

It is surprising how some poultrymen go on year after year losing their chicks and contenting themselves by imagining that some serious epidemic over which they have no control is responsible. In other cases the high death-rate is put down to bad luck. Usually there is no bad luck about it, the sole cause of the trouble being fetid air and too high a temperature in the brooder-box. Overheating and insufficient ventilation induce sweating, and this makes the chicks susceptible to chill immediately they leave the brooder. From this the little ones seldom recover or develop into good stock.

Of course there are other causes of chicks becoming chilled, such as an irregular temperature in the brooder-box, removing them from the incubator before they are properly dry, or giving them too much freedom for the first few days. The most manifest symptoms of chill are bowel troubles, excessive thirst, droopy wings, a distressed chirp, and no inclination to take exercise or to eat. In addition there is always a tendency to huddling. The huddling effort brings about a spreading of the legs, especially where insufficient bedding-material is provided and the floor of the brooder is made of smooth boards. The constant squeezing-in of the chickens in their endeavour to get an inside position, which is naturally the warmest, causes the delicate legs to spread, and there is no cure for this trouble. When chickens begin to die through the effects of chill it is useless trying to doctor them. The cause should be looked for, and removed if possible.

On no account should chickens be overcrowded. It is one of the mistakes which never fail to make trouble, especially where the quarters are not kept in a thoroughly sanitary state. Failure to prevent overcrowding and neglect of strict cleanliness are common causes of vermin making an appearance, and this is one of the things that must be guarded against. Chickens with the natural mother will sometimes do more or less well even when infested with vermin, but when chickens are in the brooder vermin is fatal to them.

Correct feeding is another essential which must not be overlooked. Only good sound grains should be used, while care must be taken as to the manner in which it is supplied. Baby chicks do not require much food for the first few days; in fact, they require nothing for at least twenty-four hours after they are hatched. During the first week especially it is always a good plan to underfeed rather than to overfeed the chicks. They should be fed often, and only what they will eat up clean. If fed at once, or even if overfed during the first week, they will not assimilate the yolk which they absorb just before leaving the shell. Green food is an important matter in the rearing of young stock. It should be supplied in abundance. Care must be taken that it be tender and succulent—not coarse grass or hard fibrous growth. When birds are supplied with long pieces of rank grass the fibrous substances become a tangled mass and will not leave the gizzard, with the result that death takes place. Charcoal is another thing which should not be overlooked. For chicks of all ages it is one of the best preventives for bowel trouble, and also assists digestion. An ample supply of clean water as well as good grit are also imperative if the chicks are to make the best growth.

To sum up: For success in the artificial rearing of young stock correct temperature and proper provision for ventilation and exercise must go hand-in-hand with good feeding and strict regard to cleanliness.