

Vet urges egg producers to blood sample flocks

LANCASTER — A simple program of blood sampling can help poultrymen keep tabs on the health of their flocks, and if something goes wrong with a particular flock, the samples can be used to track down the causes.

"Blood sampling is still a relatively new area of poultry management," Dr. Glyde Marsh told a gathering of 150 egg producers and poultry industry suppliers Friday, April 2, at the Lancaster Farm and Home Center.

"But it can be a very effective tool for determining whether or not vaccination programs are working, and for tracing disease problems all the way back to their beginnings."

Dr. Marsh is an Ohio State University veterinarian who spends half his time on poultry farms, working with flocks and their owners. His byline shows up regularly in national poultry publications and he's a frequent guest speaker at poultry functions. He was in Lancaster at the invitation of Pennfield Corporation, sponsors of a day-long seminar on profitable poultry farming.

Blood sampling doesn't have to be complicated, Dr. Marsh said. In a typical layer house with 60,000 birds, just 10 individual birds can serve as sampling subjects, if they're spaced fairly evenly

throughout the house. Every two months he recommends withdrawing 5 cc's of blood from the brachial vein of each test bird. Throughout the laying cycle, he said, these test birds should always be the same individuals.

The blood samples should be allowed to sit at room temperature for a few hours. After a while, the red blood cells will form a clot over a cloudy liquid, the blood serum. The clot should be thrown away and the serum stored in a freezer. It contains all the antibodies produced by the birds to combat all the diseases they've ever been exposed to. If the flock gets sick, the samples can be used to determine whether or not the birds were vaccinated for the particular illness, or whether or not the vaccine used lost its effectiveness over a period of several months.

Some advocates of blood sampling feel more than 10 birds should be used. They recommend as many as 75 or 100 individuals in the testing program. Dr. Marsh feels that's much too ambitious. It's impractical for working poultrymen, he said, and not worth the effort.

Dr. Marsh appeared before the group once in the morning and again in the afternoon, and talked about much more than blood sampling. A number of Pennfield people shared the podium with

him. Ray Lehr, Manager of Feed Marketing; Dr. John Fidler, Manager of technical services; Scott Buckwalter, sales coordinator for layer feeds; and credit manager James Vaughn spoke on managing layer flocks for better profits.

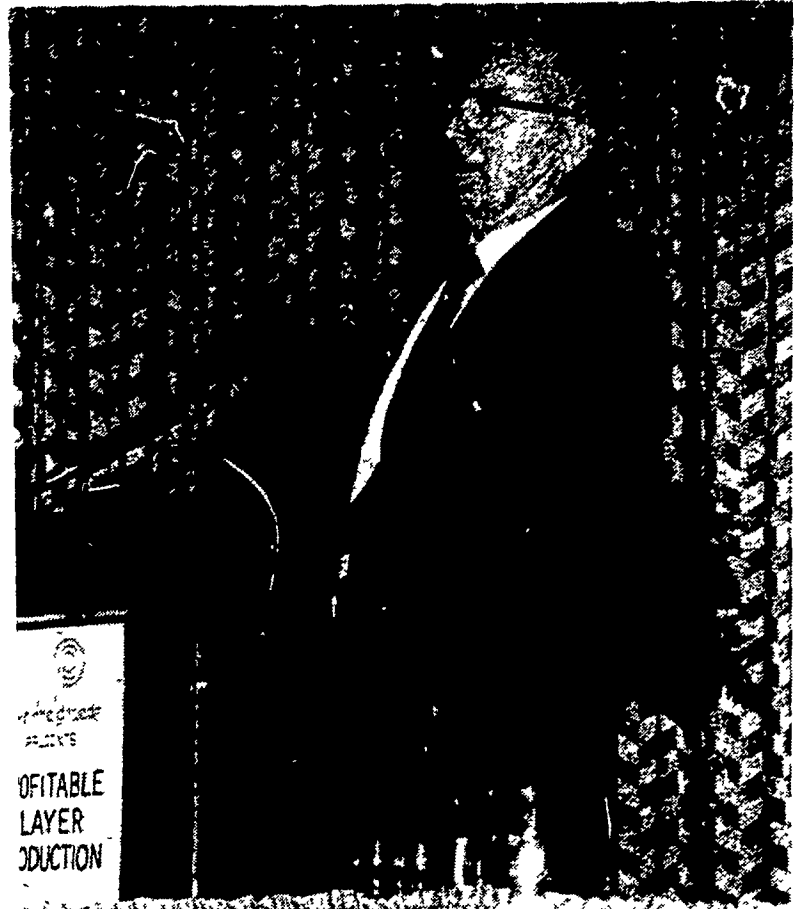
While layer management has made impressive strides over the years, Dr. Marsh said there's still plenty of room for improvement. "Never be satisfied with the number of eggs your hens are producing. There's always something you can do to get more production."

