Force-Molting Layers

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In the poultry business we are challenged to use the present respite from the struggle for bare survival to investigate, analyze and plan programs for future more rigorous economic times. The managerial decision of possible force molting benefits becomes an important question under alternative enterprises when faced with certain economic conditions

A limiting factor to consider would be the marketing channels available. For the shell egg trade we need some realistic evaluation of the practice and its product Surely, we have the alternative channel of egg breaking increasingly available to us

But it seems economically wasteful to the Pennsylvania industry to unconditionally condemn the practice in total — and not accept the fact that at least the first five months of production by molted layers are acceptable for the shell egg trade, usually. We must keep in mind, however, that as the force-molted production period progresses it takes more time to grade the eggs as the quality changes In the final analysis, quite a few producers are utilizing the practice under certain conditions and apparently doing it rather successfully.

The all-important pros and cons of the practice should be inspected rather closely according to current economics and prospective economic conditions.

In most "cost of production" budgets, bird depreciation is the second largest cost component in egg production Force molting has been described as one practice that could reduce this cost — under certain circumstances

We see familiar figures relative to rules of thumb concerning production, performance and feed per dozen eggs, etc, however, the important coefficients to become familiar with are the following

Feed in pounds/Dozens X size = coefficient and; Price per dozen/Dozens X size = coefficient

Both of these coefficients take into consideration egg mass as a production factor and are relevant to force molted flocks

If we cut our average housing cost by 50 percent, out potential gain would only be one cent per dozen — if we lost no performance with the cheaper house An equal saving would result from only a 14 percent reduction in hen depreciation

Any consideration of force-molting must include analysis of at least seven factors

1 Rate of Lay
2 All Quality Factors
3 Egg Size
4 Price Spreads
5 Flock Depreciation
6 All Relative Costs or Alternatives
7 Management Factors

In most poultry enterprises, egg production level is the major factor contributing to income — all other factors being equal In some reports, production appears to be 20 to 30 percent lower in molted flocks We would prefer to hope that only well-managed, healthy pullet flocks, of a strain that characteristically molts well, would produce better after molting than this

A pullet flock may average 70 percent production during the first eight months of lay On the other hand, after going through a forced molt, an old flock might average 50 percent production for a similar period

One must consider the egg production egg quality and house capacity for the total pullet year period versus the pullet flock production, etc for eight months, a rest period and subsequent production, etc for an additional five months Egg quality and size associated with price received then become very important in the decision to force-molt.

If old birds were consolidated, so that all facilities were used 100 percent, the facilities might produce 90 percent as many eggs as the average production for a pullet flock over the longer period The decision to consolidate is not the most desirable choice for a poultryman to make, because of the multiple age factor and disease challenge

Egg quality means different things to different people To a poultryman, it might mean shell texture, or the number of cracked eggs, or even the "results" of a grade-out slip To the processor, it might mean how the eggs look under the candling light, how well they handle with automatic equipment and pack, or the prevalence and characteristics of customer complaints

Despite the measure of quality whatever it might be egg quality "seems" to be associated with age of the birds Mere age alone is not the only final criteria of quality, however It would seem that production span rather than age is more important in effect on egg quality

There is no question that there is a significant egg size differential between the two production periods considered. Value of the product then becomes important as total price received for the blend yield is accented

One of the main arguments against force-molting is that of the excessive size of the eggs. The extra cost of producing these larger eggs from older hens is recognized but the processors do

(Continued on Page 29)

CAGE LAYER HOUSE on the Plain and Fancy Ranch is shown by Henry S. Bowman. Bowman is the production manager. L F. Photo