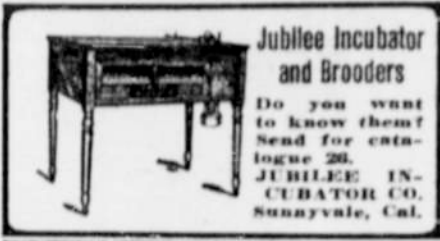


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CONFINING HENS IN HOUSES.

By LeRoy V. Brant.

THE system of confining hens in large houses has been prevalent in some European countries and in a few instances in the east for some time, but on the Pacific coast, where the climate is so mild, this system has up to the present found little favor. However, in a few instances the plan has been tried out, and with good results. In the present article the system as employed by John G. Smith, one of the most successful poultrymen of the Petaluma district, will be described.

"The fundamental principal of success in the poultry business is to keep in touch and sympathy with the birds," said Mr. Smith. "It may seem a little farfetched to talk about being in sympathy with a hen, but that is exactly what is needed to make a man a successful poultryman. I look after my hens, and I figure out what they want, and what is best for them. And, then, if I see a hen drooping I get hold of her and see what is the matter. It is true that a man with a thousand or two of hens has not a great deal of time to be doctoring his birds, but a little does not hurt, and I may also prevent some contagious disease from getting a start. I am never afraid that my birds will get chickenpox or canker from the outside, I am pretty sure that as long as I take good care of the birds and see that they receive the proper food there is no outside influence that is going to take half a year's saving out of the bank by killing a bunch of my hens. Every poultryman knows that there are times when he will get a disease in his flock from his neighbor; I am not troubled in this way, for my hens never come into contact with my neighbors, and if he has trouble in his flock he keeps it to himself.

In running the hens in the house in this manner the rancher saves a great deal of time and labor, according to Mr. Smith.

"I figure that a man can care, easily, for fortyfive hundred hens in this way," said he. "Now I have in this one house 1100 hens, I clean the house every morning. It is necessary to do this with this system, and in this way there is a little more work than if the houses were cleaned only once a week, but the labor saved in other ways more than repays for that expended in that direction. Ordinarily, it keeps a man hustling to care for three thousand hens, but as I said, he can care for 4500 with this system, and I suppose that if he wanted to hopper feed them he could care for even more. I am of the opinion, however, that it would be far from wise to hopperfeed with this system, as the main exercise that the birds get is in scratching for their feed, and they would lose that if they were fed in hoppers."

The question of exercise is one that enters largely into this system. Mr. Smith remarked that he had never had any trouble with the hens getting too little exercise.

"I find," he said, "that the hens will scratch in the litter which I supply all day long, even after all the grain is picked out of it, and in this way they really get more exercise than many hens that are out of doors. I keep the floor of this house covered with a straw litter all the time, and the way hens scratch about in it would convince any man that they were getting exercise."

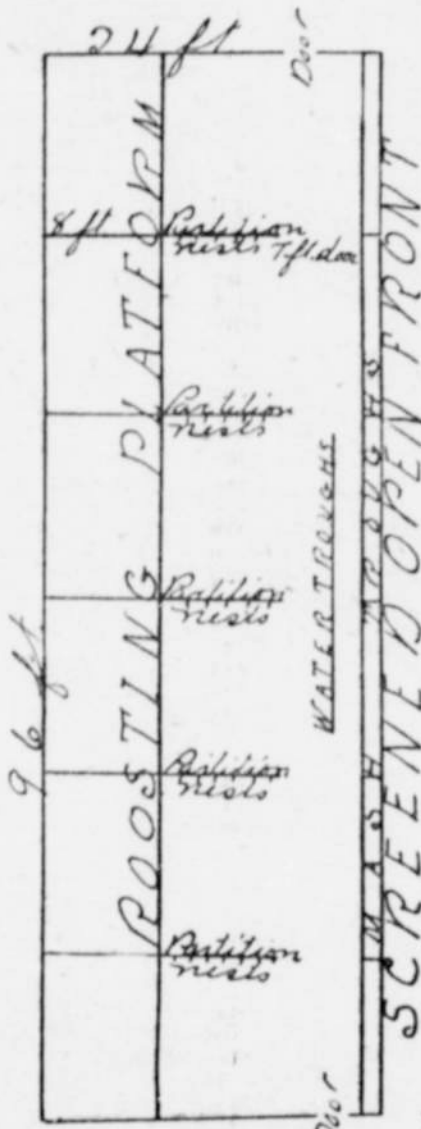
The straw was almost ankle deep on the floor, and the hens were indeed scratching in it as if their lives depended on it. The entire floor was a working mass, and after a little observation the most skeptical would have been convinced that these birds were getting all the exercise they needed. Mr. Smith stated that the straw was renewed every three weeks, which was quite often enough, and that it took four bales to cover the floor.

