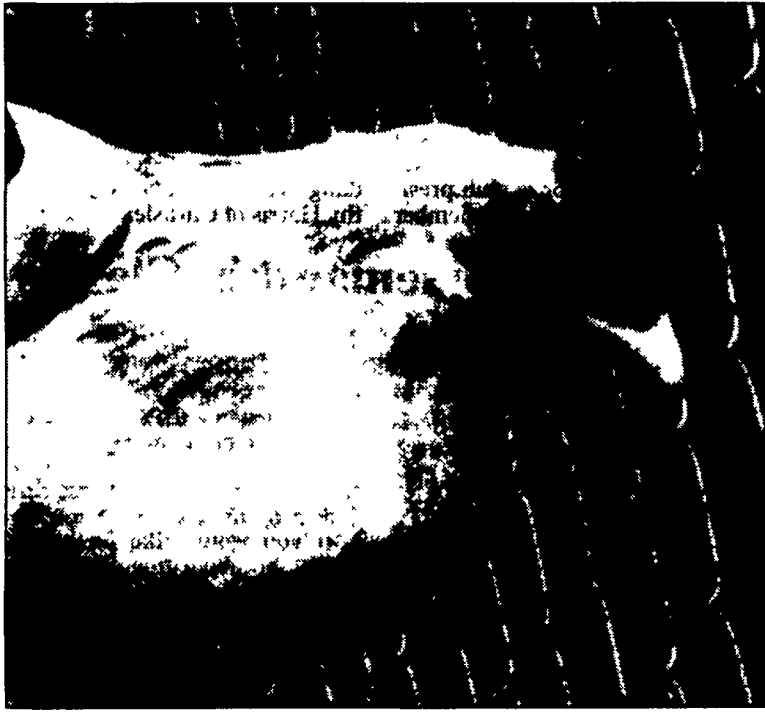


Kids Korner

J.P. Costello's Work With Chickens Has Its Perks



In this photograph there is a close view of a white earlobe. The color of the earlobe is how to determine what color egg the hen will lay. If it is a brown or red lob, the chicken's eggs will be brown. White indicates her eggs will be white. Too bad someone forgot to ask J.P. if the Araucana chickens have blue or green earlobes.



The Araucana breed, shown eating cracked corn, is known for laying eggs that have green and blue shells. J.P. used the corn to help the fowl behave long enough to pose for a photograph.



Inside the pen with his smaller Japanese breed chickens, J.P. Costello has to scrunch himself up to fit in the space. The birds have beautiful snowy white feathers and black tails.



Holding one of his two mischievous pigmy goats, J.P. and his parents are still debating how to keep the little rascals restrained. They will leap over the sides of their pen. If they ever got the chance to roam, it is certain they would be off on an expedition to explore the neighborhood.

GAY BROWNLEE
Virginia Correspondent
KEARNEYSVILLE, W.Va.
J.P. (James Paul, like his dad) Costello, 11, of Kearneysville, W.Va. thoroughly enjoys chickens. He knows a lot about chickens, too. In fact, he has owned a flock of chickens since he was nine years old.

J.P. was asked what makes chickens such neat creatures.

"They lay eggs and they eat worms," he replied. "They eat any kind of bug that moves."

J.P. said a couple of his chickens are tame. The oldest one is named "Mom." Another pet — "Gimpy" — was a baby when an adult stepped on her tiny foot. After that she didn't move about normally and J.P. says she "gimped" instead.

The ones with names J.P. can identify, but his mom, Paula, can't tell them apart. For instance, one of his girl birds has a guys name, "Roger." That's because the chick was born around the time J.P.'s friendly neighbor named Roger had died.

"Speedy" isn't living today, but he was a bantam that had one eye and would chase you, J.P. said. One rooster is "Bob" and another is "Boo Boo."

His interest in chickens began when J.P. was in another community visiting his brother's farm. He noticed how the chickens were always scratching in the dirt. It made J.P. really curious to learn more about the fowl.

"I asked if I could see how many eggs were in the laying block," he said. "I was gathering eggs and I thought that was cool."

