

Layers: Problems and Solutions

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So you have a poultry layers production unit? Or you're thinking of establishing one? Maybe 100 birds, maybe 25? You will still benefit from this article! What can possibly go wrong anyway?

1. **Non layers:-** Layers are egg-making machines. Or so we want to believe. But in a flock, you will always get the slackers, those which feed without producing. How do we detect them and what do we do?

Non-laying birds are not easy to detect. However, simple detective techniques can help. First, check those birds with luxurious, shiny feathers! They are in great body condition and yet others are in condition 2 or 3. Remember body condition scoring article? Refresh your memory here: <https://livestockmatters.blog/2019/04/15/feeding-breeding-stock/>

Layers typically lay 2 eggs in 3 days. Therefore there is a drain on body nutrient reserves. Active layers are always hovering in condition 2 or 3. Rarely will you find an active layer in condition 4 or 5.

2. **Two finger test:-**Laying birds have a fairly wide distance between the pin-bones. If you take a bird and feel your hands on its abdomen, going towards the vent, you will come across two sharp bones on either side of the abdomen. These are the pin bones. If there is a distance of two to three fingers between the pin bones, your hen is laying. Non layers have pin bones close together, meaning no egg has passed through that space for some time!

Solution:- Isolate suspected non-layers. Feed them reduced ration plus greens. Give them a week to get back to laying. If they don't start laying, cull/sell them.

Egg-eating

This is a vice or bad habit. Usually there is an underlying problem to it. Could be any number of stress factors: over-crowding, hunger, specific deficiencies in the feed (esp. proteins and vitamins), floor eggs, late picking etc.

Solution

De-beaking or blunting the beaks reduces damage; address underlying cause; greens are always helpful. In extreme cases, serial or habitual offenders have to be culled/killed.

Diseases/Conditions

Layers can be affected by diseases. The major disease to worry about is E.Coli infection which is always present in unhygienic, overcrowded birds. It is not a dramatic disease but it will kill your birds steadily over a period of time. It also affects egg production. E. Coli infection is usually diagnosed at post mortem by veterinary professionals.

Most infectious diseases can be vaccinated against. This is why it is worthwhile to invest in a vaccination regime that ensures maximum protection for your birds.

Management/Handling

This is the human factor. It may seem unimportant, but this is probably the most significant. The poultry attendant must be consistent in his habits: same routines and quiet and calm demeanor. Give feed at same time, quiet whistling, careful movements inside the poultry house. There is a good poultry hand!

Light

Where possible, extend daylight by two or so hours to average 14 hours. In the absence of electricity, do not worry. Normal daylight is good enough. Draw up the curtains for the birds to get some sun!