

Raising Poultry in America--Making It a Profitable Business

The American poultry industry, not long since regarded as a side line of the general farm, is rapidly becoming highly specialized. One of the more recent developments is the hatching and selling of baby chicks. These are now shipped in vast numbers each season, and the trade in them is growing at an astonishing rate. Dealers in chicks have frequently been accused of cruelty by those who merely look upon the surface and are not intimately acquainted with the true facts. Professor Stoneburn takes advantage of the opportunity to present fairly and fully the other side of the case.

BY PROF. FREDERICK H. STONEBURN.

"THERE is nothing new under the sun," is a saying which has been quoted so often that it has become decidedly the worse for wear. Of course, it is not taken literally in these modern days, but it must be admitted that a very large number of ideas which to us seem to be new and original prove upon investigation to be hoary with age.

This is as true in the poultry field as elsewhere. Of late we have been assuming much credit for the development of the open-front or fresh-air type of poultry house, and the general adoption of more sanitary methods in caring for our flocks. But a gentleman living in China writes in an American poultry publication that for a long period of time the poultrymen of China have believed in and generally used both of these new (?) ideas. That they have sheltered their birds under thatched roofs attached to protected sides of their buildings, the poultry shelters being open on two or three sides. Further, that these structures are kept very clean, it being a common practice to remove and renew the straw-mat floors at frequent intervals.

Custom Hatching Plants.

During recent years many American poultrymen have taken up the work of custom hatching, operating incubators having large egg capacity and selling space in the machines to any one who wishes to avoid the detail work of running incubators or attending to sitting hens, or who prefer to pay a reasonable charge in order to secure the benefit of expert service.

Again, we are a trifle behind the times. In both China and Egypt artificial incubation has been successfully practiced for many centuries, and central hatcheries have long been in vogue. Those of Egypt were commented upon by Sir John Maundeville in a volume containing an account of his travels, issued about the year 1350. They were referred to again by Reaumur some four centuries later, and frequently by modern travelers and investigators.

The Egyptian incubators are huge brick ovens, really buildings, constructed of brick and earth. The attendant does his work while actually within the incubator. It might be added that some progress has been made in America with huge hatching rooms of somewhat similar character.

The Chinese incubators are different in type, being merely large earthen jars, covered with wicker work and provided with an opening in the side, through which the charcoal fire may be attended to. Another jar, slightly smaller in size, is placed inside. The baskets containing the eggs are set in the inner jar.

A most interesting account of the operation of the Chinese hatching establishments appears in Professor F. H. King's wonderful volume dealing with the agriculture of China. Some of the more important points brought out by this distinguished author are discussed below.

One hatchery visited is equipped with 30 incubators, each capable of holding 1200 eggs, or a total capacity of 36,000 eggs at one time. In size this compares favorably with many of the prominent American establishments. The machines are operated in the dwelling, the front room of which serves as a shop where eggs are purchased and chicks sold.

The work is not confined to the hatching of hens' eggs alone. Ducklings and goslings are also produced in large numbers. The eggs are not permitted to remain in the incubators for the entire period of incubation. At a certain stage they are removed in padded trays, which are kept in a suitably warmed situation until the hatch is completed.

No breeding stock is kept by the owners of the hatchery, all eggs being purchased, the price paid being about 50 cents per 300. The chicks are sold at about \$1.30 per 100.

The Baby Chick Trade.

Here we encounter another industry which has only recently taken root in America—the selling of baby chicks. Very few people, save those in intimate touch with the poultry industry of our Nation, realize how extensive the trade in baby chicks is at present, and how rapidly it is growing. But our sellers of chicks have something to learn from those in China. The latter have learned the trick of distinguishing the sex of the newly hatched chicks, and they sort them accordingly. Each purchaser may designate just how many pullets and how many cockerels should be included in each order. Pro-

ducers of eggs naturally select the former, while those who desire to grow table poultry prefer the latter. Some time we may expect to have our progressive dealers announce that they are now in position to ship either male or female chicks, as requested, and such will certainly be in position to corner the market.

When the pioneer American baby chick dealer first offered to ship newly hatched youngsters by express to distant points, he was subjected to an unlimited amount of public ridicule and more or less abuse; the former from those who just knew the plan could not be worked successfully, the latter from the misinformed individuals who thought the babies would be cruelly treated.

Chicks Safely Shipped.

But the experience of many thousands of purchasers has conclusively shown that chicks may safely be shipped by express to distant points, and the general acceptance of this fact is indicated by the establishment of large hatching plants in all sections of the country and the steady expansion of the business done by them. Many are now hatching and selling more than 250,000 chicks each season, while those with an output of 100,000 or more are so common that they excite but little comment.

