have not studied into their wild nature and what their diet consisted of in their wild state they have failed to raise more than a small part of those that are hatched.

In Former Times.

When the turkeys roamed over the forests at the time this country was inhabited by Indians very little corn was raised. A few beans constituted the grain crop, and as the Indians were too lazy to raise the corn themselves, and put the work on the squaws, who had the young braves, in the form of papposes, to pack around on their backs, and all the domestic duties to look after and keep their wigwams in order, they did not raise corn enough to glut the market and the turkeys had to look elsewhere for their food than to the corn-cribs of the natives. The trees were their roofs to keep the young sheltered, the leaves beneath them made it dry for them to walk over, and the insects that had found their homes beneath the leaves made their food.

"Now we are confronted with a different problem. The forests are about gone, and during a wet season the turkeys must be kept near home for protection from the rain. When they have outgrown their baby feed what shall we feed them? Corn as a steady diet is out of the question, as they will eat large quantities, their livers will become congested from such highly concentrated food, and you will notice that one goes a little slow. That will be the only symptom amiss; it will walk a little slower, until it turns up its toes to the blue sky, a silent protest against letting them gorge themselves on the most highly concentrated food that grows.

Wheat Best.

"Wheat, where it can be had, is the best and safest grain that can be fed, but wheat here represents gold dollars and is too expensive to feed. Oats has too many hulls. This year, on account of the high price of wheat, we could not get shorts. Shorts, moistened with water or milk, can be safely fed to turkeys. The turkeys found that we had plenty of corn in the crib and they developed a great liking for it and only wanted to loaf around the crib, until I lost two or three, and then I just turned them out and made them get their living in the fields, and they are all right again. Letting them live on corn is entirely against their way in their wild state, and they have to suffer the penalty. It is like raising children on rich pie, cake and preserves. Their digestive organs get out of order, they become sick and often die.

"When turkeys find that they must stay out on the range and get their living, they are soon content. By instinct, or by personal investigation of the different fields, they soon find where the largest number of grasshoppers are to be found. They are methodical in their proceedings, getting off the roosts just at daylight and going to nearest fields, picking all the insects they

can find, then coming to the house for a drink and starting out for the larger range for the day.

Turning Out On Range.

"At first when turned out on range, I fed them at night as an inducement to come home early, but after the habit is established, I think it better for their health not to feed them, as they come home with full crops and any more crowded into the digestive organs impairs them. As a general thing everybody and everything eats too much. So we are always hearing the complaints of stomach trouble in the human family. Give the stomach a rest and it will last as long as the rest of the body. As no one has been found smart enough to take out the old stomach and put in a new one, better go slow and treat the one that was adjusted to your human mechanism fairly well and try to make it last as long as the rest of the machinery.

"With our turkeys, if we interrogate Nature and ask what Nature would give at this season to her wild turkeys and follow her directions as closely as possible, we shall do well. The fact is that the closer we can imitate Nature in our care of all our feathered friends, the more successful shall we be. Of course, we cannot supply to our domestic fowls the wild seeds, berries and nuts, but we, knowing their food value, can substitute for the insects and wild animal food clean, well-made cottage cheese, clabber milk or buttermilk, skimmilk, meat (either raw or cooked). We can give green alfalfa or soaked alfalfa hay, with grain of some kind. We can leave a nice field of wheat to be picked and harvested by our flock of turkeys; we can let them glean in our olive yards and even pick up some walnuts if we have not acorns or other wild nuts for them.

Feed.

"This may be new doctrine to many, but it was instilled into me in my childhood, for I was never allowed to bring wild creatures or birds into captivity until I had studied in the animal or bird encyclopedia the life history of each captive with the necessary food, and knew the best substitute for the wild food. I attribute my great success with chickens and turkeys to this early training and to the constant turning to Nature when I was in any doubt.

"For turkeys that are on limited range that may be bare of insects, nuts and berries, we shall have to assist Nature and substitute for her fare the best thing that we can find, and undoubtedly that is good, hard corn a year old, so as to be thoroughly ripe and dry, for there is something in new corn that is apt to disagree with turkeys.

"If at the same time the turkeys can be in an olive yard, where they can pick up a few olives that are now falling or even help themselves to some on the branches, this, with some corn at night, will put them in fine market condition and is the only fattening they will need.

Little Confinement.

"Turkeys do not like to be in confinement and I try to fatten them without confining them as much as possible. They will also fatten quickly if they can be in a sweet apple orchard, for they are very fond of sweet apples. Turkeys that have not the advantage of freedom or the wild nuts and spicy berries can be successfully fattened in a yard. My way is: I take two quarts of corn and one quart of barley, soak over night, and in the morning put on the stove to boil, letting it cook slowly until it begins to soften, then set aside covered up until supper time, when it will be cool enough to feed. Give this three times a day, as much as the turkeys will eat up in about fifteen minutes. I add at supper time a chopped onion, as that is a stimulant to liver and digestion. I also add a little ground charcoal, to assist in the fattening and prevent indigestion. I have known charcoal to materially in-

crease the weight by enabling the turkeys to digest more food.

"Boiling the corn removes whatever it is in the new corn that disagrees with the turkeys. One thing in fattening turkeys, begin gradually by feeding the fattening food only once a day and that preferably at the evening meal.

Fattening.

"I only fatten turkeys from two to three weeks before killing. Do not fatten turkeys that you intend to keep as breeders, for fat weakens the organs of reproduction of both sexes and the offspring the following Spring will be weak and small or the eggs will be infertile. I have found this to be the case in many instances where people have had me investigate the cause of eggs not hatching.

"Turkeys should be kept at least twelve hours without food before killing. They may have water, but not food. This is to empty the intestines and to prevent the food which would remain there from souring and giving the whole carcass a bad flavor.

"One word about turkeys getting sick when being fed for market. This shows a lack in the constitution, and is often the result of a slight attack of liver trouble, which they seemed to get over in their early life. The best thing to do now would be to turn them out upon the range again or else you can doctor them up by giving them a dose of Epsom salts, following it with ten drops of tincture of nuxvomica in a pint of water, allowing no other drinking water. Then give freely of chopped onion and bran mixed with the fattening food and market or eat them as quickly as possible. Do not breed from those turkeys, as, though they may be perfectly well, they will not breed a vigorous constitution into their offspring.—Mrs. A. Basley.

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