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Chicken Fitting and Showmanship Member's Guide
Michigan State University Cooperative Extension Service
4-H Club Bulletin
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CHICKEN & SHOWMANSHIP

FITTING MEMBER'S GUIDE



4-H — Youth Programs • Cooperative Extension Service • Michigan State University

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At most county fairs, 4-H'ers enrolled in dairy, sheep, swine, and horse programs have the opportunity to enter a fitting and showmanship contest for their particular animal. These contests are fun, exciting, and rewarding to the participant; they also provide an entertaining event for the public.

Fitting and showmanship contests in poultry have been neglected at many county fairs. However, if this opportunity is available, you will find that it is a challenging and exciting competition that can help you develop to your greatest potential.

In a regular poultry show, the birds are judged rather than the 4-H member. In a fitting and showmanship contest, the judge evaluates the members on the various poultry skills they demonstrate and their general knowledge of chickens. The judges also consider each participant's preparation, attitude, and behavior.

In this contest, "poultry" denotes chickens only. Any breed can be entered.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of a poultry fitting and showmanship contest are to develop:

- an inquiring mind and an eagerness to learn in members
- the members' ability to apply scientific knowledge
- practical skills in members
- leadership qualities in members
- competition and sportsmanship in members
- socially acceptable behavior and values in members
- a special interest in raising poultry in the members
- a better image about poultry raising in the minds of the people who attend showmanship contests

- an appreciation for poultry and the knowledge of how to handle the birds in a humane way

FITTING

Fitting is a word used to describe how a 4-H member selected a chicken from a breed and how the member fed and cared for the bird prior to the contest so that it is neither over- nor underweight. The term also encompasses any preparation of the bird prior to the contest such as treating for lice and mites, cleaning the feathers, and trimming the nails. Fitting also includes the participant's general appearance.

Guidelines for Selecting Poultry

There are many breeds of poultry to choose from for a fitting and showmanship contest. If you are just starting a poultry project, making a choice is not a difficult task. Check with your 4-H leader on which breed is best for your purpose. If possible, select the chicken to show from a heavy breed; these birds are not as easily excited as lighter breeds. For junior members, a medium breed may be a better choice since they are easier to handle. As a rule, any breed is acceptable for showmanship. The emphasis is on how you work with the bird to demonstrate your knowledge and your ability in the handling skills.

When selecting a chicken, it is important to choose an older bird. Younger birds tend to get excited more easily than older ones. Make your selection four to six weeks prior to the contest in order to have time to train for posing and other showmanship aspects.

Make sure that the bird you select has no apparent defects or disqualifications.

Feeding and Caring for the Bird

Once you decide which chicken to enter in the contest, it is very important to give special attention to that bird in the areas of feeding and caring. You may want to separate the bird from your other chickens to a place where more attention can be given and where it

receives more exposure to people. By handling your bird often and providing exposure to other people, you can have an advantage during the actual contest. A balanced ration should be provided to help ensure that the bird will have excellent feather and meat quality and be free from any diseases.

To prepare your bird for the show prior to the contest, you will need the following materials: corn meal (for use only with white birds); soap; warm water; a bucket; paper towels, soft cloths, or a blow dryer; an old toothbrush; scissors; canine clippers; dusting powder (for lice and mites); and mineral oil or petroleum jelly. Follow this procedure:

1. Check for lice and mites around the vent area, on the shanks, and under the wings. If they are present, treat the bird with a recommended dusting powder or spray. Obtain the powder or spray from your local feed elevator and follow the directions on the label.
2. Check the feathers. Clean the feathers of white chickens with corn meal by working it through the feathers from head to tail. Clean the feathers of colored chickens and very dirty white chickens with soap and warm water. Scrub from head to tail—*do not go against the feathers*. Rinse thoroughly.
3. Dry the feathers with a soft cloth, paper towels, or a blow dryer. When using a dryer on birds with tight feathers (for example, Leghorns), blow in the direction of the feathers. When blow drying birds with fluffy feathers (for example, Cochins), blow against the feathers.
4. Trim the fluff feathers near the vent area if necessary.
5. Scrub the bird's feet, toes, and shanks with an old toothbrush and warm, soapy water. Wash the comb, wattles, and beak with a soft cloth. Rinse and dry all parts thoroughly.
6. Lightly apply mineral oil or petroleum jelly to the comb, wattles, shanks, beak, and feet.

Guidelines for the Participant

The fitting and showmanship contest for poultry is generally an annual event and may have several curious spectators. Remember that a poultry fitting and showmanship contest is as important to the poultry raiser as the horse, beef, swine, and sheep fitting and showmanship contests are to their respective producers. Therefore, your appearance is important. In a county level contest, the superintendent may recommend the dress code. In the state contest, it is recommended that you wear a show coat or any other neat and clean attire, such as dark pants and a light-colored, long-sleeved shirt or blouse. Hair should be properly combed. Wear appropriate shoes; bare feet are not allowed.

SHOWMANSHIP*

This section of the competition will be held after all the participants are asked to get their birds from the carrying cages and bring them to the assigned area. Remember that you are being judged from this point on.

Handling and Posing the Bird

Step 1. Entering the bird in the cage

- Hold the chicken in front of you so the bird's head is facing you. Your right palm should be under the breast area of the bird so that one thigh rests between your thumb and index finger and the other rests between your smallest finger and your ring finger. Place your left hand on the bird's back to provide additional support (fig. 1).
- When you reach the cage, release your left hand from the top of the chicken to open the cage (fig. 2).
- Turn the bird 180 degrees so that the bird faces the doorway of the cage (fig. 3).
- Slowly place the bird in the cage head first. Your right hand should be under the chicken, and your left hand should be on the back of the chicken (fig. 4).

