Hints on chicken rearing

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HINTS ON CHICKEN REARING

A good brooder, ample space, good sanitation, plenty of water and a balanced feed are still the essentials of successful chicken raising, says P. Smetana, B.Sc. (Agric.), Acting Officer-in-Charge of the Poultry Branch.

For the next few months poultry farmers will once again be concerned with rearing chickens.

The methods of raising these young chicks have not changed a great deal over the last few years, and the basic requirements for successful rearing during the early weeks are mainly providing an adequate shelter or brooder house with space for the intended number of chicks, clean and sanitary conditions, some means of supplying artificial heat for brooding and the provision of water and a correctly balanced feed.

Before the chicks arrive on the farm the brooding equipment should be given a trial run to make sure it will work efficiently once the birds are placed under the brooders.

BROODERS

There is a range of brooders to choose from but usually one system will be more suited to a particular farm than some of the others. The brooders used most commonly today are the hot water system, electric, gas, charcoal, kerosene, infra red and the battery brooder.

Hot Water System

On large farms where groups of a thousand or more chicks are brooded at the one time, the hot water system has proved to be very satisfactory. A boiler is installed which heats water circulating in pipes running the length of the brooder house. Although the cost of installation is fairly high this method of brooding is one of the most economical to operate, requires very little attention apart from a daily stoking of the boiler and is very efficient.

Electric Brooders

Electric brooders are clean and efficient but the running costs are high unless a thermostat is installed. There is practically no labour attached to the operation of electric brooders. It is essential that a reliable power supply exists in areas where electric brooders are favoured.

Gas

A newer type of brooder which has been installed in a few of the larger farms, uses gas as fuel. These gas brooders have a fairly high initial cost of installation and are relatively expensive to operate but they have the advantages of being clean, efficient and require very little labour.

Charcoal

Charcoal brooders are usually the cheapest to run and are still popular for small groups of chickens. A certain amount of attention is necessary with these brooders and some people object to the fairly frequent handling of charcoal. Also in most cases it is difficult to control the temperature of charcoal brooders.

Kerosene

Kerosene brooders have lost a lot of their former popularity. The frequency of fires and the labour necessary for refueling and adjustments are the main disadvantages and although the initial capital outlay
is not great, the running costs are not as low as many people believe.

Battery Brooders

Battery brooders are not widely used although a few have been installed recently.

This system eliminates contact with the ground and has advantages for disease control. This could be important in some cases, particularly where coccidiosis has been troublesome in the past.

Pilot Globes

A feature of brooding which is often overlooked is the distinct advantage of small pilot globes placed under the brooder in addition to the source of heat. Many farmers in this State have adopted the idea with good results. These lights should be provided wherever possible.

Infra Red Brooders

This type of brooder consists of 250 watt infra red lamps, suspended above the ground. Up to 100 chicks can be placed under each lamp and the temperature can be controlled by altering the height of the lamp from the floor. The absence of a hover means that a maximum amount of ventilation is possible and also the entire batch of chicks can be easily observed at all times. It has also been claimed that better growth occurs due to the extra light and the beneficial effect of the infra red type of light, but this is doubtful.

FOOD AND WATER

Food and water should be provided to chickens as soon as they are placed under the brooders, not after a period of days as was once mistakenly believed. Glass fonts with metal bases are almost invariably used as waterers for the first few days.

Because of the labour involved, especially for large groups, a number of farmers used an automatic watering system with success last year for the first three weeks of brooding until the chicks were old enough to use the automatic water troughs. In this system lengths of polythene piping are laid on the ground beside the brooder and small plastic funnels are fitted into the pipe at about 12-inch intervals. A cistern at one end regulates the level of water in the funnels.

Feed may be in the form of crumbles or mash and for the first few days a small amount should be placed in wide, shallow troughs close to the brooder. This is more satisfactory than handfuls of feed on scraps of paper or on top of the litter.

Finely chopped good quality greenfeed is still considered beneficial for young stock and may be fed after the first day.

DISEASES

The main diseases affecting young chicks are uricaemia and coccidiosis.

Variable responses have been obtained from the agents used to prevent or treat uricaemia but molasses, potassium salts and antibiotics have been effective in some instances. In many cases the presence of stresses such as overcrowding, chilling and so on will lead to outbreaks of uricaemia.

Coccidiosis is still a major cause of loss, although in most cases expert management will minimise losses. Effective drugs both for prevention and treatment are available but must not be regarded as a substitute for good management.

Day old fowl pox vaccination—discussed in the last issue of this Journal—is still being tested in this State, but seems likely to become the best insurance against fowl pox.

Finally there is one very important point which should never be overlooked—the desirability of raising young stock as far removed as possible from older birds. This is essential for disease control and is particularly important now that we have a high leucosis incidence.

Although isolation brooding is not guaranteed to prevent losses from leucosis at a later stage, it is one of the few measures which has been shown to reduce the chances of losses.