

Postmortem exams essential to poultry health

LANCASTER, Pa. - In the first of three educational seminars sponsored by the Lancaster County Poultry Association and the Penn State Extension Service, Dr. Robert Eckroade, director of the Cooperative New Bolton Center Poultry Diagnostic Laboratory, University of Pennsylvania Veterinary School - Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, spoke on "Poultry Health for Broilers, Layers, and Turkeys." He addressed an audience of approximately 50 industry men at the Farm

and Home Center, here, last month.

Touching on a wide range of topics including preventative avian medicine, poultry post-mortem examinations, and infectious bursal disease, Eckroade first began his lecture by familiarizing the audience with the lab facilities and objectives of the New Bolton Center Poultry Diagnostic Laboratory.

The lab is tax supported through the Pa. Department of Agriculture and therefore,

free of charge to those taking advantage of it. But, according to Eckroade, not enough farmers are using the facilities available to them.

"In my opinion," he said, "the labs aren't being utilized to their fullest, and we want to generate more interest."

The lab sets out to do two basic things. First of all, it is used for emergency situations or for day to day poultry disease problems in which answers are needed immediately.

"We can do viral, bacterial

and mycoplasma isolation work to look for the answers," Eckroade said, but he made it clear that emergency work isn't all the lab is set up to do.

Preventative avian medicine is another area of poultry health which the lab is designed to handle, and one which Eckroade stressed as being of key importance.

"We need to have more routine necropsy exams done," he emphasized. "And, we're not looking at enough birds early in the grow - out period." Many

times, the lab will get the birds, (pullets and layers mostly) when they are 35 to

should have been brought in at about 20 - 24 weeks.

"That's too bad, because we have a free service, and if we would do these check ups on a routine basis, many of the large problems wouldn't develop," he pointed out. In the case of the mycoplasma infection, he challenged every poultryman there, to know the mycoplasma status of both on - farm birds and new pullets.

Another measure of key importance in diagnosing poultry disease problems is making sure the sample taken to the lab is a typical example of ongoing flock disease. This takes more work on the part of the producer, but saves time and money in the long run.

"The most important thing you can do whether you're coming for a routine necropsy or because there's a problem and you need the answer fast, is to bring in a typical example of your birds to us - selection is paramount," he emphasized. Many times the lab receives cull birds that aren't typical examples of the real flock problem. When the final diagnosis is made, therefore, the question they are faced with answering is, "Is this a flock problem or an incidental occurrence?" Selection of birds helps to answer this question.

Eckroade also made the point that if a large number of birds in the flock are dying, the producer should perform weekly or daily



Dr. Robert Eckroade

40 weeks old, only to find that they have a mycoplasma infection problem. By this age, it is too late to get the most out of medication costs to treat this flock - the birds

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(Continued on Page 32)

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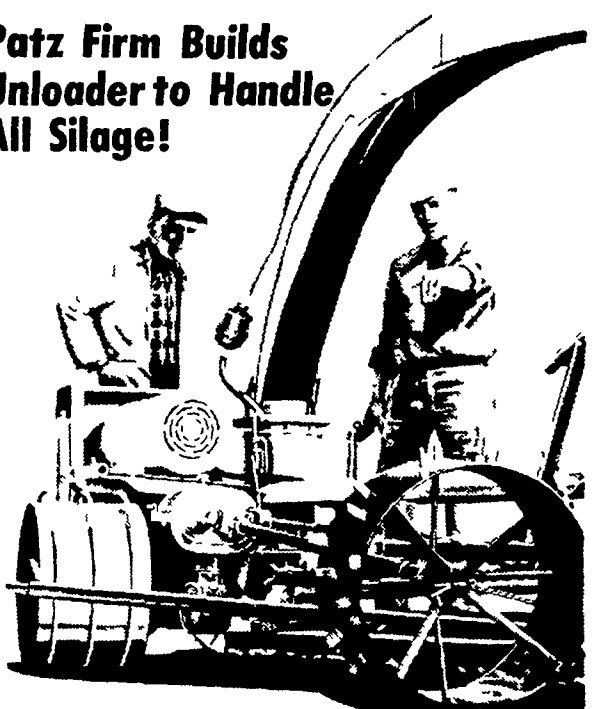
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