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EFFICIENT MARKETING OF EGGS AND POULTRY

By M. R. Benedict, Professor of Farm Economics

A cooperative shipment of live poultry made to provide an outlet for surplus poultry from one community.

The annual poultry and egg crop of the United States is estimated to total more than $500,000,000 in value, thus ranking well up with wheat, hay, and other staple crops in importance. The 1922 production of these products for the state of South Dakota is estimated at approximately $7,399,895.

The poultry products of the state thus constitute an important source of revenue of greater or less significance on nearly every one of the 75,000 farms of the state. The methods of handling and selling these products offer a number of possibilities for improvement in a way to increase the profit to the producer and to furnish a more satisfactory product to the consumer.

EFFICIENT SELLING OF EGGS

The price received by the producer for his eggs depends largely upon the following points:

1. The quality of the product.
2. The time of the year it is ready for market.
3. The directness of sale from producer to consumer.

Quality of Product

In too many cases dealers, especially in South Dakota, have not been in the habit of buying eggs on the basis of quality, but instead have bought by count, paying the same price for all eggs bought whether good or poor in quality. This practice should be discouraged, as it penalizes the producer of first class eggs and overpays the producer of poor quality eggs. Losses resulting from poor quality or badly handled eggs reflect back in lower prices to the producer, and any policy of paying the same price for all eggs encourages the production of inferior ones and increases the loss sustained by the producer. This loss is estimated at from 8 to 16 per cent of the total value of the eggs sold. For the state of South Dakota the loss would undoubtedly approach the higher figure, owing to the considerable distance from the large markets, and the irregularity of shipment in many parts of the state.

In view of the above conditions, the first consideration of every progressive poultryman should be to locate an outlet where payment will be made for his product in proportion to the quality of it. This may be by direct sales to consumers, by special arrangement with a local dealer, by shipment through a reliable commission house or to a jobber, or by cooperative arrangement whereby a number of producers build up a market for a special quality brand of eggs. The latter plan requires careful planning, more or less time to develop a demand, and may require more or less consistent advertising. As a rule, the plan which results in the most direct dealing between producer and consumer is the best, provided it can be arranged without requiring too much time and effort on the part of the producer. Under South Dakota conditions, it is usually necessary to deal through one or more middlemen.

Practically all eggs coming to the central markets are candled and sorted, and a quality system of buying is gradually being established. Different markets and different jobbers make different grade classifications. The most common basis of grades is the following: "Selects," "Firsts," "Seconds," and "Dirties." The eggs purchased from the farmer or storekeeper are called "Ordinary Firsts" or "Current Receipts." From these, the regular grades are sorted out.

Selects. Eggs in this grade must be strictly fresh, large in size, weighing from 26 to 28 ounces to the dozen or 55 pounds to the case. They should be clean shelled, free from stains, unwashed, contents full, and white, thick and heavy. Some markets require that this grade be selected for color also, either all white or all brown.

Firsts. Eggs in this grade must be reasonably fresh, weighing 24 ounces or more per dozen, or 53 pounds or more per case. They should be clean shelled, fairly free from stains, unwashed. The contents should be reasonably heavy and air cell medium in size, not showing decided shrinkage.

Seconds. This grade includes eggs that will not come into the grades of "Selects" and "Firsts," and is usually made up of slightly soiled, stale, shrunken, slightly heated, and small eggs. They must
Culling out the unprofitable hens. Eggs can be produced later into the fall by disposing of the early molters

be edible, free from rots, spots, and bad eggs. Usually everything that cannot go as "Select" or "First" or be candled out as dead loss goes into either "Seconds" or "Dirties."

**Dirties.** In this class are placed the eggs that are badly stained and soiled. They are usually divided into No. I and No. II "Dirties," depending upon their freshness and other qualities.

**Suggestions for Improving the Quality of Eggs**

1. Do not keep mongrel hens.
2. Do not allow the nests to become filthy.
3. Separate the laying hens from the setting hens.
4. Gather the eggs at least every day, better twice a day in very hot weather.
5. Keep eggs in a dry, cool, well ventilated place.
6. Never wash eggs, as it spoils their keeping qualities.
7. Market eggs twice a week in hot weather, if possible.
8. Do not sell eggs case count, but insist that your eggs be candled and paid for according to quality.
9. Do not market small, inferior, or dirty eggs.
10. Separate the male birds from the flock as soon as the hatching season is over. (In warm weather a fertile egg will spoil in less than half the time it will take for an infertile egg to spoil.)

**Producing Eggs for the High Price Season**

In many South Dakota towns, fresh eggs are as much as 400 to 500 per cent higher in price in November and December than they are in April and May. This is due to the fact that everybody's hens take a vacation at that time in order to grow a new coat of feathers. During this period few people have many eggs to sell until the young pullets begin to lay. Some improvement in this respect can be made by culling out hens that molt early. However, the principal opportunity to take advantage of the high fall market lies in early hatched
pullets. Pullets of the American breeds (Plymouth Rocks, Wyandottes, Rhode Island Reds, etc.) begin to lay at about seven months of age. Leghorns, Minorcas, etc., begin at about six months of age.

More Direct Marketing. The problem of more direct marketing is one that must be worked out in each individual case. In some cases, a trade in supplying certain customers, hotels, restaurants, etc., can be developed. In other cases, arrangements can be made for direct shipments to jobbers, and in other cases, cooperative egg circles can be formed to advantage. On request the Extension service will give assistance in studying the special problems of individual communities in this connection.

Marketing Poultry

Poultry is marketed both in live and dressed form. The skill and experience required to finish and dress poultry for markets make it advisable to market it as live poultry unless the distance is so great as to make the shipping cost prohibitive. Most poultry raisers do not have the necessary skill to feed out, kill, and pick poultry in a way to bring the highest price on the market. The lower quality of the product is very apt to more than offset the lower shipping cost and the feeder’s profit. Also, there is more danger of improper handling and spoilage in transit. In western South Dakota where distances are almost too great for practical shipment of live poultry, it would seem that certain individuals in each community might well equip themselves with the knowledge of how to kill and pick poultry, and thus handle on a salary or commission basis their own and their neighbors’ poultry.

Feeding: Poultry should always be fattened before killing. This means better quality, more weight, and a considerably higher price per pound. Poor and underfed poultry is hard to keep without spoiling, and if kept long, it deteriorates greatly in appearance. The market is usually overstocked with poor poultry, and understocked with first class birds. Feed all poultry that is to be marketed either dressed or alive. It should be shut up in pens, and fed for from ten days to two weeks or more.

Direct Selling and Timing of Production

In this connection practically the same principles apply to the sale of poultry as were discussed above for the sale of eggs. Both of these factors merit careful consideration on the part of every poultryman, although they will not be discussed further here owing to lack of space.

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