

Basics of culling a laying flock

Nearly all laying flock managers will not cull poor or non-layers—hence we have periods of low egg price which is damaging to the financial well being of each individual poultry farm.

For those poultrymen who wish to cull marginal layers, here are a few suggestions:

Timing: Cull one to 15 percent of the entire laying flock per month after 7 months of lay during periods of low egg price, low productivity or low net income. If egg production is below 55% and cracks are above five percent, consider culling more severely or selling the entire flock. Time your culling when birds will not be disturbed during normal egg laying hours. Use common sense to an uncommon degree.

Identify - Which bird to cull by culling out all females with: small shriveled combs; small dry, yellow, inactive vents; wing molt

or severe body molt; any kind of abnormal behavior, poor health condition or one that is a light weight cull; or severe vent drainage of urates.

Method: Open cage door and remove any bird you suspect. Examine her rapidly and cull her or return her to the cage. Do not disturb laying birds unnecessarily. Cull any sick bird anytime. More than half of all poultry diseases are transmitted bird to bird so it is reasonable to cull sick birds.

Savings: A poor or non-layer will eat 70 to 90 percent of the same amount of feed that a productive layer will eat. It is therefore possible to save five pounds of feed per month per layer culled. Feed at seven cents a pound equals 35 cents saved per month for the last five months of lay or \$1.75 per bird culled would be the total amount of money saved in feed.

Savings also include culling

birds that lay poor quality eggs or eggs with poor shells. Poor shelled eggs are worth only a fraction of what sound shelled eggs are worth. If an egg breaks on machinery or on other eggs it may cost a dollar per broken egg to clean it up. Labor cost, down time, and miscellaneous costs like water, energy, sanitation of eggs broken on equipment can get expensive. Thus costs some producers several thousand dollars a year. If all sick birds are culled along with all birds with very paled combs, egg quality seems to improve.

Net income may or may not be improved by culling. Here is how it can be improved. If you cull 10 percent of the poor and non layers out of a cage layer flock, the next few weeks you get fewer total eggs but better quality eggs; the remaining birds feel better with more room in the cage, so decrease percent egg production at a

decreasing rate so the percent production of remaining birds is higher.

The total feed cost is enough lower to compensate for the overhead cost increase due to fewer birds in the cages.

Since fewer, higher quality eggs are seeking a market the price of eggs received can be higher. Off grade eggs is still one of our greatest problems in causing low egg price to producers.

Labor cost of culling is high so must be offset by people who can cull rapidly at 1 to 2 birds culled per minute or a total of a 500/day culled per person. Put people to culling who normally would do nothing during that time or less important work.

Egg Quality: Culling to improve egg quality happens enough to continue to do it. Sometimes culling poor layers or non-layers has no affect on egg quality so if you cull keep track of these results.

Behavior: Some producers cull birds based on behavior of the non-layer. If a cage layer appears to be weak, depressed, have ruffled feathers, is down, has abnormal eye, feather or behavior - get her out of the cage and examine her. Layers are usually alert, upright and behave normally.

Breeding Affects Culling: Ask your salesman or breeder what birds to cull or when to cull. Some strains show a wide range in individual egg production which

allows us to cull. Some strains show very little range in individual bird egg production so culling is less effective.

Nutrition may be used in lieu of culling for one month to try to bring non-layers or poor layers back into egg production. The only questions that haunts the culling technician is - "Is this bird, I am about to cull, out of production for a long time or would she lay many eggs in a week or so if treated properly?" Long time non-layers can be culled; recoverable layers should be kept.

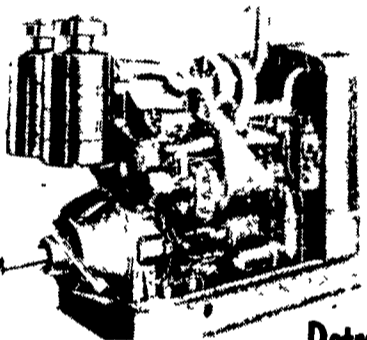
How many to Cull - Be prepared to cull any number of poor or non-layers or any percent of the flock based on what each cull looks like the day you examine her. Let the condition of the cull tell you what to cull or keep.

What to do with culls: If culls are diseased, weak, thin and a danger to the flock, they should be buried or incinerated. If the non-layer or poor layer is in normal body weight and has no harmful residues in her edible tissue, she may be dressed and sold for a steamer. Some poultrymen sell these dressed birds for \$1.50 or more each.

In summary: Culling poor and non-layers can reduce cost of production, reduce number of low quality eggs produced, lower total number of eggs on the market, therefore creating a potential to increase egg price and net income.

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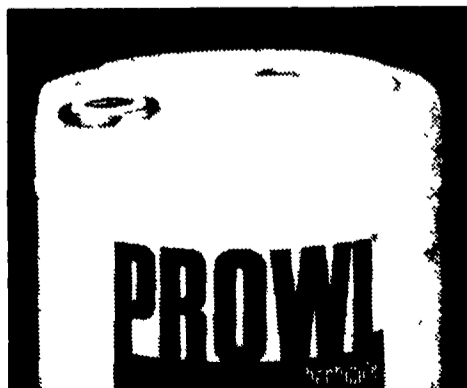
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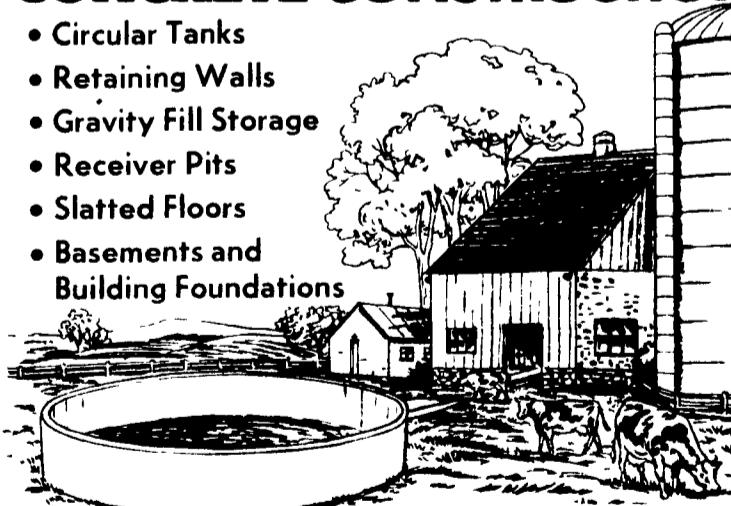


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