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Phases of Poultry Work: Breeding Stock, Its Selection, and Care

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PHASES OF POULTRY WORK
(Breeding Stock) (Its Selection) (and Care)

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DEMONSTRATION

Breeding Pen

For the Poultry raiser who wishes to increase the quality of the flock, whether for egg production or the poultry show, the "Standard of Perfection" is invaluable. It contains valuable information in regard to the selection of all well known breeds, as well as the fancy ones. If one breed only is to be raised it is wise to buy a book or subscribe to a journal on that breed.

In using the "Standard of Perfection" as a guide for type, color, weight and general characteristics, remember that the bird conforming most closely to the standard should also possess the characteristics of high production.

Do not depend upon appearance only, but handle the bird carefully so that defects as well as good qualities may be discovered. It is especially necessary to handle the bird when looking for eye-color, under-color, comb defects, stubs (feathers on the snanks), capacity, quality and position of pelvic bones, width of back, quality of abdomen, abdominal capacity and general characteristics.

Breed: In selecting a breed first consider the place in which the birds are to be kept, the care that can be given them, the market - whether the eggs or the birds will be most easily disposed of; second consider your personal preference.

Farmers usually consider poultry necessary to furnish the family table with eggs and dressed birds, with an occasional surplus for the market. Usually the poultry house is poor and the care and feeding is regulated by the season of the year and the amount of work on hand. On an average the backyard flock is better cared for, the house kept cleaner and the flock better fed, with the exception of green feed, than the ordinary farm flock. The income is accordingly greater per bird.

If the poultry is to be kept largely for home use and the surplus market, one of the general purpose breeds is best - Plymouth Rock, Orpingtons, Rhode Island or Wyandotte.

If kept for egg production largely, then Leghorn, Ancona, Spanish or Minorca will be most satisfactory, providing they have a shelter that will keep them from feeling the sudden changes in temperature. These birds do not eat so much as the larger ones, are good egg producers, and produce at less cost per dozen than larger breeds, but have a smaller body and bring less on the market, unless sold as broilers when they weigh from one and a half to two pounds.

Breed Types - Poultry Production:

There is no best breed of poultry in a general way but there are several breeds which are especially suited for several purposes. No matter what the breed, there are certain essentials which all should have to be real producers of meat or eggs.

These are: deep body, soft pliable skin, alert eye and strong vitality. These qualifications are essential and all are combined in standard-bred fowls. In fact, the closer to the standard they can be bred, the better producers they are.
In the Standard of Perfection, compiled by the American Poultry Association of Ft. Wayne, Indiana, is listed and described 77 varieties of chickens belonging to 39 breeds. These 39 breeds are divided into 12 great classes, but for ordinary purposes we shall consider only four:

1. Mediterranean.
3. English.
4. Asiatic.

The Mediterranean, or the so-called egg class, is characterized by rather small size and great activity. There are five breeds: Leghorns, Minorcas, Spanish, Blue Andalusians and Anconas. There are eight varieties of Leghorns, five of Minorcas, one of Spanish, one Andalusian, and two of Anconas.

The American or general purpose class is characterized by size, intermediate between the Mediterranean and the Asiatic, also by the comparatively large number of eggs produced. There are nine breeds: Plymouth Rocks, Wyandottes, Javas, Dominiques, Rhode Island Reds, Rhode Island Whites, Buckeyes, Chantecler and Jersey Black Giants. There are seven varieties of Rocks, eight of Wyandottes, two of Javas, two of Rhode Island Reds and one of each of the other breeds.

The English class is much older than the American and differs only to a slight extent. Usually they are somewhat larger than the American breeds and are not considered such good layers. This, however, depends on strain rather than breed. The English class contains five breeds: Darkings, Rep Caps, Orpingtons, Cornish and Sussex. There are three varieties of Darkings, four of Orpingtons, three of Cornish, two of Sussex and one of Red Caps.

