

A Weekly Page of Poultry Hints

Does it Pay To Trapnest?

By G. L. Wood, Poultry Editor.

THIS DEPENDS upon the time, resources and nature of the business the breeder would engage in and whether he is in the business for all the money he can make out of it. It is absolutely necessary for the man who would sell high egg yielding stock—and depend on records to make his sales, to trap-nest his flock. These breeders have opened a new avenue for poultry profits, in selling male breeders from heavy layers to poultry raisers who want some of the 1914 egg-laying efficiency in their yards.

Leaving it for granted that there will always be enough of these producers to supply the demand for male breeders when they are wanted, does it pay the average breeder to trap-nest, and does his poultry success depend upon it? A very able contribution on this subject has been made by L. E. Keyser, Smithboro, N. Y., which contains sound practical facts taken from his personal experiences. We submit his views in part:

The aim of the producer of commercial eggs is to produce the greatest number at the least cost. To make egg production profitable the hens must lay well for at least 250 of the 365 days in the year. We all know there are many hens which do not lay eggs enough to pay for the feed they eat, while others are extremely profitable. If all the hens were like the best hens in our flock it would not take such a great number of them to make a poor man rich, while the poor layers can make a rich man poor. By careful selection and breeding the production of hens has gradually increased. They lay more eggs now than they did fifty years ago. At that time people did not expect to get winter eggs, nor did they expect hens to do much during the summer and fall while in the molt. The average farm flock would lay only during the spring months, and those who wanted winter eggs resorted to some method of preserving them.

Poor Layers.

Even now we have hens which do not lay except in the spring, and then only moderately. These are the kind of hens the commercial egg farmer wants to get rid of, but from a lack of knowledge of how to select them or in the belief that they will do better later, they are retained, and in many cases their eggs are used for hatching, which is very likely to result in breeding more poor layers. Of course, it does not imply that because a hen is a poor layer her daughters will be. That depends on the manner in which she is mated. A prepotent male, carrying the laying instinct, is just as likely to impart this quality to the daughter of a poor layer as to the daughter of a good layer. The chances are that the cockerels from such a hen will not carry or impart the laying trait. That is where we run the greatest chance in breeding from a poor layer.

Careful selection for type and vigor all breeders, and a knowledge that the breeding male had a heavy laying mother may help to a certain extent, but there will still be many poor layers. Many careful breeders have installed trap nests and attempted to breed up a great laying strain by their use. Most of those who have stuck to it long enough have succeeded, but owing to the great amount of labor involved many have abandoned the use of trap nests or use them only during the breeding season. This latter plan is productive of good results where one is able to pick out the good layers when mating the pens.

To make egg production profitable we must secure a large number of eggs, and whether it pays best to keep a large flock of moderately good layers or a smaller flock of highly productive hens is the question to be decided. The large flock requires more capital invested in

houses and stock. The small flock requires more attention to breeding. On the large commercial egg farms the trap nest is impractical. It would cost almost as much to trap 2,000 laying hens the entire year as the profit on their eggs would amount to. If one traps continually from 200 to 500 hens is about all one person can care for and look after the growing stock to keep up the flock. Unless the hens are uncommonly productive this number will not afford the remuneration one is wont to expect who takes up the production of commercial eggs as a business.

A Tedious Grind.

For nearly ten years I have trapped my pullets designed for breeders and the breeding hens. It has been a steady and tedious grind. It means that in that time I have visited the coops something like 15,000 times. The duty could not be shirked and must be done every day, whether there is a circus in town or not. Many times I have been on the point of abandoning the work, but the thought that it would render useless all that I have accomplished sustained me. As I think it over I am in doubt whether it has paid or not. In fact, I am strongly of the opinion that it has not paid in dollars and cents. What I learned about the laying hen has been of much use to me, but if I had been on terms of intimacy with my flocks I might have secured a portion of this knowledge without the use of trap nests.

I am pretty well convinced that if I had not trapped my hens and devoted the same time and energy to raising more stock and culling out the poor layers, I would have been money ahead. The plan I should have followed is to breed from the most vigorous females, using males from some reliable breeder who does trap, or select males that came from great laying hens. I should raise about twice as many pullets as I cared for, so as to have plenty to select from and keep culling up continually. Yearling hens should be culled twice a year and this selection may continue to the two and three-year-old hens, as it is their laying condition rather than their age which determines their value. If I had followed such a course I would have been able to care for and raise the stock to keep up a flock from one to two thousand hens with the same labor I now expend on about three hundred breeders.

Not Worth the Price.

By the use of trap nests and pedigree breeding we can build up a laying strain which will reproduce itself to a marked degree, but is the game worth the price? I hardly think so, and this conclusion is reached after ten years of use. The number of pedigreed birds that can be produced is too small, even though they are the best of layers, to return sufficient revenue. We might better discard half the pullets we raise, and will then be able to secure double the number we can by pedigree breeding, and if these selected pullets do not lay quite as many eggs each as the pedigreed stock, the aggregate will be greater. If the pedigreed hens return a net profit of three dollars each and the selected hens two dollars each, we can certainly make more money from 1,000 of the latter than we can from 300 of the former, and the labor will be about the same.

By the flock record we can estimate the number of hens which are laying. If the percentage is small we should make an examination of the hens, say once in two weeks, and note down the band numbers of those which are laying. If this is done three or four times it will not take long to find out the hens which are not producing. Hens which show no signs of laying during two or three examinations may be put down as poor layers and not worth keeping.

From the commercial viewpoint it is doubtful whether it pays to trap nest and pedigree breed. The fixing of the laying trait by this method is slow at best. By breeding for vigor and carefully selecting the layers, flocks of more than ordinary productivity can be secured, though

there will not be the phenomenal layers that are secured by pedigree breeding, nor will the percentage of good layers be as great, but in the aggregate we can secure more eggs and make more money though the profit on each individual hen is smaller.

MORE ABOUT TRAP NEST.

THE HEN of the future will be from trap-nested parents, no matter what breed the "Tom Barron" fowls are. Wyandottes, or a cross, they are the product of trap-nested parents, and their annual winning at the laying contests held in this country should be an object lesson to the American beginner that for egg production it pays to trap-

nest for the future breeder. That our present-day breeds, the American standard Leghorn, Plymouth Rocks, Wyandottes, Rhode Island Reds, or Orpingtons, can be brought to a high standard of egg production goes without saying—it being merely a matter of safe and sane breeding and in the majority of cases the new standard of perfection as adopted by the American Poultry Association at Chicago has in no way harmed the utility qualities of the majority of varieties in the standard. Rather, thanks to the leading breeders, every leeway has been given to improve these qualities. It is now up to the breeders to make the most of their opportunities and breed along safe and sane lines.—Philadelphia Record.

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