

*If You Want*

# A Commercial Laying flock

## Consider These Factors:

- ✓ **SIZE OF FLOCK**  
3,000 layers or more per family
- ✓ **INVESTMENT**  
over \$15,000 for a 3,000 laying flock, excluding cost of home
- ✓ **LOCATON**  
where there is a market for products
- ✓ **PRODUCTION**  
220 eggs or more per hen per year
- ✓ **MORTALITY AND CULLING**  
not over 2 per cent a month
- ✓ **DISEASE**  
prevent rather than cure
- ✓ **FEED**  
25-30 pounds per day per 100 hens
- ✓ **LABOR**  
3,000 hours a year for a 3,000-bird flock
- ✓ **BREEDS**  
White Leghorns and production bred strains of other breeds
- ✓ **HOUSING**  
litter floor houses or wire floor pens or cages



EXTENSION SERVICE

STATE COLLEGE OF WASHINGTON

Pullman, Washington

# Success or Failure of Your Laying Flock\* . . .

## Size of Flock

For the last ten years successful poultrymen have been averaging about \$2 per hen labor income—the amount you have available for family living, debt retirement and savings. To clear a labor income of \$4,000 a year, you will need a flock averaging at least 2,000 laying hens.

Labor income varies from year to year depending on egg prices and cost of feed. Within the same year, labor income will vary widely from poultryman to poultryman, ranging from a net loss to several times the \$2 average per hen.

You must consider these fluctuations when you decide the size of your flock, particularly if you have to pay off a farm mortgage besides current living expenses.

If you start your laying flock without previous poultry experience, your profits probably will be below the average of \$2 per hen. This means that it is nearly impossible to start out small and hope to increase the size of your business from current income. You are better off starting with a unit of adequate size even though you have to borrow additional funds.

With a start of 3,000 layers you have a chance to expand to a hired help setup of 6,000 birds or more.

## Investment

The investment you need to start a commercial laying flock varies with location, type of houses, and other factors. The following is an approximate investment you will need for starting a 3,000-hen laying flock.

Land, ten acres (minimum) .....	\$ 2,000
Buildings for 3,500 layers (laying houses, egg room, and brooder house) .....	10,000
Equipment (feeders, brooders, etc.) .....	2,000
Pullets, up to six months of age, 3,000 at \$2 each .....	6,000
Total .....	\$20,000

The buildings in this estimate do not include living quarters for yourself and your family. The costs were estimated for laying houses with a capacity up to 3,500 hens and brooder house for 1,200. Brooder houses will be used for three broods a year.

This size is necessary—due to continuous culling and mortality—to maintain a flock of at least 3,000 producing hens.

## Location

When selecting the location of your poultry farm, nearness of market outlets and feed sources are important. If you have a long haul to bring in the feed and ship out your eggs, you are at a disadvantage competing with poultrymen closer to feed and markets.

Most poultry products are consumed in metropolitan areas. Selling retail eggs and poultry at the farm is usually not profitable unless the sales are large enough to use the required labor efficiently. It is usually better to sell the eggs at an established market and to use the extra time to care for more hens.

Generally, it is profitable to sell cull hens to a poultry buyer who takes them

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as they are removed from the flock. Feeding the hens for a few more days, trying to get a higher price, or dressing them yourself can eat up profits.

## Production

Most income from your poultry flock will come from egg sales. Good egg production, therefore, is essential for success.

Many poultrymen are getting less than 200 eggs per hen but to be successful you should aim at 220 eggs or more.

To get high egg production, good stock is a must. Cheap chicks are no bargain. It takes very few extra eggs to pay the additional cost of good chicks.

To keep egg production high, culls must be removed upon cessation of lay. Flocks should not be kept for a second year of lay unless force moulted. Culling should not exceed 12% for the year and most of this should occur in the last three months of the first laying year.

Brooding and rearing replacements two or three times a year eliminates peak production periods, gives you a steady supply of eggs, and keeps your laying houses near capacity at all times.