The Asiatic class is characterized by size and is called the meat class. There are three breeds: Brahmas, with two varieties; Cochins with four varieties and Langshans with two varieties.

In looking at pictures we see the characteristic shapes of the breeds common to this territory. These, when dressed in different colored feathers, make white, buff, barred or penciled varieties within the breed.

**SELECTION OF BREED:** The selection of a breed in any one of these groups does not make so much difference as whether or not the stock comes from a laying strain. It has been true that many breeders have selected stock according to show type, but now more attention is given to combining utility with a standard of shape and color.

**HOW TO BREED:** If the flock on hand is to be improved, it can be done most quickly by having a breeding pen or flock, using standard bred male birds.

**BREEDING STOCK:** If there are two houses on the place one can be used for the breeding flock, then no special yard will be necessary. Keep the birds in until twelve to three o'clock, then if no other male birds are on the place the breeding flock may be turned out. The mating of the cockerel with the regular flock will cause no serious damage to market eggs early in the season.

If the dry mash hopper is kept open in the breeding house, little trouble will be found in having the hens lay in other places unless there are not enough nests.
BREEDING PEN: A breeding pen is harder to carry on successfully for too many times the birds are kept in too small a yard, and are not fed properly. For lack of exercise the hatch is apt to be low and the chicks weak.

SIZE OF FLOCK: If incubators are to be used, enough hens should be placed in the breeding flock to insure no eggs being kept longer than ten days unless unusual care is given them. One can usually expect fifty percent egg production during the hatching season, so forty hens should fill a two hundred egg incubator in ten days.

In any case only the best birds should be used, so the number placed in the breeding flock or pen will be determined by the number of high producing females in the general flock.

It would be better to buy enough eggs from a good laying flock to fill out the number, rather than use those from poor birds.

MALE: If possible choose a cockerel whose mother has been a high producing hen, as the improvement of production is more often made through the son of a high producer than through the daughters. If this is not possible, then choose the male that has health, vigor and capacity. Pay attention to color of plumage, eye shanks and beak. The breast bone should be especially long and straight, the back broad, the legs strong and medium in length, the beak short and strong, and the abdominal capacity large. A cockerel usually gives better satisfaction than a cock bird.

FEMALES: A larger hatch and stronger chicks can be expected from the eggs of hens than from pullets, so in selecting the females for the breeding flock select the hens that show the qualities looked for: a willing time; that is, well shaped, intelligent head with prominent eye of the right color, short beak, good color in comb, wattles and ear lobes, well shaped body, good quality of skin, bone and abdominal fat, at least three (2 1/2 inches) finger space between the pelvic bones and the breast bone.

PULLETS: If pullets must be used, select those that have been laying heavily during the winter, looking for the same qualities that you do in a hen.

NUMBER OF MALES: One good vigorous male bird is sufficient for from twelve to twenty hens or pullets of the Orpington, Rhode Island, Wyandotte or Plymouth Rock, and from fifteen to twenty-five of the Leghorn, Ancona, Honora or Spanish. If eggs are to be used early - February and March - more cockerels should be used.

TIME: The breeding flock or pen should be started at least three weeks before the first eggs are to be saved for hatching.

CARE AND STORAGE OF EGGS: In saving eggs for sitting either under hens or in an incubator, one should remember that incubation starts at about 60°F. If the eggs are chilled or heated and then chilled, the germ will be killed or so weakened that it will not hatch. In the winter or early spring the eggs should be gathered at least twice daily and stored in a room where the temperature can be kept between 55° and 65°F. The sooner they can be used the better. No eggs should be kept for more than ten days if
good hatch is expected. Those from two to four days old give the best results.

When eggs are shipped they should be left for one or two days before sitting in order to regain position.

**SELECTION:** Only medium sized eggs with shells free from checks, cracks or wrinkles and, if possible, those of a uniform color as well as size should be selected. Extremely large or small eggs are apt to produce weak or deformed chicks.