What Size Laying Flock?

How many layers will there be in the nation's laying flock this fall and winter? Will the number be reduced below a year earlier? If so when will it occur? Currently, the number of layers on farms is about 1 percent above a year ago, and about 5 percent more than in 1966.

The reduced number of chicks hatched for laying flock replacements, down 18 percent October through March, is not likely to cause a significant reduction in the number of layers on farms in the next 2 months.

At the beginning of 1968, the nation's laying flock contained about 1.4 percent more layers than on the first of January 1967 About 58 percent of these layers were pullets as compared to 55 percent a year earlier due to a 3 percent increase in number of pullets in the laying flock and a slight decrease in number of hens However, the quantity of pullets not of laying age which will be housed the first 5 to 6 months of "68" was 9 percent below a year ago. The 9 percent about 8 4 million pullets, was equal to 2 5 percent of the 329 million layers on farms the first of the year Thus the reduction in the hatch the last 4 months of 1967 was sufficient to cause a reduction in the nation's laying flock by April 1 But, the number of layers on farms then was still about 1 4 percent above a year earlier.

Why hasn't a reduction occurred in the number of layers on farms? The reason is that fewer hens are being marketed than a year earlier In 1968, through the week ending April 17, about 5 million fewer light-type hens were slaughtered under Federal inspection than in the same period last year This was 10 percent below a year earlier It is likely this trend will continue Throughout most of 1968 more hens may be kept in production longer than last year. How extensive the culling and liquidation will be for reducing the number of hens throughout the remainder of 1968 will depend on prices received for eggs. As prices increase more older hens will likely be kept the second year.

Since the first of the year, through March, the hatch of chicks for laying flock replacements has averaged about 18 percent below a year earlier but this change will not show up in the laying flock until about July. Thus there is not much hope for a flock smaller than a year earlier until about July or August. But, if significantly fewer hens are liquidated, as compared to a year ago, paring the nation's laying flock to the desired size may take even longer.

The estimated reduction in number of pullets available for housing from the January, February, and March hatches would equal about 4 percent f the layers on farms. Thus the potential reduction in flock size due to reduced hatch would be about 4 percent. By months the equivalent would be 1, 1, and 2 percents respectively, meaning the monthly potential reduction is small. But again any differences in rates of liquidating hens, mortality, and other factors which affect layer numbers can temper the adjustments due to reduced hatch. Rate of lay is not expected to increase like last year because more older hens will keep it down as the year progresses.

Egg prices will decidedly influence producers' decisions to force-molt layers. Market prices below $0.30 for grade A large eggs will likely encourage liquidation. Prices several cents above $0.30 may encourage delayed liquidation. Thus the situation still is uncertain for this fall and winter and will be influenced by producer prices in the near future. Low prices similar to last year are likely to encourage additional liquidation as higher prices retard liquidation Perhaps by September there will be significant decline in number of layers on farms and subsequent price improvement.

Household Hint

Many of the new water-repellent finishes on cotton raincoats will take up to five dry-cleanings without having to be reprocessed.