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CIRCULAR NO. 61.

CULL THE SLACKER HEN

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CULL THE SLACKER HEN.*

Prepared by J. Holmes Martin.

How to Tell Her From the Layer:

SLACKER	WORKER
(The hen to sell)	(The hen to keep)
1. Pale, shriveled comb	1. Large, red comb
2. Yellow in ear lobe (In white ear-lobed breeds only)	2. Bleached white ear lobe
3. Deep yellow shanks	3. Pale yellow to white shanks
4. Early molter	4. Late molter
5. Exceptionally long toe nails	5. Short toe nails
6. Lazy and listless	6. Active and always working
7. Pelvic bones close together (One to 1½ fingers width)	7. Pelvic bones wide open (2 to 4 fingers width)
8. Vent yellow and puckered	8. Vent pale and pliable
9. Skin of abdomen coarse and tough	9. Skin of abdomen dilated and soft

In order to lay well a bird must have a sound body. As a first consideration a bird must be VIGOROUS and HEALTHY if it is to lay well. Vigor and health are shown by a bright, clear eye, a well set body, a comparatively active disposition and a good circulation.

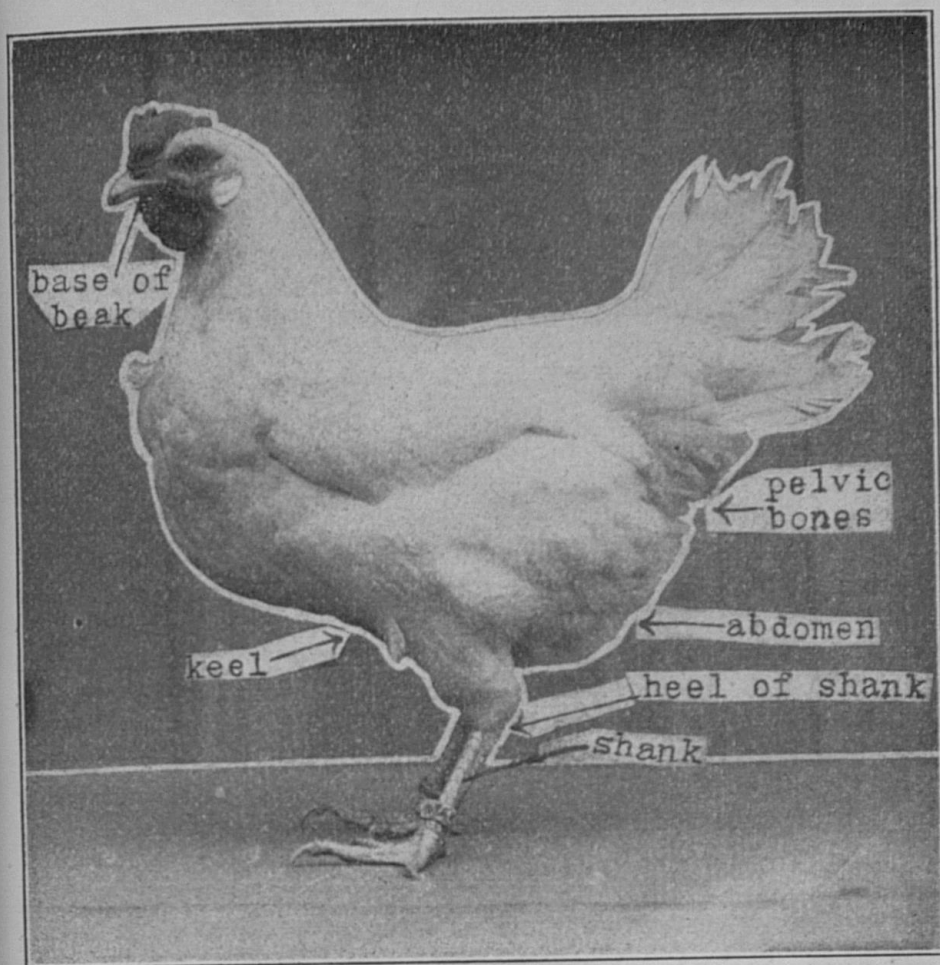
Loss of Fat Due to Laying

The pigmentation or COLOR CHANGES should be observed by daylight. Laying uses up the surplus fat in the body, and it especially removes the fat from the skin. In yellow-skinned breeds this loss of fat can readily be seen by the loss of the yellow color. The different parts of the body tend to bleach and become white as the stored fat is used up. The changes occur in the following order:

The VENT changes very quickly with egg production so that a white or pink vent on a yellow-skinned bird generally means that the bird is laying, while a yellow vent means a bird is not laying. It should be recognized that all yellow color changes are dependent on the feed, coarseness of skin and size of bird. A heavy bird fed on an abundance of green feed, yellow corn, or other heavy material that will color the fat deep yellow will not bleach out nearly as quickly as a smaller or paler-colored bird.

