Seven factors in profitable poultry farming

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Seven Factors in Profitable Poultry Farming

From a Broadcast Talk by D. K. GILES, B.Sc. (Agric.), Acting Officer in Charge, Poultry Branch.

Fig. 1.—Layers housed in a well-constructed shed with dry friable litter have a good chance of avoiding serious diseases.

Profitable poultry farming depends upon getting the greatest number of eggs from the birds by good breeding and management, and carrying enough birds to give a reasonable income.

Of the many factors which influence the successful operation of a poultry farm, the seven listed below are of outstanding importance:

- Good breeding.
- Good feeding.
- Disease control.
- Labour efficiency.
- Clean, high quality eggs.
- Size of farm.
- Insurance against price fluctuations.

Breeding.

The first of these, good breeding, is at a low ebb in Western Australia. The C.S.I.R.O. Poultry Research Centre in Victoria has done some excellent work in finding simple, but effective methods of breeding. In the near future they will be publishing a report on a breeding programme which requires a minimum amount of labour, but at the same time gives an effective increase in egg production. We can look forward to more high quality birds coming on to the market when these breeding systems are put into practice. The Random Sample Test in association with private breeding programmes will show the farmer where the profitable birds are to be found.

Feeding.

Good feeding is the next important factor. In the last two years, our Research Station has obtained results which will permit us to produce more eggs for less food. The rations which are being recommended by the Department can save a third or more of the food used previously. This means an extra profit of something like £300 a year per 1,000 layers, without any more work. It can be seen from this, that it pays to feed efficient rations.

Disease Control.

Disease control is another factor. Good sanitation and treating disease when it is first identified are the most effective methods of reducing losses. In recent years,
it has been very rare indeed to see high mortalities due to disease, but there is still room for improvement however, by attention to sanitation.

Good sanitation is a feature of modern farm layout and there is a wealth of evidence to show that some of the diseases that have not been identified previously are due to insanitary conditions. Infectious blood poisoning is an example of this. Further to this, dirty yards and litter mean dirty feet and soiled eggs in the nest. Nobody wants to eat eggs if the shells are soiled with poultry droppings.

Labour Costs.

Labour efficiency is a factor which has been receiving a good real of attention in the last few years. It is now realised that to carry enough birds to provide a satisfactory living for a family, more birds have to be carried per man without reducing the rate of lay. The two factors which have contributed most to this, are improved farm layout and mechanisation.

Modern farm layout cuts travelling time to a minimum, and has reduced the time and labour once spent on many of the routine jobs such as watering, feeding, and temperature control of brooders. Mechanisation has saved time still further by enabling the farmer to mix his feed in bulk.

On many farms, many more birds can be carried per man, but a debit against this is the increased number of eggs that have to be cleaned. Packing large numbers of eggs is less arduous if they are clean, therefore, clean litter and clean yards are essential if the eggs are to be taken from the nest ready for packing without cleaning.

Egg Quality.

This brings us to our next point, the marketing of good quality eggs. Good quality eggs must be clean and the air cell must not be deeper than ½ in. when they are graded. It is highly important that eggs should never be stored in
draughts or at temperatures greater than 60°F. This is particularly important in summer. Air conditioning or air coolers can be highly effective, providing that at no time is there free water on the egg shells. If eggs are not graded first quality then the price received is less than the cost of production, so that they are uneconomic to the farmer. Further to this, the farmer can improve his own market if eggs are clean and fresh.

Farm Sizes.

All the preceding factors are necessary to give high production per bird, labour efficiency and the marketing of good quality products, but the farmer must still sell sufficient of his product to make a decent living. At present prices, he can net something like 15s. a bird over all costs except labour. If he is only carrying 1,000 birds his total income is £750. If however, he carries 2,500 he can net something like £2,000. This is a bit more than 15s. a bird, but it must be remembered that the larger farmer can cut his overheads. Because lack of capital often prevents a farmer from building just what he wants in the first place, he runs the risk of ending up with a mass of scattered small sheds which do not come up to the minimum requirements for efficient poultry husbandry. It is highly important therefore, that the farmer should build to an overall plan. When one sees large laying sheds,
150ft. to 200ft. long and 30ft. wide, they appear to be impossible to build with a small amount of capital. There are many sheds in the industry today however, like this which have been built by adding a little bit each year.

Price Fluctuations.

Once a farmer is producing, his biggest hazard is fluctuating prices. The egg and poultry meat market is renowned the whole world over for the big variations in prices from year to year, and it must be remembered that it is only the last few pence on the wholesale price of eggs that give the profit.

For instance a drop in price of 3d. a dozen—say from 4s. 6d. to 4s. 3d.—means a reduction of only one-eighteenth, or less than 6 per cent. of the poultry farmers gross receipts—which may not seem a serious matter.

Most of the gross return however is swallowed up by cost of food, labour, maintenance of plant and other overheads so that the farmer is to a large extent merely recouping himself for money already spent.

His real income consists of his net profit—which might be 1s. a dozen when eggs are bringing 4s. 6d. Under such conditions a drop of 3d. a dozen in wholesale prices takes one-quarter or 25 per cent. of his income—which is a serious reduction.

Obviously therefore the poultry farmer must operate on a long-term basis—in other words he must be in a position to put aside sufficient reserves during the high-price periods to be able to maintain his income at a reasonable level during those recurring periods when low prices reduce his profit margin.

Always remember that successful poultry farming is a matter of mass-producing a product with a small and fluctuating margin of profit per unit. If this is made the basic principle of the farmer's operations there is no reason why an efficiently-conducted poultry farm should not be as prosperous as any other soundly-operated industry.
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