

1-1-2014

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Troy D. Cooper
Utah State University

Darrell Rothlisberger
Utah State University

David D. Frame
Utah State University

Recommended Citation

Cooper, Troy D.; Rothlisberger, Darrell; and Frame, David D., "Basic Selection, Nutrition and Care of Show Poultry" (2014). *All Current Publications*. Paper 624.
http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/extension_curall/624

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Basic Selection, Nutrition and Care of Show Poultry

Troy D. Cooper, Extension Associate Professor, Duchesne County
Darrell Rothlisberger, Extension Associate Professor, Rich County
David D. Frame, DVM, DACPV, Extension Poultry Specialist,
 Central Utah Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory

The championship potential of a chicken is determined by genetics. Genetics are the traits inherited from its parents. The chicken's environment dictates if the genetic potential can be met. The chicken's environment includes such things as, facilities, care, nutrition, health, training, etc.

Selection

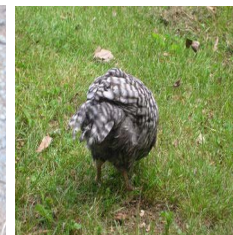
There are many breeds and varieties of chickens both in the bantams and large fowl to choose from. If you cannot decide on a breed there are many books, magazines and Internet websites that can provide pictures, descriptions and positive and negative traits of many breeds. If you are interested in showing at the local level, getting day-old chicks from a mail order catalog or the Internet is the most common way. The idea that every chick raised will be of show quality is not true. There are still several steps in selecting the chicken you will show.

There are a number of factors that should be taken into account when evaluating chickens to be shown. In selecting chickens for shows it is important to look at the bird as a whole. You are looking for a good overall bird and not one that just has one or two outstanding features. You should look for certain characteristics and qualities when selecting birds for show. The bird needs to meet breed characteristics such as body shape, tail carriage, comb type, feather pattern, etc., for the breed exhibited. This information can be obtained from

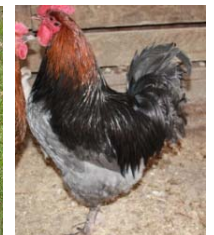
the American Standard of Perfection (www.amerpoultryassn.com). This is a good book to own for the serious exhibitor of standard and bantam breeds (Scheidler, S.E.). The following are disqualifications and defects that should be checked out before your final bird selection. You will be looking at your bird's tail, wings, back, beak, feathers, comb, shank and toes. Some of the tail disqualifications are split tail, wry tail, and squirrel tail, along with twisted feathers in primaries, secondaries, main tail feathers, and sickles.



Wry tail



Split tail



Squirrel tail

Problems with the wing can be slipped wing, split wing, and clipped wing.



Split wing



Slipped wing

Back defects include crooked or hunchback. Any beak deformity is grounds for disqualification.

Look for birds with a comb foreign to the breed or variety. Some of the disqualifications that may show up are split single comb, side sprigs on single comb, and lopped comb. Females of Mediterranean breeds, New Hampshire and some rare breeds do have lopped comb.



Lopped comb

Shanks and toes should be examined carefully for bowlegs, knock-knees, more or less than the required number of toes, and stubs or down on shanks or toes of all clean-legged breeds.

There are also specific disqualifications for each breed and variety. Refer to the American Poultry Association's Standard of Perfection for details regarding the birds you have (Jacob and Mather, 1997).

In selection of a chicken for showmanship the above items should be considered along with the weight of the bird. A young exhibitor may not be able to hold a standard size bird for the amount of time required. For the younger exhibitor a bantam breed may be more desirable.

Nutrition

According to A. Lee Cartwright, Associate Professor and Extension Poultry Specialist, Texas A&M University, "No matter what a bird is fed it will only grow as well as you feed it, and it cannot grow beyond its maximal potential." Bird feed should contain all nutrients needed to grow muscle, bone, internal organs, fat and feathers. The nutrients needed are carbohydrates, proteins, fats, minerals, vitamins and water. Fresh clean water and feed must be continuously available to birds at all times. There is a direct relationship between the amount of water a bird consumes and the amount of feed it will eat (Cartwright, L.A.). Chickens will drink approximately three times as much water by weight

as they eat in feed. A good rule of thumb is to provide one quart of water for every four chickens. Water intake levels will also increase significantly during warm weather.

Birds of different ages and function have specific nutrient requirements, which are met by mixing together different feed ingredients. Formulating and mixing poultry feed is a complex process that ensures a diet contains all of the nutrients required by the bird. It is recommended that you feed a high quality commercial feed which can be purchased from most local feed stores. Commercial poultry feeds contain feed ingredients that are designed to meet the nutritional need of the bird and several types of rations are available (for example: starter, grower, finisher, and layer rations). It is important to choose the right ration for the type (pullet, layer, or broiler) and age of bird being fed (Timmons, Rhodes, Nottingham, Johnson, 2010).



Pellets



Crumbles

It's OK to let your chickens forage for bugs and greens, but always provide them access to the appropriate type of formulated balanced feed as well (Frame, 2008).

Housing

Your show birds should be raised in stress-free environments, safe from predators, with plenty of ventilation and a regulated temperature. Because chickens are vulnerable to temperature extremes, pay close attention to the thermostat so they don't become heat stressed or have to expend energy warming up. Feeders and waterers should be placed conveniently throughout the pen for birds' access. As the chicks grow place the bottom of the waterers and top lip of the feeders at the birds' back height. This will keep the feed and water clean and prevent wastage (Clauer, 2009).



1



2

Poultry feeders Figures 1 and 2.



3



4

Poultry waterers Figures 3 and 4.

Health Management

The disease agents we are concerned about include viruses, bacteria, fungi, and parasites. Prevention is the most acceptable way to deal with poultry diseases and parasites. Many diseases can be prevented through good management but cannot be cured once they occur without taking further steps for control. Chickens will do their best in a clean and nurturing environment. Removal of soiled litter material and replacing it with fresh litter will help decrease the chance of disease. Clean feeders and waterers when they appear soiled. Signs of disease to watch for include an increase in the number of dead birds, difficult or noisy breathing and bloody droppings. Birds that are not well may try to hide, are inactive, and may appear weak. If you see these signs you will need to separate those birds and disinfect your coop and cages. Certain drugs have been approved for use in poultry feeds. These drugs may help prevent or reduce disease outbreaks, enable birds to overcome stress conditions, and speed the growth of chicks. Drugs should be used to

reinforce good management, not as a substitute for it (Lyons, 1997).

Conclusion

Remember select only healthy well-developed birds that have been fed and cared for, that mirror the standard of perfection for your breed and variety of chicken. Selection, nutrition, and care are not all that must be considered when deciding to show your chickens. Training and handling are essential in making your bird a show quality bird.

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