

# Establishing a Household Poultry Unit

By the Livestock Division

**E**GGs, like vegetables, are at their best when fresh, but other factors influence a householder when he considers whether to keep fowls. The price of eggs and the prospect of a regular supply during winter are perhaps the two most important. In addition, the householder who is a keen gardener knows that poultry manure is a valuable organic fertiliser, and the litter or bedding from the poultry house makes splendid compost. Results will be best when the householder has consistent regard for the birds and looks on poultry keeping as an interesting hobby. Less successful will be the man who seeks only what he can get out of his birds with the minimum of attention.

**T**HE knowledge required to keep fowls on a small scale is not great, but such knowledge of management as is essential should be thoroughly understood and consistently applied. Failure to obtain a reasonable supply of eggs is often caused by a lack of information about the simple rules of management.

Production of eggs in spring and summer is comparatively easy, but winter eggs are more valuable and a more welcome addition to the family diet. It is natural for fowls to lay in spring and summer and they will do so with a minimum of reasonable attention, but winter production is not entirely natural and will be obtained only under good housing conditions backed by careful management and correct feeding. During winter the householder must give his birds the maximum of attention.

Birds require attention every day and more than once a day. They cannot be allowed to fend for themselves at the weekends if production is to be maintained.

## Reminders for February

Hot weather means thirsty birds.

They require an ample supply of cold water. Water troughs should not be exposed to direct sunshine.

Hot weather is ideal for lice. Examine birds for lice and, if they are present, use nicotine sulphate on the perches at night.

All birds should be in lay. Discard any birds that go into an early moult during February, as they are likely to be poor producers and unsuitable for retention for another laying season.

If an order for the new season's pullets has not been placed, it is already late and no further delay should be permitted.

Owners who have taken delivery of growing pullets will be well advised to dose each bird with a 1 c.c. capsule of carbon tetrachloride to clear it of roundworms. This should be a routine precaution, not to be delayed until worms are seen in the droppings or until the pullets look anaemic.

Young pullets which arrive in February should not be put in the house with the older laying birds. The hens bully the pullets and drive them away from the food trough, and the young birds' growth and development are thus retarded.

Rats are readily attracted to poultry food, but reasonable care reduces this trouble to a minimum. Uncovered food must not be left in the laying shed at night, and a rat-proof place in which to store both grain and mash is highly desirable. The feeding of too much grain in the litter, particularly for the evening meal, results in rats being attracted by the uneaten portion.

Keeping fowls at home is not a cheap hobby at present, but, properly managed and with reasonable production, they can be made to pay and to effect a substantial saving in the household accounts. Eggs surplus to household requirements can be sold, and when fowls have finished laying they have a market value or can be used as table birds, thus offsetting part of the price of replacements.

## Establishment and Production Costs

Growing pullets bought before the beginning of a new laying season are costly—between 8s. 6d. and £1 each according to their age. Grain and mash are expensive, particularly for the owner of a few birds who buys poultry foods in small quantities at the maximum price permitted. However, feeding costs can be lowered by the judicious use of household scraps, but the old idea that fowls can be fed successfully on a little grain, pollard, bran, and some scraps is erroneous. Feeding a laying bird costs the commercial poultry producer about £1 per year, and this figure may well apply to the backyard hen.

**A** SERIES of articles about household poultry published during the past 2 years has been much appreciated by people who run only enough laying birds to keep the family in eggs. This is the first of a new series, and the intention is to introduce further advice for those who wish to start a small household unit, while at the same time supplying additional information for those already looking after laying birds.

Many household poultry keepers have no idea or only a vague idea of their egg-production costs. If a laying bird produces only 10 dozen eggs per year, worth on average, say, 3s. per dozen, all outgoings are fully covered. Some of the costs which the commercial producer must face do not appear on the debit side of any accounts or costings noted by the householder, which may cause him to think poultry keeping most attractive and to consider taking up poultry farming, but the profits for the householder are no guide to the possible profits in farming.

## Registration and By-laws

Registration under the Poultry Runs Registration Act is required only of an owner who has 25 or more laying birds and sells eggs. Registration may be effected at any post office or by sending the fee to P.O. Box 379, Wellington. The fee is 2s. 6d. for each 100 birds or part thereof. Registration of a poultry run does not lay the owner open to restrictions on housing or management or to visits by inspectors, nor does it make the birds liable to inspection.

However, householders in cities and towns are advised to consult the local authorities about by-laws controlling the conditions under which poultry may be kept. Usually the minimum distance at which poultry houses may be built from dwelling houses is specified. Next month's article will deal with the choice of a site for a poultry house and the considerations which influence the type of house to be built.

