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Hints on chicken rearing

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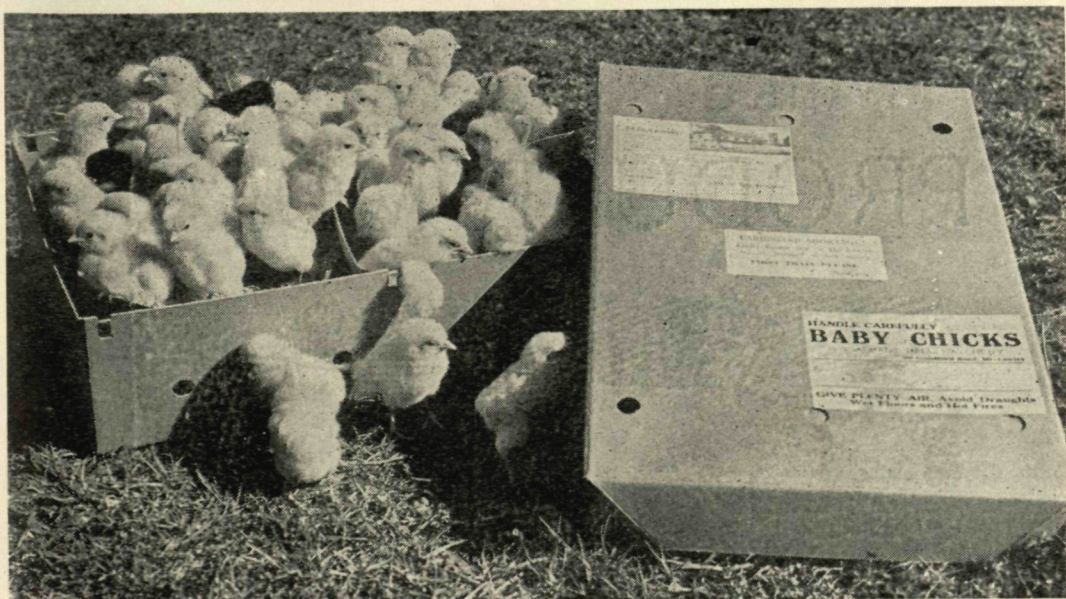
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HINTS ON CHICKEN REARING

By R. H. MORRIS, B.Sc. (Agric.), Officer-in-Charge Poultry Branch,
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*(Broadcast talk delivered during the A.B.C. Country Hour, and made available
by courtesy of the A.B.C.)*

THE ultimate profit to be made from poultry farming depends largely on how successfully each year's chickens are reared. A bird can be made or marred during its growing life and many aspects must be considered in rearing chickens successfully, some of the more important of which I will treat very briefly today.

The main requirement of a very young chicken is warmth, and it is well to remember that the chicken is better off with too much warmth than with too little. A brooder temperature of 95°F. should be maintained for the first three weeks. During inclement weather it is customary to keep chickens confined indoors for the first two weeks and when they are allowed out in the run at a two weeks old there is a possibility of them becoming chilled. Should this happen it is important that they should be able to scamper back

to a brooder which is providing an abundance of heat. A brooder which has a temperature of 95°F. will enable the chickens to warm up quickly, and if this temperature is provided for the first three weeks, little mortality should result through chilling.

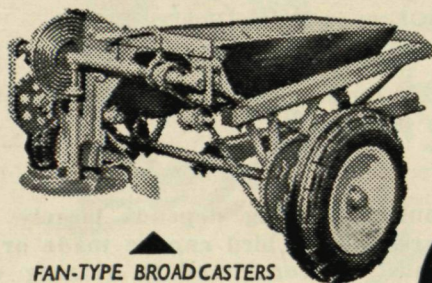
After the first three weeks the temperature is not so important and may be gradually reduced to 75°F. at five weeks, at which time the heat can be dispensed with altogether and the chickens taught to perch with the aid of a perching platform. It is very important to see

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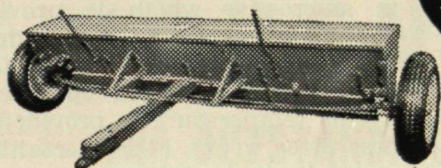