On the internet J.P. began researching breeds of chickens. His mind was made up. He was determined to own a flock of chickens and finally, selected Rhode Island Reds, like his dad suggested.

"It's the State Bird of Rhode Island," he said, like a good social studies student.

One day the post office notified them that 25 chicks had arrived in the mail. J.P. and his mother then went to the farm store to purchase feed and were surprised that the store was offering "Araucana" breed chicks for sale.

Now J.P. knew from his research that Araucana eggs have a green or blue shell. After he and his mother discussed it, they decided to purchase two Araucana chicks. In about 21 weeks all the birds would probably be mature enough to lay eggs.

At home all the preparations were completed to give the young fowl a good start in life. There was a brooder with a heat lamp to keep the babies warm, snug and cozy.

Later he learned the importance of taking care of the eggs. J.P. says with emphasis: "Never, ever wipe em!"

He explained why. When the egg is laid by the chicken, it's outer shell has a natural invisible coating or membrane that prevents bacteria from going inside to the egg itself. Wiping the shell can break the membrane and destroy the protective layer. Of course, before cracking eggs open to cook them its best to clean away all smudges.

Most people don't know that you can tell what color and egg shell will be by looking at the



Goodness! This long stretchy earthworm that J.P. found under a rock will be tossed over the fence. In the chicken yard the excited flock is waiting in expectancy of a high treat. They see it coming through the air. With feathers flying and loud clucking, they race to be first for the "pecking."

chickens tiny earlobe. If the earlobes are brown or red, the eggs will be, too. If her earlobes are white, the eggs will be white.

Four big proud and noisy roosters are amongst J.P.'s chicken pens. There are two Rhode Island red, one buff Orpington, and one barred Rock.

The birds are fun to watch and sometimes their behavior seems silly. They make you laugh and are very pretty, too, with different colored feathers.

Some are a rich red brown. Others have soft creamy tan feathers. The plumage of several is slate gray mixed with white. Mostly, their heads have red combs.

J.P. doesn't want the big chickens pecking the smaller Japanese bantams, so he keeps these snowy white birds in separate pens.

At the Jefferson County Fair "Big Boy" a Rhode Island red male won "Best Cockerel in Show." Someone called him the "Prettiest rooster in Jefferson County."

"Mom" and "Goldie" also took blue ribbons and so did the eggs J.P. entered.

J.P. belongs to the Trailblazers 4-H Club where, in public speaking competition, he did a visual presentation about chickens, of course. He won a county blue ribbon and a state red ribbon.

J.P.'s responsibility morning and evening is to feed his livestock. So it is a good thing he loves being outdoors.

A South Jefferson Elementary School fifth grader, J.P. says: "Twenty minutes are not enough for me outside at recess."

J.P. checks the news and weather every morning on television. Afterward he puts on camouflage coveralls of olive green and brown to feed and water the animals. The grain and mash must last all day. He checks the three Dorset sheep in the grassy pasture of Cardinals' Meadow and makes sure the pygmy goats are tended.

On the weekends J.P. works at a paying job to earn some money. Friday, after school and twice on Saturdays and Sundays, he feeds 120 calves for dairyman Bob Gruber.

The youngest calves are bottle fed until they are three weeks old. J.P. fills the bottles from a large vessel of milk, puts on the nipples and then hangs the bottles on a rack. The position of the rack and the bottles enables the calves to drink without help from J.P.

"I put grain in the back and hay in the back for those who don't have milk," he said.

Each feeding takes about one and a half hours.

J.P. recently spent some of his money for a Love bird. It has lime green body feathers, a blue tail and peach around its neck. It's name is "Peachy."

J.P. is so industrious that when he's working, you can catch a gleam of satisfaction in his dark brown eyes beneath his cap.

Someday, J.P. is going to own a ranch — a very big ranch — he said, where he will be able to raise everything. Before then, however, he wants to drive a big dump truck to relocate tons of earth. There's just something cool about operating a dump truck, he said.



In the chicken yard "Boo Boo" a buff Orpington rooster is in the center of the photo.