

Plastic Floors Seen Boon to Hatcheries

Housing broiler breeder flocks on a new plastic mesh flooring, combined with use of other modern automated equipment, could bring a two million dollar broiler hatching egg business into Pennsylvania, predicts Dr. Glenn O Bressler, professor of poultry science at Penn State. With the new plastic floor, twice as many breeder pullets can be housed on the same floor area compared with conventional housing.

Using wire mesh in sloping floor systems for breeder flocks, Dr. Bressler and associates found that the heavier cockerels developed sore feet and hock problems. The result was poor mating and a sharp drop in egg fertility.

The new plastic mesh floor could enable Pennsylvania poultrymen to compete in producing hatching eggs now coming from other states, Dr. Bressler claims. Presently, most hatching eggs are shipped into the Commonwealth from competing areas, adding transportation costs of 4 to 5 cents per dozen Pennsylvania poultrymen rank about 11th in broiler production raising about 60 million broilers annually.

In addition to the plastic mesh flooring, equipment includes automatic feeding and watering and either hand or mechanical egg gathering from plastic roll-away nests, also developed by Dr. Bressler. He believes the total system brings the industry an opportunity to enter a new era of broiler breeder management.

Experimental broiler breeding flocks raised on the plastic mesh floor equal or excel flocks grown on the typical two-third slat, one-third litter floor system. Flocks on plastic mesh have been superior in egg production, livability, feed conversion, number of settable eggs, and hatch of fertile eggs per pullet.

Breeding flocks on the plastic

mesh floor were given only one square foot of floor space per bird, compared with 2 square feet of floor space per bird under the conventional one-third slat, two-third litter floor system.

"The significance of using plastic flooring," he says, "is that doubling the number of breeding hens also doubles the number of hatching eggs produced. The only disadvantage is a loss of about 3 percent in egg fertility resulting from about 5 fewer chicks hatched per pullet housed. Nonetheless, the cost for producing a dozen eggs is almost cut in half," he affirms.

Labor for raising breeder flocks on the sloping floor system is minimal, he says. This is vital for poultrymen in Pennsylvania where wage rates are higher than

in most competing areas. Cutting labor costs by more than half compensates for the higher wage rates and eliminates the advantage competing areas have in labor costs.

The plastic sloping floor system has further advantages. Costs for handling litter on floors and in nests is eliminated. Bacterial and fungal contamination are reduced substantially over litter floor and nest systems. By using a two-stage manure drying system developed at Penn State, manure handling problems are nearly eliminated and odors are controlled.

Dried poultry manure has potential sales value which eventually may more than offset purchase price and operating costs for the drying equipment.

Poultry Imports Banned, Eggs Restricted

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) banned the importation of all fresh poultry meat into the U.S., and placed restrictions on the importation of table eggs. The action was taken by USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), because of recent shipments and planned shipments from countries infected with exotic Newcastle disease. It is designed to further protect the nation's supply of poultry and eggs against the introduction of exotic Newcastle disease which affects poultry and other birds.

APHIS officials said the prohibition on imports covers all fresh, chilled, and frozen poultry carcasses and parts. The only exception is Canadian poultry meat shipped directly to the U.S. since Canadian officials are also following an eradication program against the disease.

The new restriction on table eggs requires that all imported eggs be washed, sanitized, and packed in new cartons, flats, dividers, and crates. Further, these eggs must be certified by a veterinary official of the exporting nation as having come from flocks proven to be free of Newcastle disease through the use of sentinel birds.

Certification will not be required if the eggs are sent under seal directly from the port of entry to an approved egg processing plant for breaking and pasteurization under Federal egg inspection supervision. The same exceptions for poultry meat from Canada will cover eggs imported from Canada.

APHIS officials explained that—while this disease does not affect persons who eat poultry

and egg products—the action was taken as a precautionary measure to prevent the exotic Newcastle disease virus from again being spread to U.S. poultry flocks, where losses could greatly reduce the supply of poultry and eggs available to American consumers.

Since March 1972, Federal and State animal health officials have been cooperating in a massive effort to eradicate exotic Newcastle disease from southern California—where more than 9.5 million birds have had to be destroyed to halt the spread of the disease.

USDA noted the original introduction of the disease into southern California is believed to have resulted from the importation of infected exotic pet birds.

The new regulations became effective immediately, and are scheduled for publication in the Federal Register on Jan. 11. They cover all poultry and eggs shipments to the U.S., special conditions are provided for table eggs consigned to U.S. buyers on or before the effective date of the regulation.

Special exceptions for individual importations can be made by APHIS officials for education, scientific, and research institutions with the facilities and equipment to safely receive and handle potential disease-bearing materials. Migratory game bird carcasses being imported by hunters are exempt from the regulation. USDA said.

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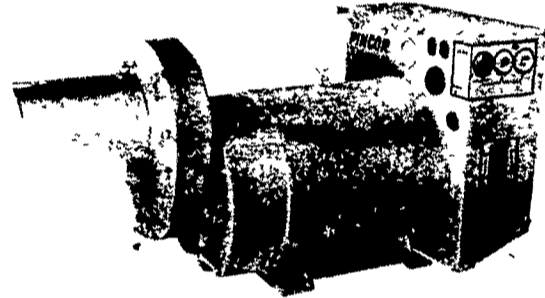
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