

Come Jan., the Livingstons have a capon caper



With an entry for both the live and dressed categories, Emily Livingston is all set for capon competition in the Farm Show youth exhibits.

DAVIDSBURG—What has a broad, bold breast, a smooth yellow-tinged skin, wings that hug the body and wins blue ribbons?

Why, Emily Livingston's prize capons, of course.

Sixteen-year-old Emily is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. George Livingston, whose dairy farm is located at 5441 Davidsburg Road, Dover. For seven years, she's been raising 25 capons annually as a 4-H project. And it's a job she apparently does quite well.

Grand champion ribbons have been added to Emily's collection with regularity and she's taken the top prize in the Harrisburg youth competition several times in recent years. So it came as no surprise when her nine and three-quarter pound entry in the York County

capon roundup won the purple ribbon again this year, an encouraging prelude to the January statewide competition.

But a potential exhibitor in this somewhat unique category doesn't just saunter into the poultry house, select any old bird, and start pulling feathers. According to Emily and her family, capon selection and dressing is an art in itself.

"A live capon must have a full appearance, with a breast that's broad and flat," explains this youthful poultry expert. "He must walk straight, show nice full thighs and have smooth, finished-looking feathers."

That's just the beginning. The bird comes under even closer inspection after the dressing procedure.

"Then you want to see no sharp bone protruding from the breast, just lots of meat," Emily adds. "Skin should be the yellowed fat color and the bird should show compactness, with the wings and legs set close to the body, presenting a neat and attractive packaged product."

Preparing the dressed bird for exhibit takes both patience and practice, with the entire family pitching in on this step.

Water is heated to 130 degrees F. — Mrs. Livingston actually tests it with a thermometer to avoid overheating — and then after carefully dipping the capon several times, one feather at a time is plucked to avoid skin tearing.

"Usually four of us start on a bird and work toward the center," says Mrs. Livingston. "After ten years, we've gotten better at it."

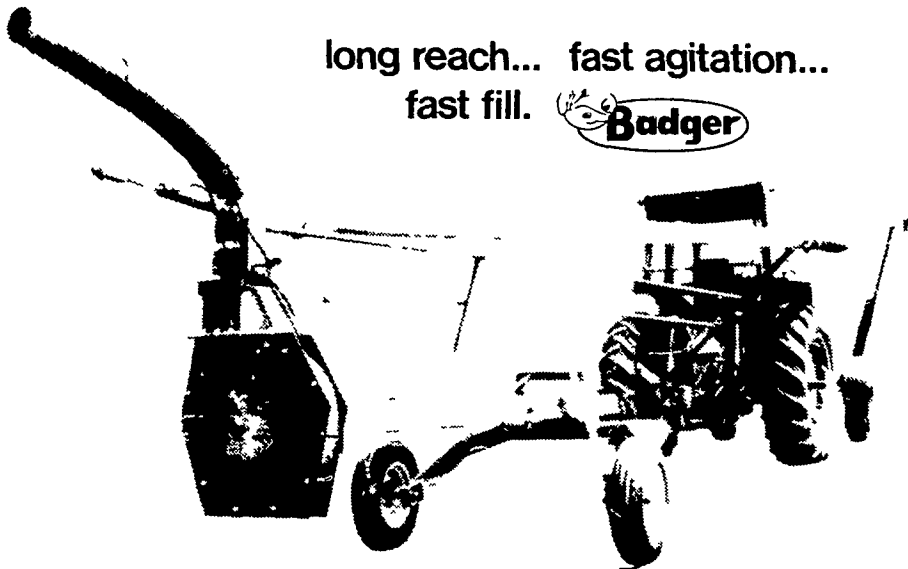
Two capons are usually prepared, and the most attractive finished product is entered in the show. Family members, including dad, consult over the choice of live birds. Only the very finest specimens go for dressing, with second place choices entered in the live bird classes.

The project usually begins in early June, when the young caponized chicks are bought in at four to six weeks of age. Careful tending, feeding and record keeping

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