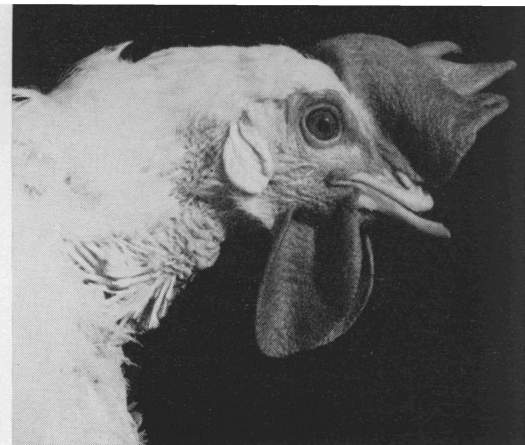


1. A properly debeaked 16-month-old pullet



2. Six months after debeaking



3. Twelve months after debeaking.

7-31-64 - SM

L-631

Debeaking Laying Stock To Control Cannibalism

*W. O. Cawley, B. C. Wormeli, W. F. Krueger and J. H. Quisenberry**

Why Debeak

Poultry flocks often are plagued with a vicious habit — cannibalism. When this occurs, the birds may literally pick each other to pieces.

The exact causes of these cannibalistic tendencies in chickens are unknown. Some factors which may contribute to outbreaks are:

1. Overcrowding
2. Lack of adequate feeder, water or nest space
3. Poor ventilation
4. Dietary deficiencies
5. Failure to remove injured or crippled birds from flock
6. Slight prolapse or extension of oviduct after egg is laid. This is a real problem in young flocks where birds are just coming into production. Often "pickouts" are classified mistakenly as "blowouts" or malfunctions of the oviduct. If flock mortality exceeds .5 percent per month due to oviduct prolapse, the real problem is probably cannibalism.

Removing the end of the beak is the most effective, economical way of preventing or stopping cannibalism.

Debeaking will not eliminate deficiencies in management or stop the picking, but it will stop losses and damage caused by the picking.

When to Debeak

At the first sign of cannibalism or intensive feather pulling, immediately debeak the birds regardless of age.

*Respectively, associate Extension poultry husbandman, Extension poultry husbandman, professor, and head, Department of Poultry Science, Texas A&M University.

During brooding: The most popular ages for early debeaking of laying stock are 1 day and 7 to 14 days of age.

Some poultrymen feel it is best to debeak at 1 day of age because chicks can be handled easier at this age. They also find it more convenient to let the hatchery do this operation for them.

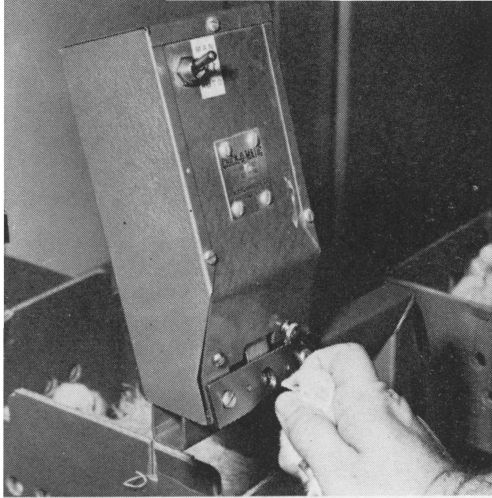
Others feel that there is less stress if debeaking is delayed until the birds are 7 to 14 days old. These poultrymen feel that they do a better debeaking job and that it is effective longer. At these ages apply a special attachment to regular debeakers to prevent removal of too much beak.

If the birds are debeaked correctly during the brooding period, their beaks will grow out during the rearing period. Therefore, pullets need to be debeaked again before going into the laying house.

During rearing: The best time to debeak older pullets is from 12 to 22 weeks. Delay this operation as long as possible, but perform it before the birds come into production. There are two reasons for this. First, you can do a better job on older pullets. Second, a good debeaking job probably will carry the birds through the laying year.

How to Debeak

During brooding: Poultrymen may use an electric shear-type debeaker on 1 day old chicks which removes the beak with a quick stroke of its sharp blade, but does not cauterize the end of the beak. When debeaking older birds, use a different type of debeaker that cauterizes the cut to prevent excessive bleeding and death.



4

Three common methods of early debeaking are: (1) block debeaking in which one-third of both the upper and lower beak is removed in one operation, (2) removal of two-thirds of the upper beak only, (3) removal of one-third of the upper beak and the tip of the lower beak.

