

Tests show which birds go to market fastest

NEWARK, Del — Today's broiler chicken ain't what it used to be. Rising feed costs and consumer demand for leaner meat have both spurred the broiler industry to make changes in the kind of bird that's grown these days.

As a result, poultrymen are after a more feed efficient product with less fat.

Both feed efficiency and leanness are traits which are influenced by genetics. So are some of the other factors which affect bird performance and meat quality. The industry goal, of course, is higher yield of saleable meat. The success of breeders working toward this goal is measured, ultimately, by the price you pay for chicken at the grocery store.

Breeders and producers have an idea how well their own broiler crosses do in the field. But it's impossible for them to gather detailed comparative data on all the available breeds. Unless these crosses are evaluated under research conditions, no one knows how well they actually perform.

Every few years, poultry scientist George W. Malone and extension poultry specialist George W. Chaloupka run a series of trials at the University of Delaware's Georgetown Substation on promising new breeds of broiler chicken. The trials provide the industry with information on the comparative performance of a number of crosses under identical growing conditions.

Results of the latest trials have now been released. They show that it takes four days less to raise a 4.5 pound bird than it did in similar trials four years ago.

Looking at five of the best of today's crosses, Malone found the 1980 broilers averaged 4.45 pounds live weight in 52 days and had a feed conversion rate of 1.94 (down from 2.01 in 1976 for a

similar size bird). This means that it took less than two pounds of feed to produce one pound of chicken.

On a per 1000 bird basis, this represents a savings of 82.9 pounds of feed per year over the past four years.

The test included the following crosses: Hubbard x Hubbard, Vantress x Hubbard, Arbor Acre x Arbor Acre, Ross x Arbor Acre, and Indian River x Indian River. Crosses were selected on the basis of a Delmarva industry survey and represent some of the most popular breeds currently in international production.

Placement dates were 9/17/79, 12/7/79, and 4/11/80. Broilers were hatched from eggs of breeder flocks approximately 46 weeks old and were reared in a shed-type poultry house under management practices simulating those used commercially.

There were 5250 birds in each trial.

According to Chaloupka, the University of Delaware Substation is one of the few

public research facilities in the world conducting this kind of performance test. The trials are possible at Georgetown, he says, because of the closeness to a USDA poultry research laboratory and local industry processing plants. These provide important information when birds are processed.

Results of the 1980 trials are presented in two Delaware Experiment Station reports which are available on request. By taking this information and comparing it with notes from their own observations, broiler companies can decide which type of bird will be most profitable for their own particular operations.

"Just because a breed has a certain disadvantage doesn't mean you shouldn't grow it," says Malone, noting that one cross had lower egg hatchability but more breast meat. "You have to look at the end result, and that's yield at the processing plant."

Speaking of the improvements they've seen in broiler performance since the 1976 trials, the scientist predicts even more impressive weight gains in broiler crosses over the next five years. In fact, by 1985 the industry projects a four pound broiler in 42 days with

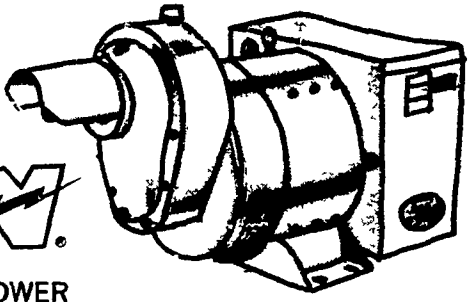
a 1.85 feed conversion, probably activated on a lower energy diet. This is good news for poultrymen and consumers alike.

The reports on the 1980 broiler evaluation cross test have already received global distribution.

For a free copy of the report, call or write: G.W. Malone, University of Delaware Agricultural Experiment Station, Substation Division, R.D. 2, Box 47, Georgetown, DE 19947 302/856-5254. Ask for the "1980 Broiler Cross Evaluation Reports."

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