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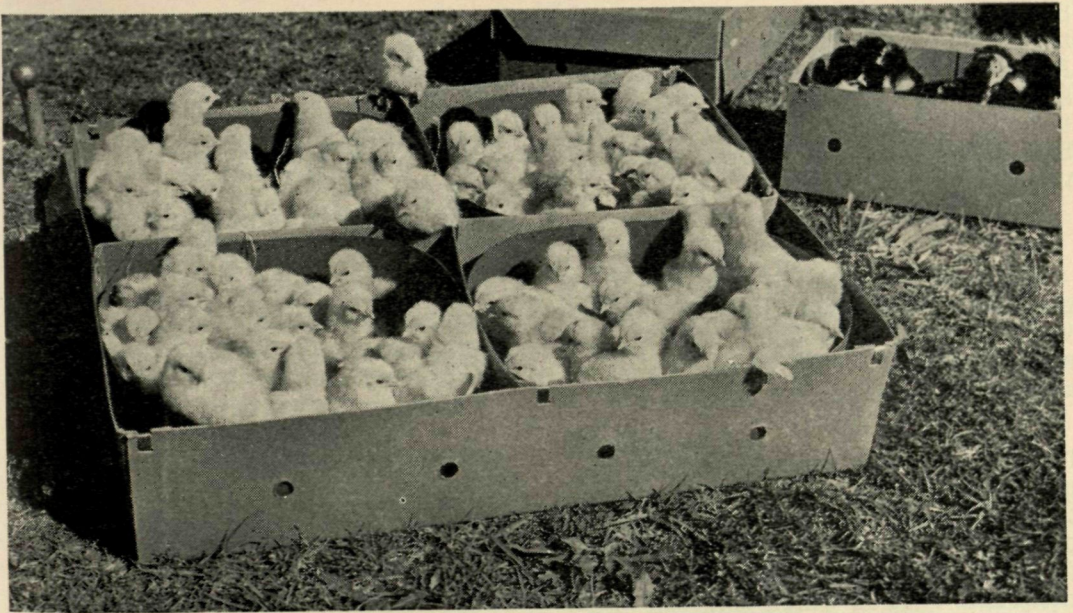


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that the chickens go up on to a perching platform immediately the artificial warmth of the brooder is removed. This will prevent the chickens from huddling and smothering in a corner. Many chickens are reared well to the five week old stage but become stunted and ragged in appearance during the following weeks simply because they are not taught to perch early enough. Details for constructing a perching platform are available on application to the Department of Agriculture, St. George's Terrace, Perth.

All corners in the brooder compartment should be rounded off to prevent the chickens from packing in them, and the brooder should be in operation 24 hours before the chickens arrive. Overcrowding of the chickens must be avoided for good results and at least 1 sq. ft. of floor space should be allowed each chicken.

For the first week a guard made of flat iron and 1 ft. high should circle the brooder. It should be so placed that it prevents the chickens from straying too far from the source of heat,

while at the same time allowing them to get away from the heat should they become overheated. In addition to helping the chickens to realise where the heat is, the guard also prevents any floor draughts from sweeping on to them and in this way prevents chilling.

Dampness must be guarded against in rearing chickens, and should be avoided at all costs. It is important for instance to see that the surface of the brooder house floor is at least three inches above ground level, and that the concrete floor is at least 12 months old before the chickens are brooded on it, as green cement contains moisture which is detrimental to the chicks. An ideal floor is one with one inch of concrete superimposed on three inches of cinders.

Three to four inches of dry sawdust is recommended as litter on the brooder house floor, and this can remain in the compartment for the full five or six week brooding period without being renewed. However, when the chickens are two weeks of age, the litter should be stirred daily and the litter under the

brooder replaced with that from around the outside edge of the compartment. At the same time, a little hydrated lime should be sprinkled over the litter and thoroughly incorporated in it. The lime will be found very effective in keeping the litter dry.

FEEDING

The correct feeding of chickens is an important consideration, and this aspect is treated in some detail in Departmental leaflet No. 995, which is obtainable free of charge on application.

