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THE POULTRY YARD

THE STORY OF A SUCCESSFUL POULTRY FARM

VIII.—More About Brooders and Brooding; How to Feed the Baby Chicks; Dangers in Moldy, Spoiled Feeds

By Miss Mary Walker, Horn Lake, Miss.

IN MODERATE weather we can begin to turn the chickens out on the ground before they are a week old. Here we observe great caution, always choosing the warmest part of a sunshiny day for the first lesson. The ground outside the brooder shed is covered with litter and the return to the brooder is made as easy as possible. Then we take no chances, and leave them in the brooder longer if we cannot watch them closely. We keep the chicks in brooders from three to six weeks, depending on the weather and season. They can be moved earlier, of course, if some means of providing heat for cold days and nights is devised. We move from brooders to colony houses provided with low roosts and a curtain for the open front. We have plenty of hay in these houses and round it up in the corners to prevent crowding. Don't forget this, and never leave any arrangement by which they may "pile" up on one another. Remember young chicks are very silly when cold and sleepy. At first the chickens sleep on the floor, under the roosts. We throw sacks over the roosts making a kind of cold hover for cool nights. They soon begin roosting but we do not discard the sacks until most of them are flying to the roosts. Our colony houses are six feet square and in these we put about 50 Leghorns. When the roosters are sold there will be 20 to 25 pullets "at home" until time to move into the laying houses in the fall.

We change the litter in the brooders as often as it seems necessary. It does not pay to be saving with this commodity. After the chickens are all roosting it is not necessary to keep litter in the colony houses except in very bad weather in early spring. When litter is discarded the colony houses are cleaned as the hen houses are. Each brooder has a section of the brooder house and a yard outside fenced with 18-inch wide one-inch mesh netting. Except for temporary fences to accustom to houses, the chickens of colony-houses are on free range.

One more word about brooding. We have had this idea in mind and our system is founded on it. The brooder should be operated like an improved, reliable, mother hen. The little chicks require a warm place to sleep and to warm up, but they need a lower temperature to exercise in. They can stand very cold weather if they have a place where they can get warm quickly.

Feeding Baby Chicks

OUR system of feeding baby chicks is simple, complex and compound, being derived from nearly everything we ever heard of that seemed good. It is simple in the main, however, and beginners could do worse than save this for reference, for it has stood the test of experience in our hands and many of our friends have tried it with success.

For two seasons we have used the Cornell method, with some variation. As this is not our original "way" and has given no better results than simpler rations, I give the plan we used for a number of seasons with marked success.

We do not feed chickens until they are about 48 hours old. Little Leghorns are so active they soon get hungry, and it is often hard to wait so long as the little fellows are so clamorous. We provide water as soon as we put chickens in brooders. We use an oatmeal can with a hole one-half inch from bottom. Fill and

insert in an oatmeal saucer or very small pan. The idea is to furnish a vessel that will not slop over when handled and does not allow the chickens to get into it. We also use ready-made fountains, but like the others better. We use water as it comes from the well and change often. It soon becomes warm and dirty, too, with many little feet playing about it.

As we are so apt to feed too soon, the feed for the first day or two is very light. The dry mash system of feeding is now generally used for baby chicks as well as mature fowls and the same principles apply in using it. Before the chickens come off we have on hand all the necessary articles of food. We provide baby chick feed of best quality, fine grit and oystershells, the best wheat bran, shorts, corn meal, beefscraps and alfalfa. When all of these feeds are not available we have used a mash of bran, corn meal and beefscrap, and supplied some kind of vegetable food along with the grain feed. If we have plenty of milk we do not use beefscrap. We feed milk in fountains like those used for water, and are careful to keep them clean. Infertile eggs are also utilized in supplying animal protein, but these do not go very far.

For the first feed, we prepare a mixture of equal parts of crackers or stale light bread and oatmeal, moistened with sweet milk. We feed this on newspapers, three times a day for two or three days, and longer if it is convenient. In between meals we place a shallow pan with bran before them. We also sprinkle some of the chick feed in the litter twice a day the first two days and several times a day thereafter. After the first day or two we supply some kind of chopped vegetable, mixing it with the cracker and oatmeal. When this nursery food is discontinued we still give some kind of vegetable food every day. Chopped onions is our favorite vegetable for very small chicks. When these are plentiful their use could be continued. We substitute raw turnips, turnip tops, cabbage, raw potatoes, Irish or sweet, sprouted oats, rye, etc.

When the nursery feed is left off, and no more infertile eggs and milk are to be had, we begin to add beefscrap to the mash, using only a small quantity at first. Ordinarily we do not like to give beefscrap until the chicks are 10 days old, beginning sparingly. However, when no other animal food is available and we are sure the scraps are absolutely fresh, we do not hesitate to use them from the first. We gradually add the other ingredients of the mash until at two weeks of age we are keeping before the chicks a mixture by weight of four parts bran, and one each of the other ingredients. When bran alone is used we use about one-eighth the bulk in beefscrap and feed more heavily of the chick feed that contains a good deal of corn. We gradually change from the prepared chick feed to a coarser grain mixture, trying to wean them entirely before they are six weeks old. Where good fine corn chops can be obtained, this with good whole wheat, makes a good developing feed, used in connection with the bran. We have even used no grain but the fine chops with good results. We continue to feed the grain in litter as long as the weather keeps them confined to houses. When they begin to run about and forage here and there it is not necessary to use litter for feeding. We feed them on clean ground whenever convenient.