

United States Department of Agriculture Page

Bulletins and Special Articles of Interest to the Northwest, Issued by the Government; Suggestions Covering a Wide Range of Activities; Results of Federal Investigations, Etc.

Advice for Poultry Shippers

Mr. Poultryman: Would you avoid the heavy losses of last year's disastrous season? Follow this governmental advice.

THE fact that it will soon be one year since the calamitous dressed poultry season of 1913 wrecked many handlers of poultry, sent tens of thousands of pounds of chickens, turkeys, ducks and geese to the crematory, and left the consumer with such a strong aversion to the taste of the poultry that reached the market in "off" condition that sales have suffered ever since, is being used as the text of the sermon which experts in poultry handling in the United States Department of Agriculture are preaching to poultry shippers all over the country.

Shippers agree that the spoilage of dressed poultry during the autumn of 1913 was unparalleled, and that the rest of the year has been, financially, one of the worst on record despite the scarcity of meat. Specialists in the Department consider that the blame rests chiefly upon the man who killed, picked, chilled and packed the poultry and sent it to market. This man bought the birds alive, hence they were not decayed when he got them. The railroads, in general, have worked diligently at their refrigerator lines and it is well known that shippers who packed their goods properly found the railroad service last autumn sufficiently satisfactory to deliver the product in good order. The receivers of poultry were hunting for stock that could be sold to a high class trade—but the inspector did not have to look far for poultry that was absolutely unfit for food.

The Department accompanies its words of warning with words of advice to the poultry dressers, telling them how to handle the birds to ensure high quality and a minimum change in composition.

Cooping.

First: The packer, as soon as the birds are received, should transfer them to "holding batteries," which are really coops so constructed that only a few birds are in the same compartment. All have an equal chance to get food, each has an abundance of fresh air and absolute cleanliness is easily maintained.

Feeding.

Second: For 24 hours before killing the bird is not fed but is given plenty of clean water. In this way the crop is emptied and the flavor of the flesh is improved, as well as its keeping quality. Of course, the bird does not weigh as much when emptied of food, but it is better to be paid for a few less pounds of poultry than to receive only a freight bill.

Killing.

Third: Killing should be done by cutting the veins of the neck from inside the mouth while the bird is suspended by the feet—Circular 61 of the Bureau of Chemistry, gives the details of how to bleed and to "brain"—that is to loosen the feather muscles so that the birds may be dry picked, not scalded. Scalded birds have their keeping quality greatly reduced.

Removing Feathers.

Fourth: Holding the bird while removing the feathers is best accomplished by the "frame" method. The second best way is what is known as the "string" method, and the worst methods are the "bench" and "lap."

Chilling.

Fifth: After the birds are bled and picked the animal heat must be removed. The best method of doing so is to hang them, head downward, in a room having a temperature between 30 and 35 degrees Fahrenheit, where they should remain for 24 hours. The temperature must not go above 35, nor below 29 degrees, and the atmosphere cannot be depended upon to remain within these limits, hence mechanical refrigeration is an

absolute necessity. If the packers last season had adhered to this one regulation, it is safe to assert that the inspectors in the markets would have had to hunt a long time for a "green-struck" or "off conditioned" chicken. Putting the birds in cold water, or water and ice to cool them is unredeemably bad, and packing in fine ice with a heavy lump of ice on top of the barrel is a continuation of an unreliable and often very disastrous method.

Packing.

Sixth: Pack the chilled birds in standard boxes—12 to the box—or in small kegs if they are not to be hard frozen, and see that each bird in the package is an exact match in quality, size, color and perfection of dressing for every other bird. This is the height of the art of "grading."

Shipping.

Seventh: Have the refrigerator car in which the dry picked, dry packed poultry is to be shipped iced with a mixture of broken ice and 10 to 15 per cent of salt for 24 hours before loading. When loaded, the temperature of the car midway between the doors, four feet from the floor, must not exceed 35 degrees F. To ensure the best of handling during transportation, dressed poultry should be shipped in car lots. If you cannot get the minimum quantity for a car lot yourself, get together with other nearby shippers and make up a joint car. You may have to bury some hatchets, but that is better than having your bank account snowed under. Get together!

Get Together.

Remember that every bad chicken sold hinders or prevents the sale of a number of good chickens. The housewife remembers only that her family did not like her choice of food. Generally, she does not know whether the bird was dry picked or scalded, dry packed or iced. What she wants is a fine flavored product. Your product may be good, but if your neighbor's is bad yours will also suffer. Get together! In this emergency the good of one is the good of all.

Circulars 61, 64 and 70, Bureau of Chemistry, and Year-book article No. 591, all dealing with the handling of dressed poultry, will be sent on application to the Department of Agriculture as long as the supply for distribution lasts.

Lessons on Corn

FOR the benefit of children in rural schools suggestions for a series of lessons on corn are about to be issued by the U. S. Department of Agriculture. The average production per acre of corn in the United States is still below 28 bushels per acre despite the fact that in almost every section of the country yields of more than 100 bushels have been obtained. The difference indicates in a measure the value of proper instruction in growing corn. The spread of boys' corn clubs all over the country has also emphasized the need of corn study in rural schools.

The forthcoming bulletin contains outlines of 12 lessons covering such important points as the different kinds of corn, ways of judging corn, seed, corn crop rotation, best kind of fertilizers, proper cultivation and the food value of the crop. Suggestions for the proper observance of corn day have received consideration. Rural school teachers, especially in the great corn-growing states, will find the bulletin a valuable aid in the work of stimulating in their charges a healthy interest in sound agriculture.

This bulletin will be published under the title of Farmers' Bulletin No. 617, "School Lessons on Corn," and copies will be sent free as long as the supply lasts.

Concrete for Canals

THE LINING of irrigation canals with concrete in order to prevent losses in the transmission of water is discussed at some length in a forthcoming bulletin of the United States Department of Agriculture (No. 126) entitled, "Concrete Lining as Applied to Irrigation Canals." The census of 1910 shows that there were more than 120,000 miles of unlined irrigation canals in the West. Forty per cent of the water that passes through this, the author estimates, is lost, or, if allowance be made for that which is later recovered by lower conduits the loss is still more than 25 per cent. So much of this loss could be obviated by the use of concrete that in many places the value of the water will more than offset the increased cost of construction.

Big Saving.

On the larger irrigation systems now in course of construction, water rights are being sold for from \$25 to \$50 an acre. In addition to the value of the water saved by concrete lining, the reduction in charges for operation and maintenance must also be taken into consideration; and also the insurance that such construction affords against damage to the crops by a sudden failure on the part of the water supply. As an instance of the importance of the latter the author mentions a break on a canal in California which caused a thousand feet of the main canal on a steep sidehill to be washed out. It was six weeks before the canal could be repaired and although the actual cost of the work was only \$20,000 the loss to the crops from lack of water was estimated at a million dollars.

The bulletin presents in a summarized form some results of seepage measurements, and discusses methods and costs of concrete lining as applied to irrigation channels. It is a professional paper and of value to engineers and others engaged in irrigation work and is not intended for general distribution.

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