

# Management of Perching Pullets

**H**OUSEHOLD poultry keepers commonly buy perching pullets either to establish a small unit of laying birds or to replace birds that have completed their economic laying life. Management and feeding of perching pullets are comparatively simple, but a few precautions should be taken. This article by the Animal Industry Division of the Department of Agriculture describes the handling of pullets after they are through the brooding stage and up to the time they begin to lay.

**T**HE term "perching pullet", commonly used in the poultry industry, refers to a young growing pullet approximately 8 to 10 weeks of age, a bird which has been hardened off from the heat given during the brooding stage and has acquired the habit of perching. Generally this is a handy age at which the householder can take over growing pullets, as it is the age at which the fully feathered, hardened-off pullet can be purchased with the least initial outlay. As they increase in age the price rises to cover the added cost of their maintenance incurred by the producer. Pullets are sold at less than 8 weeks of age, but generally householders are advised to choose the slightly more mature perching pullet.

## Separate Houses for Pullets

It cannot be emphasised too strongly that perching pullets, or indeed any growing pullets up to the laying stage, should not be put in a house or poultry run with fully grown birds. The latter will bully the young, growing birds, chase them from the food trough, and generally make life intolerable for them. This will result in stunted and timid pullets which will be unlikely to give satisfactory egg production later. Therefore a separate house or house and run are necessary for these young birds. Though it may not be practicable for many householders to give growing pullets a good grass run, birds up to 4 to 5 months of age benefit considerably by having access to a grass run of good dimensions. It is sound management in commercial practice to give growing pullets free range over a grass paddock, as this ensures that the birds develop good body size and a strong constitution, capable of standing up to heavy egg production later.

Perching pullets may, however, be allowed to grow up in a well-lighted and ventilated laying shed, provided they have ample room. They should be bedded down with ample clean litter such as straw and be encouraged to keep the litter turned over by scratching. Perching space of 6 to 9 in. per bird is desirable. Perches of 3 in. x 2 in. or 4 in. x 2 in. timber should be used, the broad side being placed for the birds to sit on to prevent dented and crooked breast bones. It is an advantage to remove the sharp edges of perches.

## Importance of Proper Perching

Although the birds when purchased may be termed perching pullets, the householder is advised to watch them



These young growing pullets on free range are developing body size and sound constitution.

for the first few nights to make sure they do perch. They should not be allowed to sit together in corners of the house or, indeed, to remain on the floor. Birds easily form bad habits which are difficult to break; therefore,

they should not be allowed to form the habit at the start of perching on any part of the house other than the perches. Where necessary a little patience and perseverance during the first few nights after the birds' arrival will be well repaid.

## Reminders for September

As the spring egg flush season has begun, all birds should be in production. Those not laying should be disposed of as uneconomic.

September is the start of the season for preserving eggs for use in winter. As the eggs should be infertile, male birds should not be run with the laying birds. Fertile eggs when preserved may deteriorate or break down owing to the presence of the live germ in the egg.

Broody hens should not be allowed to rob the egg basket, but should be put in a broody coop as soon as their condition is observed and fed well.

The nest boxes may contain a number of eggs when birds are in full production. The boxes should contain ample clean litter and precautions should be taken to prevent eggs being broken in the nests. It should be remembered that broken eggs lead to egg eating—a bad habit difficult to break.

## Control of Internal Parasites

Young poultry are subject to internal parasites such as roundworms. These live in the intestines of the birds and at the expense of their proper nourishment. If many worms are present, the pullets become thin and unthrifty, but even if they are present only in small numbers, the worms are detrimental to the health and proper development of the birds. It is not easy to determine whether worms are present in small or moderate numbers. Therefore as a safeguard each pullet should be given a 1 c.c. capsule of carbon tetrachloride, which will clean the worms and their eggs out of the body. Dosing with capsules is simply done by placing a capsule at the back of each bird's mouth or in the throat and gently working down the top of the gullet with the finger and thumb on the outside of the top of the neck.

## Feeding

Growing pullets require grain and mash, the latter being fed either as wet or dry mash. If it is available, standard chick mash No. 2 should be used or, if the chick mash is unavailable, standard laying mash No. 2. These mashes are not complete when purchased, as they contain no meat meal or protein supplement. Growing pullets need meat meal and benefit