A well-fed, well-managed, well-watered laying hen has the potential for laying an egg a day for a year. The reason they don't is management, Dr. Marsh said. Scientists have bred chickens to produce an egg a day, and there's some evidence to indicate that that's about all the faster a good bird can go.

Dr. Marsh talked at some length about the body chemistry of laying hens, and how to manage them for top production. Management starts with pullets, he said.

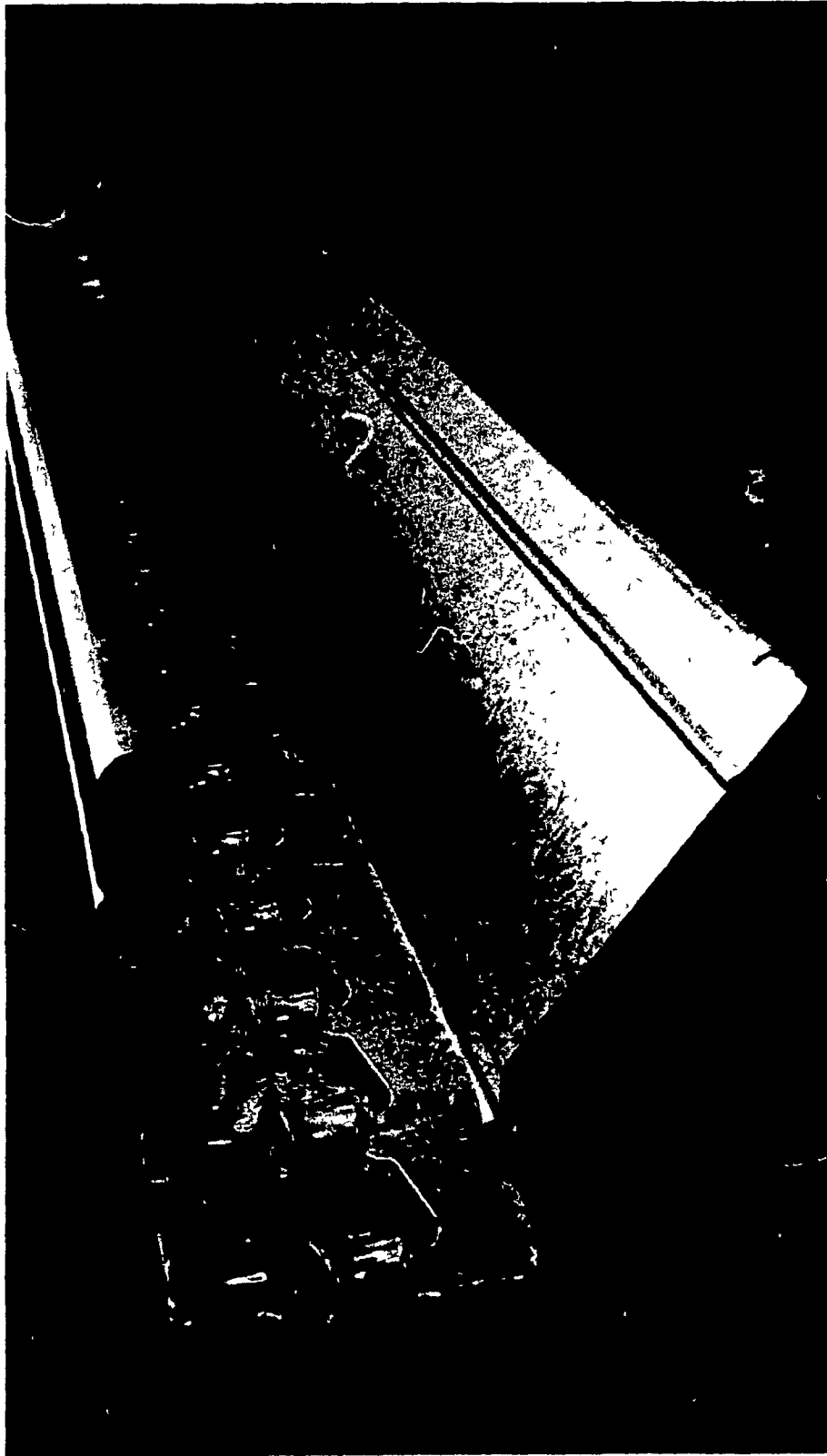
"A lot of farmers think when they fill their laying houses with pullets that they've got to feed the birds right away. That's not so. They need water right away, but

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Dr. Glyde Marsh, veterinarian in the Poultry Science Dept. at Ohio State University, stresses importance of flock blood sampling program at Pennfield Corp. seminar.

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