UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE

Extension Division

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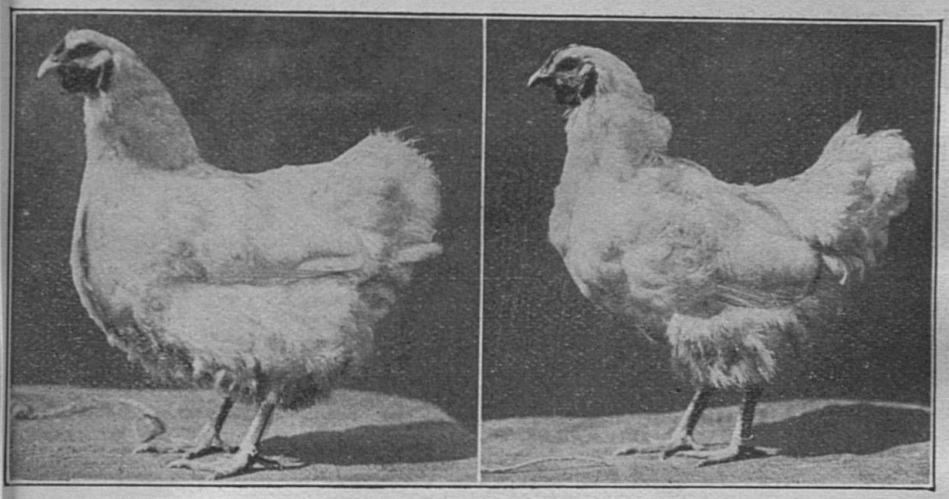
CIRCULAR NO. 101

HOW TO CULL THE FLOCK

By

J. HOLMES MARTIN



226 EGGS IN 1 YEAR
MOLTED IN NOVEMBER

82 EGGS IN 1 YEAR
MOLTED IN AUGUST

How They Looked August 15th

LAYER	LOAFER
1. Pin bones (pelvic or lay bones) wide apart.	1. Pin bones close together (one finger's width or less).
2. Vent pale and pliable.	2. Vent yellow and puckered.
3. Large, full, bright red comb and wattles.	3. Pale, shriveled comb and wattles.
4. Pale yellow to white beak and shanks.	4. Deep yellow beak and shanks.

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CIRCULAR NO. 101

HOW TO CULL THE FLOCK

By J. Holmes Martin.

SELECTING THE HIGH PRODUCER

(Apply this test in late summer.)

Molting

When a bird stops laying in the summer she usually starts molting. The later a hen lays in the summer or the longer the period over which she lays, the greater will be her production, so that the high producer is the late layer and hence the late molter. The length of time that a hen has been molting or has stopped laying can be determined by the rate of renewal of the feathers. First the body feathers are shed, the tail next and then the wing, which molts from the middle out. Molting is one of the most valuable characters in picking the cull because of the simplicity of its use.

Color Changes Due to Laying

The pigmentation or COLOR CHANGES should be observed by daylight. Laying uses up the surplus fat in the body, and it especially removes the fat from the skin. In yellow-skinned breeds this loss of fat can readily be seen by the loss of the yellow color. The different parts of the body tend to bleach and become white as the stored fat is used up. The changes occur in the following order:

The VENT changes very quickly with egg production so that a white or pink vent on a yellow-skinned bird generally means that the bird is laying, while a yellow vent means a bird is not laying. It should be recognized that all yellow color changes are dependent on the feed, coarseness of skin and size of bird. A heavy bird fed on an abundance of green feed, yellow corn, or other heavy material that will color the fat deep yellow will not bleach out nearly as quickly as a smaller or paler-colored bird.

The color goes out of the BEAK, beginning at the base and gradually disappearing until it finally leaves the front part of the upper beak. The lower beak bleaches faster than the upper, and should be used where the upper beak is obscured by horn or black. On the average-colored, yellow-skinned bird, a bleached beak means heavy production for at least the past four to six weeks.

The SHANKS are the slowest to bleach out and hence indicate a much longer period of production than the other parts. The yellow goes out from the scales on the front of the shanks first and finally from the scales on the rear. The scales on the back of the shank are the last to bleach out and may generally be used as an index to the natural depth of yellow color of the bird. A bleached-out

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shank usually indicates fairly heavy production for at least fifteen to twenty weeks. The yellow color comes back into the vent, ear lobes, beak and shanks in the same order that it went out, only the color returns much more quickly than it goes out.

Body Changes Due to Laying

Heavy production is also shown by the quality of the SKIN. Fat goes out from the skin and body with production, so that the heavy producers have a soft, velvety skin that is not underlaid by layers of hard fat. The abdomen, in particular, is soft and pliable.

One of the finer indications, yet one of the most valuable in picking the high layer, is the fineness of the HEAD and the closeness and dryness of FEATHERING. The head of a high layer is fine. The wattles and earlobes fit closely to the beak and are not loose and flabby. The face is clean-cut. The eye is full, round and prominent, especially when seen from the front. The high layer is trim; that is, the feathers lie closer to the body but, after heavy production, the oil does not keep the plumage relatively sleek and glossy, the plumage becoming worn and threadbare.

