

## Chickens Live To Old Age In Lancaster County Henhouse

LITITZ (Lancaster Co.) — For a lot of laying hens, their first year in the henhouse is followed by a trip to the soup factory. The chickens on Richard Myer's Lancaster County farm ultimately take that ride, but before they go they often cluck contentedly along for three years.

Myer's farm is near Milton Grove and operates as The Egg Basket. Myer explained that producing hens must go through a

molting process, just as their jungle forebears had to do, before they enter a new laying cycle.

When chickens molt, they lose most of their feathers and they stop laying. As their feathers grow back, they begin to lay eggs again. In their second laying cycle, hens lay about 80 percent of the number of eggs produced in the first cycle. In the third cycle, production will fall off another 10 percent.

It is because of this reduction

that most farmers get rid of their hens after the first laying cycle. Myer's birds are divided into four flocks each of 80,000. It costs about \$200,000 to replace an 80-bird flock. By molting his

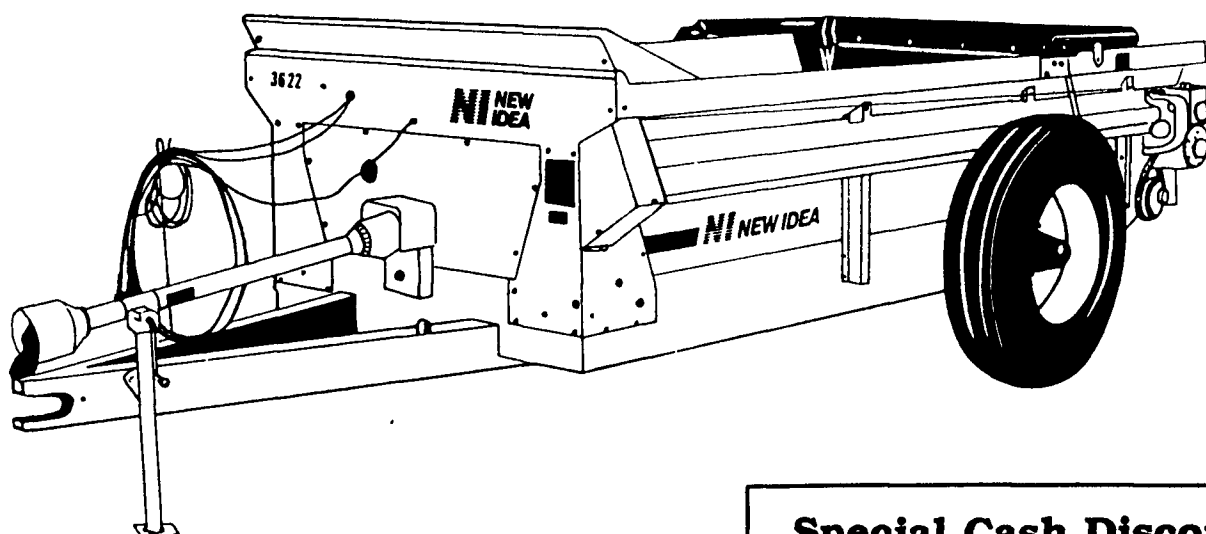
flocks, Myer feels he's saving the \$200,000, and the higher price he gets for his larger eggs makes up for the lowered production.

Another unusual feature of The Egg Basket operation is the hand-

ling of the manure. Manure is scraped out of the laying houses every week. It is then fermented and run through a dryer before being sold to a company that bags it for garden fertilizer.



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