"I find that it will take about half a day to clean out the straw and renew the supply," said the owner of the ranch. "This makes fine fertilizer, and

as the soil on my place is rather heavy for convenience I find that the addition of the straw as fertilizer is of great service in loosening up the soil. After a year or two of adding this compost to the ground the soil is in good condition for any crop."

Another advantage which these houses possess over houses of another sort is the fact that the hens are kept out of the storms at all times. There is no chance that the birds will get wet and take cold from exposure, as is often the case with other systems. No matter how hard the rain, or how severe the wind, there is no chance that it will affect the flock. And in fact will appear to be an advantage to the man who knows just what extent a hard wind will effect the egg yield.

The accompanying cut shows the interior arrangement of the house. The length, 96 feet, is divided into six spaces. At each division there is a



partition running within seven feet of the open front, extending clear to the ceiling. The object of this partition is to break the draft which would be created in a house the length of this one in which there were no partitions. The open space of seven feet is fitted with a door which may be closed at night, in which there is a small hole through which the hens may pass at will. Mr. Smith's own words will explain the object of this arrangement to the best advantage.

"Many people, preparing for this system build their houses about a hundred feet long and sixteen or twenty feet in width. This will not do at all, as with this arrangement it is impossible to get enough protection for the hens. If the partitions are built clear out it will take away the benefit of the whole room for all the hens. Again, if the house is built the same dimensions as this, and the partitions are not built in as they are here the wind sweeps through the place, the hens catch cold, and the poultryman has a time in general. It is necessary that some sort of a partition be made in the building, and I have decided that six of these partitions will safeguard against any possibility of cold from a draft in the house. The doors that I set in place during the night are a further safeguard against the draft, and I leave the small hole in the door so that it will be possible for me to close these doors at any time and yet know that the hens will have an opportunity of going to their usual place of roosting."

The roosts are placed on a sloping platform, at the back of the house as will be seen from the diagram. The object of so placing the roosts is that it facilitates the work of cleaning in the morning.

In the first place it is easier to take a hoe and clean off the boards, as Mr. Smith does, than it would be to take a shovel or other instrument and clean off the floor, in the second place the slight slant allows the droppings to be raked down to the front easily, and

POULTRY.

In the third place the whole business is so arranged that a wheelbarrow may be brought along the side and the droppings pulled off into it. It is a very simple and convenient arrangement, and it takes only about half an hour a day to do the cleaning.

The sides are six feet in height, with a fifth pitch roof. The front is boarded up for three feet, so that the hens cannot look out and be discontented. The other three feet is covered with a two-inch mesh wire. This allows an aperture 96 feet long and three feet wide through which air may come, and there is never a tinge of smelt in the house other than that smelt that is about the bodies of the fowls. As shown in the diagram the mash troughs are ranged along the wall under the netting. These troughs are made of tin and are nailed to the wall.

The rations which these hens receive could hardly be held responsible for the excellence of their laying at the present season. The following formula will be seen to be very little different to that which the average run of birds get: Bran, five parts; ground wheat, four parts; boiled barley, one part; granulated milk, two parts; ground corn, one part; beefscraps, two parts; charcoal, one part; alfalfa meal, one part; barley sprouts, three parts.

"With this ration is fed all the grit the hens will eat, in the mash. The grain dist is made up of one part cracked corn and three parts wheat, fed in the litter in the evening. Enough of this is placed in the straw that the birds will have a small allotment of feed to last them in the morning till the mash ration is brought around.

At times these hens are let out of doors for a couple of hours per day, merely as a change for them. The writer asked Mr. Smith why he did not have a dust bath in the house for the hens, and he replied:

"I have not yet found the need for one. I have found no lice on the hens, and besides, every time I change the straw in the house I spray the floor with crude carbolic acid, which has a decided tendency against the breeding of lice in the straw. And, so long as I have no lice, why should I clutter the house with a lot of paraphernalia that would only be in the way."

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