During rearing:

Step 1. Have a crew of two or more men to do the job.

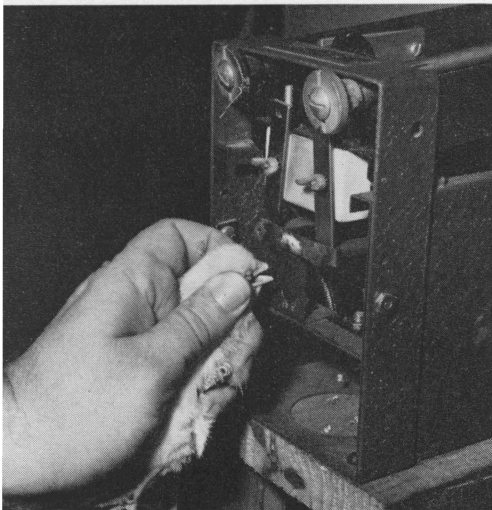
Step 2. Heat the debeaker blade to a cherry red color by placing the thermostat on reserve heat.

Step 3. Hand two birds to the debeaker operator feet first.

Step 4. The operator inserts his index finger into the bird's mouth one at a time to force the beak open and hold tongue down and back. Have a container of mild disinfectant handy in which to dip this index finger between birds to prevent spreading disease.

Step 5. Place top beak on cutting bar and cut it 1/8 to 3/16 inch in front of nostril. Lower bird's head to get a 20 degree to 30 degree slant back toward roof of the mouth. Cut slowly so blade will burn its way through beak and cauterize the tissue as it goes.

Step 6. Place lower beak on bar and cut so that it will be 1/8 to 3/16 inch longer than upper beak. Cut lower beak in straight block form. (Roll each beak



5



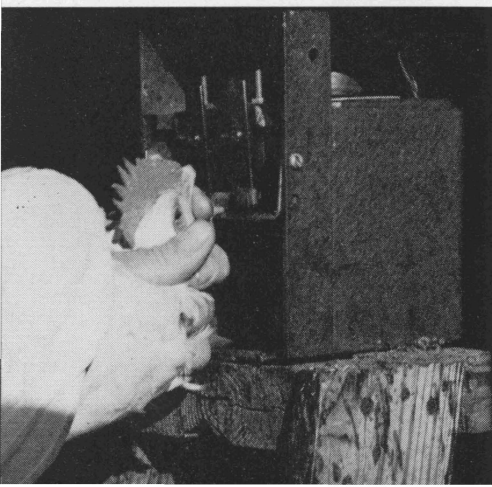
6

4. An electric shear-type debeaker which removes beak with a quick sharp stroke, but does not cauterize beak end.

5. Apply a special attachment to regular debeakers for chicks 1-14 days old to avoid removing too much beak.

6. For older birds, place beak on cutting bar and slice 1/8 to 3/16 in front of nostril.

7. Cut lower beak so that it will be 1/8 to 3/16 inch longer than upper beak.



7

against the blade to round the edges and to further cauterize it.)

Step 7. Check both cuts carefully. If either the upper or lower beak is not cut properly, touch it up immediately.

Points to remember:

1. Start with a new debeaker blade and change it fairly often. Do not try to economize on blades.

2. Never use a warped or bent blade.

3. Make sure the debeaking blade and cutting bar are in perfect alignment and that the blade falls on the highest part of the bar.

4. Incomplete beak severance may result in seriously torn tissues in the roof of the mouth. Since this tissue cannot be cauterized, excessive bleeding may result.

5. Hold the bird's tongue away from the hot blade. Burned tongues cause cull chickens.

6. Do not work with a blade that is too hot, for this causes blisters in the roof of the bird's mouth. Use medium heat for young birds; reserve heat for older birds.

7. Do not pull the beak away from the blade until it is completely severed. This can cause tearing of the tissue which may result in excessive bleeding.

8. Sear the beak well to prevent bleeding. After each cut, hold the beak against the blade, rolling it momentarily until cauterization is completed.

9. Compounds can be placed in the drinking water a day or two before debeaking to reduce bleeding and to speed up healing. Most of these compounds contain a vitamin K derivative.

10. The few missed birds or ones carelessly debeaked cause trouble later on.

11. Failure to remove enough of the bird's beak is a common mistake made by poultrymen when debeaking.

Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Texas A&M University and the United States Department of Agriculture cooperating. Distributed in furtherance of the Acts of Congress of May 8, 1914, as amended, and June 30, 1914.