Unfortunately, the cruelty idea still persists in certain quarters. As late as two years ago there was some talk at the annual meeting of the American Poultry Association of introducing a resolution condemning the shipping of baby chicks, on the ground that the practice is responsible for much unnecessary suffering. However, sane counsels prevailed and the resolution was never brought up.

Consider the facts. When newly hatched, baby chicks do not require food or water. Few professional poultrymen supply either for at least 48 or frequently 72 hours. A sufficient degree of heat is demanded, however. The successful operation of many forms of fireless brooders is sufficient proof that a brood of chicks will generate all the heat required, provided they are kept in a suitable box. Therefore, it is plain that properly packed chicks will be comfortable and contented for at least two days, and few, if any, shipments are en route for a longer time. It must be admitted that the shipments may suffer from improper packing and handling, but the commercial factor acts here to correct such troubles. The sellers of chicks must deliver the goods in first-class condition, otherwise their trade will suffer. This compels them to use suitable cases and exercise care in packing. The transportation companies are always looking for business. If they fail to give careful service,

their income suffers through the curtailment of shipments. Therefore, they are actuated by mere self-interest, if by no nobler sentiment, to handle chick shipments with utmost care. In fact, the express companies have issued instructions to their employees to pay particular attention to all livestock while en route, and these seem to be very generally obeyed.

There is further proof that the practice is neither cruel nor inhuman. One large shipper recently stated to me that the backbone of his business is repeat orders from his customers. Certainly, few poultrymen would continue to patronize the same man year after year if the chicks did not give satisfaction. And, obviously, if the little fellows suffered severely during shipment, they would not be satisfactory, because such a large proportion of them would die during the brooding period. A baby chick cannot stand much "grief" and make good later.

Few Chicks Lost in Transit.

The low percentage of dead chicks received by purchasers also indicates careful handling. The man referred to above guarantees that each customer shall receive as many live chicks as he pays for, replacing the dead ones without charge, and this is the usual custom. The loss from this source does not exceed 2 per cent during the entire season, and one could easily believe that a similar loss would be had in large numbers of chicks transferred directly from the incubator to the brooder.

Of late I have received many letters from poultry keepers, inquiring about the quality of the stock one may expect to receive from dealers in baby chicks. Such inquiries cannot be fairly answered in a single word, "good" or "poor." It depends upon the source from which the chicks are secured. The same is true of breeding stock and eggs for hatching. As a rule, one gets about what he pays for when he deals with reliable concerns.

Strong Breeding Stock Required.

But in the baby chick business the element of self-interest compels the producer to pay particular attention to the quality of the breeding stock from which he secures the eggs for hatching. Fresh eggs have a definite market value, and the cost of a given number of chicks is determined by the cost of the eggs required to produce them, plus the labor charge. At current prices of chicks, good hatches must be the rule, or no profit can be obtained from the sale of chicks.

In view of the above, the dealer is greatly interested in having flocks of breeding birds which are healthy, strong and vigorous, as eggs from such sources give largest hatches of strong chicks.

There is another point. The profes-

sional incubator operator equips his establishment with the best incubators and learns, through extended experience, how best to operate them. He must do this in order to insure a reasonable income; and this means that his chicks are well hatched.

One might cite individual cases where purchased baby chicks have been most unsatisfactory in quality; where shipments have arrived in deplorable condition. But these are not sufficient warrant for the wholesale condemnation of a business which, on the whole, is conducted squarely and cleanly. The baby chick industry is here to stay, but it could not last long if the adverse statements made about it were true in any great degree.

The poultryman who needs few or many chicks on definite dates, who wishes to "count his chicks before they are hatched," will find it most convenient to purchase them "ready made." Speaking personally, if I were in need of 50,000 additional chicks this month, I would not hesitate to place my order for them with any one of a large number of concerns whose stock, methods and business integrity are well known to me.

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Her Cup of Coffee Runs Away.

NEW YORK—A woman entered one of New York's automatic lunch rooms appearing much preoccupied. After changing a dime for two nickels she put one of them in the slot marked "sandwiches" and the other in the hot coffee slot.

She turned the crank, as per directions, and then gave a series of panicky staccato shrieks of "Oh, oh, oh! —look!" The other auto-eaters turned in time to see that she had forgotten to put a cup under the faucet, hence the dismay. All of the brownish liquid had filtered down into the drain.

