



Poultry Patter

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HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR DIAGNOSTIC LABORATORY

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An experienced poultryman knows when his flock is in good, general health. But when egg production drops, feed consumption changes, or his birds begin to die, he needs help. A local veterinarian can usually diagnose the problem and recommend treatment. If his services are not immediately available or additional tests are necessary to solve complex problems, the services of a diagnostic laboratory can be helpful.

Poultry diagnostic laboratories are operated by state and private organizations as a public service. While there may be differences in their operation and the types of services performed, the requirements for specimens submitted for diagnosis are essentially the same.

Laboratory diagnosis is frequently limited by lack of information about the case. In some instances, the value of the diagnosis is practically worthless because specimens submitted are not typical of the flock problem. You can help your diagnostic laboratory do a better job for you by following a few basic procedures.

Selection of Specimens

When requesting diagnosis of a health problem in a chicken flock, you should submit entire birds for examination. Specimens may be either live or dead, but preferably, both live and dead birds should be submitted. Dead birds should be kept refrigerated to retard deterioration.

Be sure birds selected are typical of the flock problem. If the problem is sudden death in normal appearing, well-fleshed birds, then submit several freshly dead, heavy birds and, if possible, one or two live, sick, heavy birds. If the problem is with birds becoming weak and thin

and finally dying, then submit several weak, thin birds and one or more freshly dead, thin birds if any are available.

Almost every flock has a few cull birds. Don't bring these in as being representative of your flock problem. Remember when you try to catch birds housed on the floor, the culls are the ones most easily caught.

Ideally, it is desirable to examine about five birds: some live and some dead. With young chicks, 15 to 20 specimens can be submitted. Since every case is different, it is difficult to set an exact number of birds. There may not be any dead birds available; or, it may be difficult to find live birds typical of the problem.

Flock History Needed

The laboratory uses information submitted with specimens to get an idea of the nature and extent of the problem. What the laboratory does is determined by the case history. General information should be provided, such as: name and address of flock owner, name and address of veterinarian or serviceman, strain, age, and source of birds, type of housing, feeding program, and the number of birds in the flock. Also indicate the number, age and type of other poultry flocks on the premises.

The flock history can be in essay form. Try to describe your situation so laboratory personnel can create a mental image of your flock. Start with the beginning of the flock. Answer questions you would raise about the flock if you were not familiar with it, such as:

How did birds start off when you received them? What vaccinations have birds been given and at what ages? Have birds been moved to a different building?

What has their overall performance been? Has it been a uniform flock? Mortality level? Have there been changes in feed and water consumption? Egg production?

When did the current problem begin? (Use dates rather than days of the week.) If deaths have occurred, have they been sudden? How long have birds been sick before they die?

What drugs have been used, at what levels, and for how long? Symptoms - How do birds act? Abnormal position of head, abnormal walking, etc. Have wet droppings been a problem?

Observations by the individual who has worked with the birds every day are frequently more valuable than those of someone who visits the flock infrequently. Be sure to note any unusual circumstances such as a worker commenting that the birds didn't seem to like the last batch of feed. Observations of unusual bird reaction or performance should be made in their normal surroundings. The laboratory observer often cannot readily determine whether the birds' unusual reaction is due to illness, stress of the trip to the laboratory, or unfamiliarity with new surroundings (usually a lab bench or concrete floor).

The poultryman has to spend considerable time and effort making the trip with his birds to the laboratory. It certainly should be worth 10 minutes of his time to complete a flock history to aid in the diagnosis of his problem.

Feed Sample Evaluation

In spite of the general excellence of complete manufactured feeds, errors in formulation or mixing can occur, or feeds may become contaminated with toxic materials. Problems may arise due to deficiency, excess, or imbalance of nutrients, or the presence of harmful substances or organisms. If these problems are to be discovered, it is essential a feed sample be saved. All too often when it becomes apparent the problem might be feed-associated, the batch of suspected feed has all been used up.

If you suspect the problem might be in any way associated with the feed, collect a sample and save it for analysis. Take a sample, representative of the feed the birds have eaten, from

the feed troughs or tank. Save 15 to 20 pounds of this feed. If it isn't needed, it can be fed to the birds and won't be wasted. Date and label the sample and store it in a cool, dry place.

Do not send feed samples to the diagnostic laboratory for analysis unless directed. Most diagnostic laboratories do not analyze feeds. They refer you to private laboratories performing these services if findings indicate the feed may be a cause of the problem.

Bring Birds in Early

Do not wait until you have large losses to have your problem diagnosed. Bring birds in early, when the problem begins. Select specimens typical of the problem and provide a good history of the flock. This will help your laboratory give you the correct diagnosis of your poultry health problem.

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Correction - Vol. 5, No. 3 (From May 1967 Poultry Patter)

Egg Production Costs

Table 1 should be corrected to read:

Table 1. Rank of Production Costs Per Dozen of 22 Cage Egg Producers, Excluding Labor and Depreciation

22.3 Cents	24	25	25.9
22.4	24.2	25	26
23	24.5	25	26
23.3	24.6	25.5	27
23.6	24.6	25.5	27.6
24	.	25.8	



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