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CANNIBALISM

its Cause and Prevention

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CANNIBALISM

ITS CAUSE AND PREVENTION

The biggest cause of cannibalism in the laying flock is blow-outs or pick-outs, sometimes called prolapsus. Usually, the greatest loss from this condition is in the fall and early winter.

The pullets, in attempting to lay a large egg, cause the oviduct and vent to protrude. Before it returns to its normal position, other birds see it and pick at the soft, tender, reddish membrane. The bird is defenseless and often is killed before the flock owner sees what is happening.

Sometimes, the intestine is pulled from the body of the affected bird before she dies. If this happens several times, the hens get into the habit of picking at the birds just off the nest and the losses from cannibalism can become regular and costly.

PREVENT CANNIBALISM IN THE LAYING FLOCK BY GOOD MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

- **Don't Crowd** - Allow the birds plenty of floor and feeder space - 3 to 3-1/2 sq. ft. of floor space per bird, depending on the breed and 3 inches of feeder space per bird.
- **Good Ventilation** - Keeps houses dry. Wet houses result in dirty feathers which encourages feather picking. This leads to vent picking and cannibalism.
- **Good Litter** - Keep the floor covered with good dry litter. Ground corn cobs, shavings or fine straw work best. Hens like to scratch. It keeps them busy and out of trouble.
- **Plenty of Water** - One hundred hens will drink from 5 to 7 gallons of water per day.
- **Feed Hens A Complete Ration** - Be sure the feed has all the needed proteins, vitamins and minerals in it.
- **Darken Nests** - Dark nests tend to keep the hen on the nest until the vent has returned to its normal position, thus taking away the temptation or reason to start pecking. The community nest is a good nest to use.
- **Darken Windows** - Allowing only enough light in the house for hopper feeding has some effect in retarding cannibalism.

- **Feed Whole Oats** - Whole oats fed to the hens is helpful in preventing cannibalism.

DEBEAKING

Debeaking will stop losses from picking or cannibalism. Debeaking is the cutting off of the end of the upper beak. Usually, the beak is cut back to the quick. This is done with an electric debeaker, which has a hot blade that cauterizes the job. However, if knife is used, it would be well to have a heavy chunk of hot iron with which to cauterize the beak.

Debeaking will stop the picking for several months. After the beaks have grown out, they should be cut back again to prevent the habit to start again.

MECHANICAL APPLIANCES

Several metal gadgets on the market are designed to prevent picking. If these are used, put them on before the pullets go into the laying house. If they are put on after the birds are in the house, they may interfere with eating and cause a drop in egg production.

FREQUENT FLOCK INSPECTION

There is no substitute for inspection of the flock and the removal of the guilty birds as well as the injured hens. Often it will be of direct benefit to watch the flock to catch the ring-leaders and remove them from the flock. Leaving injured birds in the pens is bad. It just adds to temptation.

It is a good idea to prevent cannibalism in the brooder house although it may end when the chicks are turned outdoors; it probably will start again as soon as the pullets are housed in the fall.

TO PREVENT CANNIBALISM IN CHICKS

DO NOT CROWD - Provide 1/2 sq. ft. per chick until they are 6 to 8 weeks old. Then provide 1 sq. ft. per chick.

GOOD LITTER - Provide good DRY LITTER, fine enough to encourage scratching and coarse enough to allow the droppings to settle through to the floor.

HOPPER SPACE - 1 inch to four weeks, 2 inches to 8 weeks and 3 inches thereafter.

WATER - Chicks need water. Provide drinking space to the equivalent of 2 glass jar waterers per 100 chicks to 3 weeks. Then double.

BALANCED RATION - Be sure that the feed the chicks are getting has enough of the necessary vitamins, proteins and minerals.

ROOSTS - Put up low roosts in the brooder house when the chicks are 4 or 5 weeks old.

KEEP CHICKS FED AND WATERED - Have feed and water available to the chicks at all times. Good equipment is wasted if it is not used, and the chicks will be slow and weak.

KEEP ROOM TEMPERATURE DOWN - The temperature in the brooder house should be low enough so the chicks have to depend on the hover for warmth.

LET CHICKS OUT - Let the chicks outdoors as soon as they will go. A screen floored sunporch or range shelter will protect them from contamination from the ground and keep them off the wet ground.

MOVE CHICKS TO RANGE - Put the chicks on good range as soon as they are big enough to get along without heat, or as soon as weather and range conditions permit.

SANITATION - Keep all equipment clean. An ounce of sanitation is worth a ton of cure.

IF TROUBLE DEVELOPS - Put salt in the water at a rate of 1 tablespoon per gallon of water.

Provide the chicks with a green leafy material to pick at. Alfalfa is good.

Smear the affected parts with axle grease or a commercial preparation to prevent further picking. Try a mixture of quinine and red paint. All the quinine that can be mixed with a small can of paint and spread over several birds that have not been picked as well as those that have been picked.

Try painting the windows red.

If everything else fails, debeak the chicks. This is done by trimming off the tips of the beaks with a sharp knife.