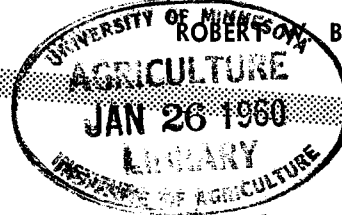


POULTRY  
HUSBANDRY  
NO. 4

# FACT SHEET

## Managing the LAYING FLOCK

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Fast-moving events place a premium on good management. Management is often the unseen factor of production which determines the success of an egg producer. It shows up in the decisions that a producer has to make on his housing methods, lighting practices, cannibalism in the flock, temperature, and many other problems. This fact sheet is a guide to help the producer make the best decision.

7. Birds more adversely affected by sudden changes in temperature.
8. Birds need a more highly fortified feed.
9. Lower egg production.

### Slat Floors

#### Advantages:

1. No litter needed.
2. Better control of bacterial diseases.
3. No need to clean during the laying year, except to eliminate moisture.
4. Better results on poor management.

#### Disadvantages:

1. Causes higher humidity.
2. No place where the bird can relax.
3. Birds appear more nervous.
4. Feather condition becomes rougher.
5. More egg breakage.
6. More feather picking and cannibalism.
7. Lower egg production.

### Combination of Litter and Slats or Wire

#### Advantages:

1. Higher production on good management.
2. Less mortality.
3. Fewer birds going out of production.
4. Birds have a place to dust themselves and rest.

### Methods of Housing

Much interest has been shown in the various ways of housing laying hens in an effort to improve the performance of the flock. Here are the advantages and the disadvantages of the three most popular methods of housing.

### Cages

#### Advantages:

1. Less feed required per hen.
2. No litter needed.
3. Good working conditions for operator.
4. Reduced feather picking and cannibalism.
5. Better control of disease and parasites.
6. Easy culling of nonlayers.

#### Disadvantages:

1. Higher capital investment.
2. Fly problem.
3. Increased labor per hen.
4. Wire-marked eggs.
5. Cage fatigue.
6. Pullet replacement problem.

## 5. Less labor required.

## Temperature

### Disadvantages:

1. Good dry litter sometimes hard to obtain.
2. Floor eggs become dirty.
3. Cannibalism and feather picking possible.

The Poultry Department of the University of Minnesota recommends the combined use of litter with a dropping pit. The dropping pit should be covered with slats or wire. This recommendation is based on experiments conducted under good management conditions. However, if you do not have the time to give your chickens the proper care or are unable to get a satisfactory dry litter, slat floors or cages may be alternatives.

### Pointers in Housing Pullets

1. Catch the birds with a minimum amount of disturbance.
2. House the birds before egg production starts.
3. Cull weak, undeveloped birds.
4. Debeak birds or put on pick guards.
5. Check and record at housing time:
  - a. Number of pullets housed.
  - b. Total of your feed costs and other costs.
  - c. Calculation of your costs per pullet housed.

### Light Management

The intensity of light needed to stimulate egg production is one foot candle. It takes approximately 1/2 watt per square foot of floor space to obtain this intensity. Clean, incandescent bulbs should be used with reflectors. Fluorescent light bulbs are not as effective because they give off a blue light that does not stimulate egg production.

### Cannibalism

Cannibalism is a vice that seems to develop in the form of feather picking, "pickout" of the vent, or picking at other areas on the bird. This bad habit can start any time in the life of the flock. It is usually associated with an accumulation of stress conditions, such as overcrowding, too high a temperature, poor ventilation, and many others.

In cage operations a 1 percent loss from prolapse occurs. This indicates a possible true loss from blowouts. If your loss is higher than this you are having a pickout problem which can be prevented by debeaking the birds. It is a good practice to debeak your birds at the time of housing.

It is important to maintain a uniform temperature in the laying house. Research work conducted by the USDA showed that egg production declined at low temperatures while weight per egg increased slightly. Smaller eggs with poor shells were laid at temperatures above 85°F. The least amount of feed per dozen of eggs was required at temperatures of 65°. The following table shows the relationship found by the USDA.

Table 1. Influence of Temperature on Egg Production and Feed Efficiency\*

Air temp. °F.	Eggs per day per 100 hens number	Wt. of eggs per doz. ounces	Feed consump- tion per day per 100 hens pounds	Feed per doz eggs pounds
23	26	24.2	41	19.0
37	65	23.9	35	6.5
45	74	23.8	33	5.4
55	78	23.5	31	4.8
65	75	23.2	29	4.6
75	68	22.7	27	4.8
85	56	22.1	25	5.4

\* After a 10- to 14-day period of acclimatization, tests were run for 3 to 6 weeks. Ration was the same at all temperatures.

This table shows the importance of keeping your laying flock comfortable. It is very important to avoid the extremely cold as well as the high temperatures. A good poultryman should not let the temperature go below 45° F. nor above 85° F. Above or below these temperatures, the performance of the bird is retarded.

### Partial Molt

Management is not always to blame for a fall molt, false molt, or partial molt. This condition appears in October and November in pullets that have laid three to five months. The reason and nature of the slump is little understood. The birds usually go out of production for a period of four to six weeks, and then return to production and lay until the following summer or fall.

Birds that go into a fall molt after a three- to five-month production should NOT be culled unless anticipated future egg prices are very low, as the birds will probably return to profitable production. The cause of this condition is not known, but it is thought that birds in good condition are less likely to molt.

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Cooperative Extension work in Agriculture and Home Economics, University of Minnesota, Agricultural Extension Service and United States Department of Agriculture Cooperating, Skuli Rutford, Director. Published in furtherance of Agricultural Extension Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914.