A 16 per cent. protein diet is required for the first six weeks. Thereafter, the protein level can be gradually reduced to a 14 per cent. level at 13 weeks. The protein remains constant at 14 per cent. from 13 weeks until the pullets drop their first egg, at which time the protein should be increased to a 16 per cent. level. Buttermilk powder, because of its relatively high protein and riboflavine content is an excellent foodstuff for chickens and a four per cent. level in the chickens' diet is recommended.

Young succulent chaffed greens should be supplemented with one of the Vitamin A rich fish oils, and should the chicks be confined indoors for more than two weeks at a time a fish oil containing Vitamin D3 should be fed to prevent rickets.

One-eighth "all in" metal dust placed in a small receptacle in the brooder compartment will enable a better utilisation of food by the chicken by allowing the gizzard to work more efficiently.

Good growth demands a large food intake and this is only possible if adequate hopper space is provided.

DISEASES

A few remarks with respect to the most common diseases to which chickens are subject would be appropriate at this stage. These include pullorum disease, coccidiosis, fowl pox and worms.

As far as pullorum is concerned, when buying day old chickens you are advised to purchase them from a hatcheryman who draws his egg supplies from flocks that have recently been shown to have a low incidence of this disease. By being discreet in your chicken purchases, there should be little possibility of your experiencing this disease in your chickens.

Fortunately, most hatcherymen take appropriate steps nowadays to ensure that the chicks which they sell are from pullorum-tested flocks and consequently the heavy mortality which frequently occurred in years gone by in chicks at about the five-day-old stage is now the exception rather than the rule.

However, as far as coccidiosis, fowl pox and worms are concerned, there is a strong possibility that your fowls will contract each and every one of these complaints at some stage of their life and the consequent mortality and financial loss can be heavy unless appropriate steps are taken to prevent them, or in the case of coccidiosis to arrest the disease once the chickens have contracted it. The steps to be taken are simple and effective, but they must be carried out at the appropriate time of the growing period.

COCCIDIOSIS

Coccidiosis usually affects chickens when they are 6 to 10 weeks of age, but the disease can affect chickens as young as two or three weeks of age. The disease is characterised by the chickens losing their appetites and standing huddled and motionless with ruffled feathers and drooping wings.

Two forms of the disease are known, namely, the caecal form and the intestinal form. The former type is characterised by the passing of blood-stained droppings, and this evidence immediately tells you that the chicks have the caecal form of coccidiosis.

The recommended cure for either form of this disease is the feeding of either sulphamezathine or sulphaquinoxaline through the drinking water, and one of these drugs should be on hand when you take delivery of your chicks.

In successfully combating this disease, it is important that the sulpha drug be withheld until it is quite apparent that the chickens are sick with the disease. When one or two chickens have died, the drug should be administered without delay, hence the importance of having the drug on hand in case of an emergency. Within a matter of 12 hours of first administering the medicated water, a decided improvement in the chickens' health should have taken place.

FOWL POX

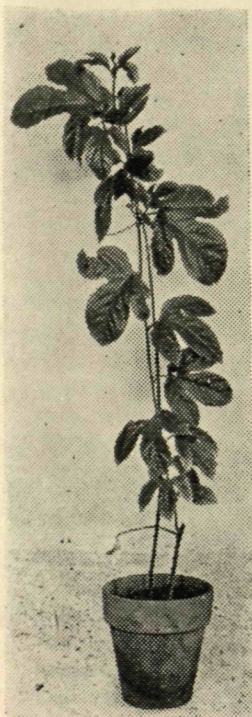
Fowls usually reach adulthood before becoming stricken with fowl pox, but it is when the chickens are 12 weeks of

age that they should be given a life-long immunity to it through vaccination. The vaccination is cheap, simple and very effective, and is a "must" in successful poultry husbandry.

WORMS

Growing stock are very susceptible to roundworm infestation, and because of the havoc which these parasites can cause, two thorough deworming treatments should be carried out when the chickens are 10 and 18 weeks of age respectively.

Carbon tetrachloride administered with the aid of a drenching gun is recommended in controlling worms and here again the appropriate steps taken at the right time will keep financial loss, which can be high from any of these complaints, to a minimum.



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