## Mortality

Some mortality is unavoidable but if it goes over 1% per month you must find the cause and take action. Disease control, isolation rearing of young stock, a well balanced ration, and sanitary precautions will keep down mortality.

## Disease

Use all possible isolation of young stock. Buy healthy day-old chicks from a reliable hatchery. Use a vaccination program which has proven successful in your area. If prevention is unsuccess-

ful, send the sick birds to the state diagnostic laboratory in your area to get positive identification of the infection and suggestions for treatment.

## Feed

Feed constitutes about 65% of the cost of producing market eggs. Consumption will vary with the breed and rate of lay.

High producing leghorns will eat a little less than 100 pounds of feed in a year, or about 25 pounds per day for 100 hens. It takes about 20 pounds of feed to raise a leghorn pullet to five months of age. If you use more, wastage is probably occurring. Much feed is lost on poultry farms through filling the feeders too full. Obtain your feed from commercial feed companies.

## Labor

Labor on your farm will be used most efficiently if buildings and equipment are arranged so all necessary operations can be performed in a logical sequence and without much backtracking or travel. Organize your poultry layout before you start building.

You should not use more than 1.5 hours of labor per hen per year, and you should strive for one hour per hen. This labor includes brooding pullets, care of the laying flock and egg handling.

Commercial egg production is a full-time job for you and your family. You must watch many details such as: sick chickens, drop in feed consumption, mites and lice on birds, too many dirty eggs, and brooders needing adjustment.

Jobs must be done when needed and not put off until tomorrow. The poultry enterprise usually cannot be successful when a commercial poultryman is trying to hold an outside job at the same time. If you have to start by establishing a

small part-time flock, try to raise it to full-time status as quickly as possible.

Do not try to raise poultry when prices are good and get out when prices are poor. Build up an efficient operation and operate through good and poor times. Your total profit will be larger over a period of years than if you try to beat economic changes.

## Breeds

Most people in the business of producing commercial eggs use White Leghorns. This breed requires about eight pounds of feed per pound of body weight annually, just for maintenance. Heavy breeds average from 1 to 1½ pounds heavier than Leghorns and require 8 to 12 pounds more feed per year. At 5 cents per pound of feed, it costs 40 to 60 cents more to keep a heavy hen than a Leghorn.

Heavy hens bring more as culls but the difference usually does not make up for extra feed consumed. Egg production is about the same, or may be even lower for heavy hens. It is important to get a high-producing strain with good livability.

## Housing

Litter floor houses 30 to 40 feet wide of single or two story design are the most popular in Washington. Allow 2½ square feet of floor space per bird for Leghorns and 3 square feet per bird for heavies. Community cages with roll-away nests are found on some farms. In this system poultrymen allow ¾ to 1 square foot of cage floor space per bird. Individual cages and two-bird cages are also being used. Properly managed, any of these are satisfactory.

The choice of single or multiple story houses must be based on cost, available space, and the number of birds to be housed. In two story houses, feed and supplies should be unloaded on the second floor to save labor. Buildings more than two stories high require elevators.

Gable and shed roofs are popular for poultry houses. Reflective roof materials will help to keep down summer heat. Plan your laying houses for alternate uses.

A good laying house needs to be conveniently arranged to save labor, have adequate ventilation, offer comfort for the birds, and have adequate floor, roosting, feeding, drinking, and nesting space.

Depending upon the area of the state where you are located, wall construction may vary. In Central and Eastern Washington an insulated building is recommended.

A permanent brooding and confinement rearing house isolated at least 300 feet from the rest of the buildings offers labor saving advantages for the raising of replacement pullets. Small portable brooder houses and range rearing can be used, but they require more labor.

Information on planning a poultry house is available from your county extension agent by asking for Extension Bulletin 468 and Stations Circular 261.

In the final analysis you will find the most efficient use of labor is determined by the arrangement of the buildings and within the buildings rather than by the type of buildings used.

*The above material was adapted from University of California Agricultural Extension Leaflet No. 8, authored by A. D. Reed.*