Temperament and Activity

A good layer is more active and nervous and yet more easily handled than a poor layer. A high layer shows more friendliness and yet elusiveness than a poor bird. A low producer is shy and stays on the edge of the flock and will squawk when caught.

While the characters discust here deal specifically with the present year's production, it should be borne in mind that a high producer one year is, generally speaking, a high producer in all other years.

Health and Vigor

In order to lay well a hen must have a sound body and be VIGOROUS and HEALTHY. Constitutional vigor is essential if the hen is to hold up under the exhaustion of heavy laying. Good hatches and strong, vigorous chicks are impossible without vigor and vitality in the parent stock. A good constitution is as much a heritable character as feather color.

The following indications of high and low vitality should be kept in mind when culling the flock:

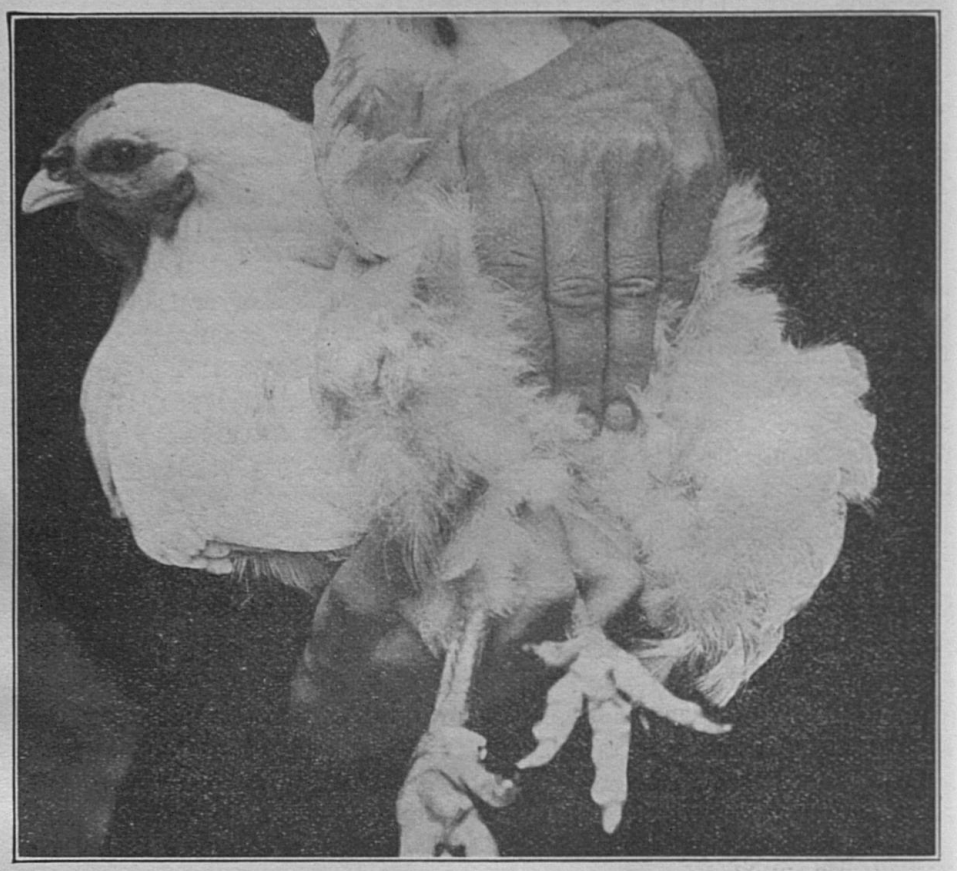
High Vitality	Low Vitality
1. Broad, deep head.	1. Long, slim head (crow-head).
2. Bright, prominent eye.	2. Dull, sunken eye.
3. Long, deep body.	3. Short, shallow body.
4. Strong, parallel legs.	4. Knock-kneed.
5. Stylish carriage.	5. Droopy appearance.
6. Active disposition.	6. Lazy, sluggish disposition.

Body Characters

A laying hen has a large, moist VENT, showing a dilated condition and looseness as compared with the hard, puckered vent of a non-laying hen.

DETERMINING THE LAYER

(Apply this test at any time.)



Width between the pin bones indicates a layer. (The tips of the first three fingers are between the two pin bones.)

Just below the vent are the two pin or pelvic bones, one on each side, projecting towards the rear. By placing the fingers, flat, between these bones, the width apart can be determined (See cut above.) If the ends of the bones are soft and pliable and the width of two or three ordinary fingers (varying with the size of the hen) can be placed between them, the hen is, in all probability, laying at the time of examination. If the bones are close together and the points hard, the bird is probably not laying.

The whole ABDOMEN is dilated, as well as the vent, so that the pelvic bones are widespread and the keel or breastbone is forced down, away from the pelvic bones, so as to give large CAPACITY.

Changes in Comb, Wattles and Ear Lobes

The COMB, WATTLES and EAR LOBES enlarge or contract, depending on the ovary. If the comb, wattles and ear lobes are large, full and smooth, or hard and waxy, the bird is laying heavily. If the comb is limp the bird is only laying slightly, but is not laying at all when the comb is dried down, especially at molting time.