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Choosing Next Year's Layer

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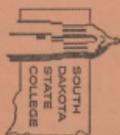
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Cooperative Extension Service

Choosing Next Year's Layers

Choosing Next Year's Layers

When you choose next year's layers, try to answer the following questions before deciding on the chicks you purchase.

1. What specific production characteristics do I want?
2. Which stock should I use?
 - a. Am I satisfied with my present flock?
 - b. How are my neighbors' flocks doing?
 - c. Have I studied the Random Sample Test results?
3. What disease prevention program is practiced by the hatchery?
4. Can the supplier service my flock?
5. What age birds should I buy?
6. What price should I pay for replacements?

Once a person has decided that he will keep layers, either as a continuing farm enterprise or as a new project, it is important for him to consider what kind of stock he should purchase. The difference between profit and loss can rest on his choice.

The size of flock and its importance in his total farm business will determine how much time he can afford to spend in picking the right stock. Dollarwise, this decision is more important in the large commercial flock than where a small farm flock of 50 to 100 birds is kept.

This information is primarily for the flockowner with a commercial egg production flock where an important part of the farm income is derived from a laying flock producing market eggs. The flock size might be 500 or it might be 10,000, depending upon the farm.

1. Select Specific Breeding for a Specific Purpose

For egg production, select a small bodied bird with good laying ability. Consider the following factors in an egg production stock:

- (a) **Shell Color**—White shelled eggs, unless your market will pay top price for cream colored eggs as well as white eggs. (Most high quality markets desire white eggs.)
- (b) **Production**—The ability to lay at the rate of about 20 dozen eggs per hen during the first year of production.
- (c) **Egg Size**—The ability to produce large eggs (Average 24 to 25 ounces per dozen).
- (d) **Efficiency**—The ability to produce a dozen eggs on about 4.5 pounds of feed.

- (e) **Livability**—Less than 1% mortality per month in the laying house.
- (f) **Body Weight**—A body weight of about 4.5 pounds is common for good egg production stock. If the farmer wants a flock of hens for general purpose use, he should select a large bodied, meat type bird with good production ability.

2. Which Stock to Use

Review last year's records. Are you satisfied with the stock you are using? Maybe it will be the best one to use again.

Visit your neighbors. One of the most forceful impressions in deciding what stock to buy can be gained from visiting a neighbor who provides management and housing similar to yours. The way a certain stock produces for him can give you a clue as to how the same stock might produce on your place. Good results are worth looking into.

Study Random Sample Test summaries. These tests are designed to measure average flock performance from each breeder rather than the performance of the breeders' best selected hens. Each year the Agricultural Research Service of the USDA compiles a "Report of Egg Production Tests." For example, the report for 1960-61 included weighted performance records for 43 test locations in the United States and Canada. The stocks were compared for mortality, egg production, income over chick and feed cost, feed used, egg weight, and egg quality. One hundred twenty-eight breeders entered 184 different stocks in the 43 tests. Inasmuch as there were 490 separate pen records, it is obvious that some of the breeders entered their stocks in many different state tests.

You can get a good picture of the genetic potential of the various stocks by studying the most recent annual report. Ask for "Report of Egg Production Tests" from the Agricultural Research Service, U. S.

Department of Agriculture, Washington 25, D. C. The State College Poultry Extension Office also keeps a limited supply for distribution.

3. Disease Prevention Program Carried Out by the Hatchery

There is a recognized rapid, stained antigen, whole-blood test that detects Pullorum and Typhoid diseases in breeding flocks. All hatcheries operating under the supervision of the National Poultry Improvement Plan are carrying on a rigid testing program and are supervised in this respect. All breeding flocks are tested until they have no reactors, either on the first test or on two subsequent tests which must be at least 21 days apart.

Hatcheries that are supervised under the National Poultry Improvement Plan may display the emblem "U. S. Pullorum-Typhoid Clean" in their advertising. Hatcheries that are not supervised under this program may or may not have a rigid Pullorum-Typhoid testing program for their breeding flocks. They are not allowed to use the official U. S. Pullorum-Typhoid Clean terminology in their advertising. If you are buying from a nonsupervised source, it may be wise to ask them about the Pullorum-Typhoid testing program in their breeder flock.

4. Can the Supplier Service the Flock

The ability to service is a factor which is sometimes stressed by local hatcherymen and salesmen. Occasions will arise when advice is needed and it is nice to have the serviceman near at hand. The seller of your chicks usually is interested in your welfare and in selling you chicks next year.

As a rule, the inexperienced poultryman stands to profit considerably by using the advice of the breeder or his representative. The experienced poultryman is better capable of "going it on his own," but should keep an open mind to suggestions concerning management and new discoveries. The breeder or his representative should know his birds better than anyone else and know under what conditions they will perform best.

5. What Age Birds to Buy

The facilities and labor available for poultry will determine to a great extent what age birds to buy. Day-old chicks are usually the best bet for the smaller farm flocks where equipment and labor are no problem. Four- to six-week-old started pullets will require almost as much equipment as day-old chicks.

In 1961, pullets at 16 weeks of age sold for around \$1.45 to \$1.65 and at 20 to 22 weeks for around \$1.65 to \$1.85. Many folks feel that a person raising pullets is entitled to about 30c per pullet for labor and investment. The above prices reflect about this amount over other costs of production.

Ready-to-lay pullets are the best bet on many farms where flock expansion has filled all of the available building space and is absorbing the available farm labor. It seems reasonable to enter the ready-to-lay pullets into the project at about \$1.75 whether you raise them yourself or hire someone else to raise them for you.

6. What Price to Pay for Chicks

Price does not always designate quality, but in a business as competitive as the hatchery business it is an important factor. A comparison of performance records and price can be a useful guide to follow.

Don't sell yourself short on price when purchasing chicks. Good breeding costs a lot of money.

Suppose you bought on price alone and received chicks from a low producing stock. Here is how it could work out.

Pullet chick cost	No. eggs produced	Gross income from eggs @ 30c per doz.
36c	180	4.50
51c	240	6.00

Under these assumptions your gross income per hen would be 10 times as much as the extra cost per chick. Although it would cost you 15c per chick more at the time of purchase, the gross income from these hens would be \$1.50 more than from the cheap stock.