The color goes out of the BEAK beginning at the base and gradually disappears until it finally leaves the front part of the upper beak. The lower beak bleaches faster than the upper, but may be used where the upper beak is obscured by horn or black. On the average-colored, yellow-skinned bird, a bleached beak means heavy production for at least the past four to six weeks.

* Adapted from a paper prepared by the Cornell Judging School.



LADY WALNUT HILL.

Holder of the world's record for continuous laying, 94 eggs in 94 consecutive days; 292 eggs in 12 months. Record made at Kentucky Agricultural Experiment Station.

The SHANKS are the slowest to bleach out and hence indicate a much longer period of production than the other parts. The yellow goes out from the scales on the front of the shanks first and finally from the scales on the rear. The scales on the heel of the shank, i. e., the back of the shank just below the hock joint, are the last to bleach out and may generally be used as an index to the natural depth of yellow color of the bird. A bleached-out shank usually indicates fairly heavy production for at least fifteen to twenty weeks. The yellow color comes back into the vent, ear lobes, beak and shanks in the same order that it went out, only the color returns much more quickly than it goes out.

Body Changes Due to Laying

A laying hen has a large, moist VENT showing a dilated condition and looseness as compared with the hard, puckered vent of a non-laying hen.

Below the tail, just above the vent, are two pelvic bones projecting towards the rear. By placing the fingers, flat, between these bones, their width can be determined. If the ends of the bones are

soft and pliable and the width of three ordinary fingers can be placed between them, the hen is, in all probability, laying at the time of examination. If the bones are close together and the points hard, the bird is probably not laying.

The whole ABDOMEN is dilated as well as the vent, so that the pelvic bones are widespread and the keel or breastbone is forced down, away from the pelvic bones, so as to give large CAPACITY. The more eggs a bird is going to lay the following week the greater will be the size of the abdomen. The actual size of the abdomen is, of course, influenced by the size of eggs laid and by the size of the bird.

Heavy production is also shown by the quality of the SKIN. Fat goes out from the skin and body with production, so that the heavy producers have a soft, velvety skin that is not underlaid by layers of hard fat. The abdomen, in particular, is soft and pliable.

One of the finer indications, but yet one of the most valuable in picking the high layer, is the fineness of the HEAD and the closeness and dryness of FEATHERING. The head of a high layer is fine. The wattles and ear lobes fit closely to the beak and are not loose and flabby. The face is clean-cut. The eye is full, round and prominent, especially when seen from the front. The high layer is trimmer; that is, the feathers lie closer to the body and, after heavy production, the oil does not keep the plumage relatively sleek and glossy but the plumage becomes worn and threadbare.

Changes in Comb, Wattles and Ear Lobes

The COMB, WATTLES and EAR LOBES enlarge or contract, depending on the ovary. If these are large, full and smooth, or hard and waxy, the bird is laying heavily. If the comb is limp the bird is only laying slightly, but is not laying at all when the comb is dried down, especially at molting time.

Molting

When a bird stops laying in the summer she usually starts molting. The later a hen lays in the summer or the longer the period over which she lays, the greater will be her production, so that the high producer is the late layer and hence the late molter. The length of time that a hen has been molting or has stopped laying can be determined by the rate of renewal of the feathers. First the body feathers are shed, the tail next and then the wing, which molts from the middle out. Molting is one of the most valuable characters in picking the cull because of the simplicity of its use.

Temperament and Activity

A good layer is more active and nervous and yet more easily handled than a poor layer. A high layer shows more friendliness and yet elusiveness than a poor bird. A low producer is shy and stays on the edge of the flock and will squawk when caught.

While the characters discust here have dealt specifically with the present year's production, it should be borne in mind that a high producer one year is, generally speaking, a high producer in all other years.

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