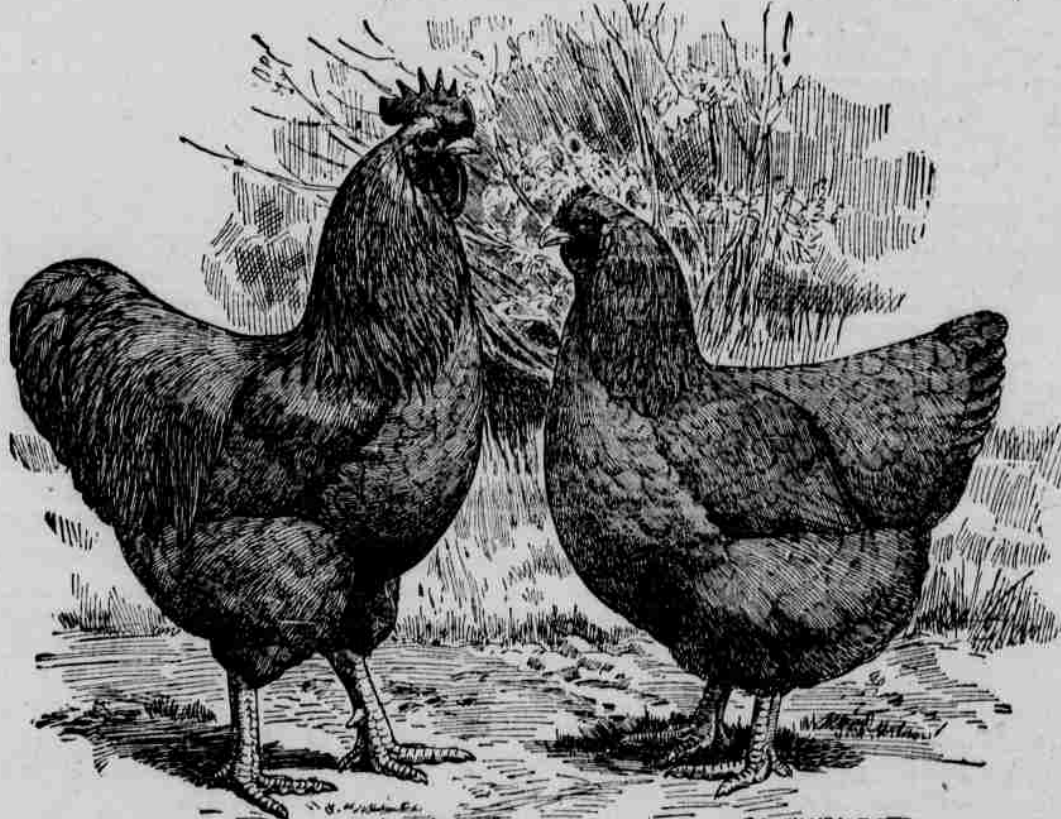
Celluloid from Skimmed Milk.

Thrifty housewives have devoted much time and thought to the economy of skimmed milk. Some of them have fed it to their families, some to the chickens and pigs, but none of them has willingly thrown it away.

Now that the war has interfered with the importation of chemicals used in the making of celluloid, there comes a crafty inventor and asks everybody to save all the skimmed milk. He used the skimmed milk to make films for the movies, coat buttons, collar buttons, piano keys and French ivory toilet articles.

The successful skimmed-milk film has already been exhibited in Chicago.

BUFF PLYMOUTH ROCKS.



New breeds and varieties of poultry come and go. Each has its ardent champions, each is boomed more or less, according to the resources and ability of the fanciers behind it. But through all the changes the grand old Plymouth Rock stands steadfast, the tried and true favorite of a countless number of poultrymen who find it to be one of the grandest general-purpose fowls on earth.

The Plymouth Rock was one of the first produced of the distinctively American breeds, the barred variety being the parent kind. Hardy and vigorous, excellent layers of large, brown-shelled eggs, desirable table stock at all ages, this breed immediately appealed to our poultrymen, and it was soon widely distributed. During more recent years it has been forced to compete with the newer American breeds and a number of foreign kinds, but it still holds its place as one of the most profitable breeds.

Of the six varieties of Plymouth Rocks, the buff was the third to appear. By 1894 it had reached a sufficiently advanced stage of development to warrant the American Poultry Association in giving it official recognition and a place in the American standard of perfection. Since that time vast improvement has been made and it is not now difficult to find large flocks of this variety which are remarkably true to type and marvelously beautiful in color.

The Buff Plymouth Rock is a made variety of the breed, i. e., it carries the blood of several other breeds, through the use of which the plumage color was perfected. Males and females alike are a rich, even buff in all sections. The hens are dependable layers of brown-shelled eggs and make excellent sitters and mothers. Buff Rocks are hardy at all ages and are good table stock from broiler age to maturity. The standard Plymouth Rock weights apply to this variety. Males, 8 and 9½ pounds; females, 6 and 7½ pounds, according to age.