

SELECTION
By J. M. Affleck
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Selection is the most direct and powerful means of improvement at the disposal of the breeder; indeed it is almost the only means of permanent improvement that is under our direct control.

In most phases of the breeding problem the poultry man is an onlooker merely; but by selection he becomes an active agent, and his acts are powerful for the good or evil in controlling the destiny of the breed or variety which we handle. To a large extent he supplants nature's selection, and if he is to succeed he must be well grounded in four fundamentals when he thus takes a hand in the course of nature.

1. He must have a clear idea of what he wishes to accomplish and persistently adhere to the one ideal.
2. He must be informed as to the history of the breed he handles and of the variations, which are most likely to occur.
3. He must know the general principles involved in selection in order to know the forces with which he deals and what is likely to happen when he interferes.
4. He must know how far he may depart from sound practice on account of economic or other considerations.

Common sense would dictate that ideals in selection should place utilitarian value first and processing this, to add other minor refinements with caution, and not lose sight of the primary purpose. Too many refinements or fads will greatly complicate problems and endanger the original ideal.

In the effort to secure such refinements, we must not overlook the importance of fertility, hatchability, vigor or longevity. The "shy breeder" never will advance you far, even though possessed of superlative excellencies in all other ways, for first must come the power of prolific production.

The more the matter is studied the more you will find that the excellence of a flock is advanced or sustained, not by the general mass, but by a few exceptional breeders. This exceptional breeder is often not the exceptional bird in appearance or performance. It is only by making test matings and pedigreeing the progeny that you can spot these super birds.

Now for the immediate problem in hand – the selection of young birds as they reach the frying or broiling stage. At this time most birds will be enough mature that we can judge them with reasonable accuracy, and since we can make a good profit from them when sold as fryers, it would seem good policy to be rather rigid in requirements. Naturally we

can and should be more exacting with the cockerels but it would be poor policy to keep a pullet unless it fairly well fills the requirements as outlined below.

1. Any which are subnormal on feathering; any with split, twisted or dropped flights or any other defect which goes with weak wing.
2. Any which do not show evidence of good nutrition by being well fleshed and pigmented.
3. Any who do not move with poise and quickness and are well balanced upon their feet.
4. Any bird whose head inclines to the crow head; too long and slender with beak sagging in front of the eye. Heads should be blocky, broad, and carried well behind the eye; beak stocky, curved and husky; eye large, bright and intelligent.
5. Any whose body is not solid, broad backed, with good length and depth. Keel should be medium to long, and preferably straight.

Having made your first selection, you will have more room for the ones that are left. Give them good range with lots of green stuff, feed a ration with not more than one part of protein to seven parts of carbohydrates, and at six months of age they should be a joy to the eye. Send broilers to market as soon as they are saleable.

Since chicks make the most rapid growth during the first few weeks of their lives, it costs more and takes longer to put on weight after they have reached a pound in weight. Chicks increase the weight 54% the first week, 65% the second, 55% the third week, 44% the fourth week, 32% the fifth week, 28% the sixth week, 20% the seventh and 16% the eighth week.

Separate pullets and cockerels as soon as the sexes can be told apart. Male chicks are likely to be larger, stronger and more vigorous than the females so the pullets have less opportunity to grow when brooded with them. Separation of the chickens should be made to insure a more rapid and uniform growth of both pullets and cockerels. It reduces the size of the flocks and gives more feeding and drinking space for the birds left. Keep the cockerels which develop fastest as breeding males.