

SPENT HEN UTILIZATION

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Not so long ago buyers would bid for mature spent laying hens as a source of natural flavoring for certain processed poultry soups and meat dishes.

Because of the growth of the broiler industry with plentiful broiler breeder hens as well as broilers, spent hens have been largely replaced by broiler stocks for this market.

The spent hen processor quickly learned that breeder hens were a more economical product to use due to their higher meat to bone yield. Any lack of flavoring was quickly remedied with artificial products.

While no one answer will handle every situation, there may be some alternatives provided at the upcoming National Poultry Waste Management Symposium. The symposium, held every two years, will be held in Harrisburg, Pa. on Oct. 21-23.

One of the key production sessions is devoted to "Mortality and Spent Hen Disposal." Nationally recognized authorities will address various opportunities that should help the table egg industry with this problem, including "Experiences and Challenges Using Spent Hens for Mink Food," "A Local Renderer's and the National Renderer's Association Perspective On the Spent Hen Issue," and "Handling Spent Hens on the Farm."

Dr. Bruce Webster from the University of Georgia will cover the last topic, "Handling Spent Hens on the Farm" and will introduce a system for humane flock

disposal. A preliminary report of this work was made at the International Poultry Exposition in Atlanta, Ga. in January.

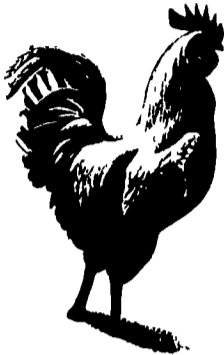
To access the available spent hen options, egg producers need a way to kill flocks on the farm that is quick, easy, economical, and above all, humane. A modified atmosphere killing (MAK) unit was developed at the University of Georgia for just this purpose. A cart was designed to go between cage rows in a commercial hen house with cart dimensions of 54-inch long x 20-inch wide x 39.5-inch high and an interior capacity of about 21 cubic feet.

Hens drop down into the main body of the cart from top spring-loaded doors. A 20-pound CO₂ cylinder is mounted on one end of the cart and connected to a system of PVC tubing so the CO₂ gas is delivered at two levels within the chamber. An unloading door with a piano hinge along the length of the cart opens up the lower 2/3 of one side and the sloping floor allows carcasses to slide out.

The MAK unit allows hens to be killed directly from the cages. Prefilling the cart with CO₂ is preferred so that the first birds entering the bird compartment are stunned rapidly. Loading to a

capacity of 250 hens takes about seven minutes. With a final flush of CO₂ at the end of loading, the killing process continues as the cart is rolled out of the house. In normal use it is possible to kill approximately 1,500 hens with each 20-pound cylinder of CO₂.

Most cost information and details about Dr. Webster's MAK unit for handling spent hens will be presented at the symposium. For more information about the National Poultry Waste Management Symposium (or mortality and spent hen disposal), please call the Penn State Department of Poultry Science at (814) 865-5573.



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