Step 2. Posing the chicken in the cage—

Make sure the bird is in a position facing you before you begin posing the bird. If necessary, turn the bird to this position (fig. 5). Use a training stick or a thin pointer for posing the bird. Touch the pointer under the head area

touching the wattles (fig. 6). The bird's head should be up and its neck should be fully stretched. The feathers should be tight and smooth. Keep the bird in this position for 1 or 2 minutes. If you are using a stick, pose the bird with the stick to maintain the position. If there is a lot of competition, the judge may request a longer pose.

Step 3. Remove the chicken from the cage — When removing the chicken from the cage, always remove it head first. Your left hand should be over the bird's back and your right hand should be under the breast, with your fingers grasping the thighs (figs. 7 and 8).

Step 4. Final pose — When you have removed the chicken from the cage, turn to the right 180 degrees and stand at attention. Keep your legs together and stand steady with your left hand straight down at your side. The bird should face you while sitting in the palm of your right hand (fig. 9). The judge will release you from this pose after a proper examination.

Posing the Bird on the Table

Step 1. You will be asked to move to the area where the tables are placed for posing the chicken. Once you reach this judging area, be ready to pose your bird when your identification number is announced. This part of showmanship is done simultaneously by the participants, and you will be

expected to move to a specified area on the table.

Step 2. Place your chicken on the table facing the judge and stand at ease behind the chicken (fig. 10).

Step 3. When you hear the command to pose, immediately pose your bird with the training stick (the stick should make contact with the bird) (fig. 11). The chicken should not walk or fly away; it should assume a stationary pose as it did in the cage.

Step 4. The judge may require that your chicken stand on the table for 1 to 2 minutes at ease (without moving) while you stand behind the table at attention facing the judge (fig. 12). If your bird moves, immediately pick up the chicken and step back.

Examining the Bird

The examination section follows posing the bird on the table. The bird should be standing on the table. When the judge gives the command to examine your bird, perform the following steps in sequence to determine defects, disqualifications, and the condition of your bird.

If your bird is a hen, be sure to examine it for the yellow pigmentation loss (a criteria for determining past egg production). For more information on past egg production characteristics, refer to 4-H 1301, *4-H Poultry Judging Manual*.

Step 1. Step back from the table 2 to 3 feet and take an overall look at the chicken for general appearance.

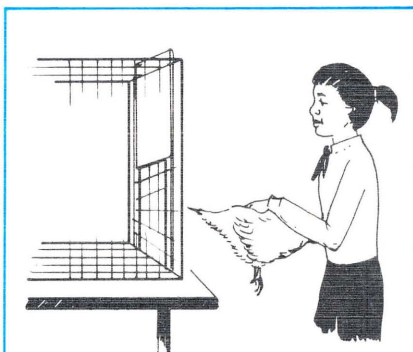


Figure 1

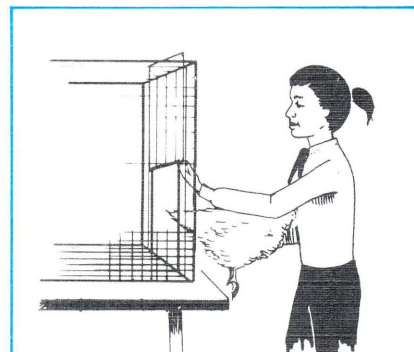


Figure 2

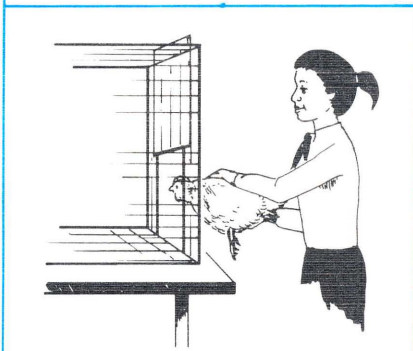


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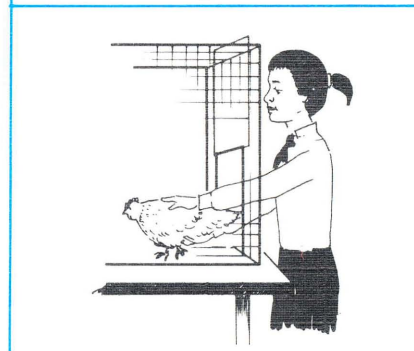


Figure 4

*All directions in this section are for right-handed contestants. Left-handed contestants should use the opposite hand from that noted in the steps.

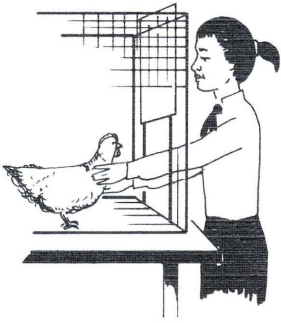


Figure 5

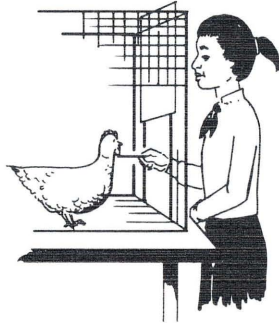


Figure 6

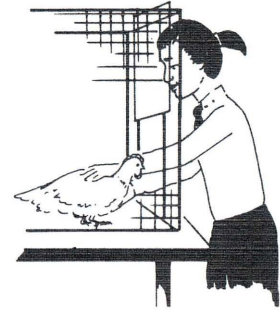


Figure 7

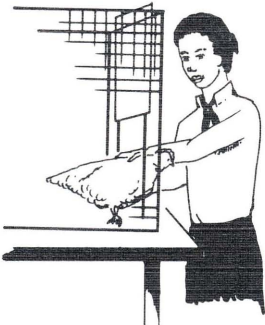


Figure 8

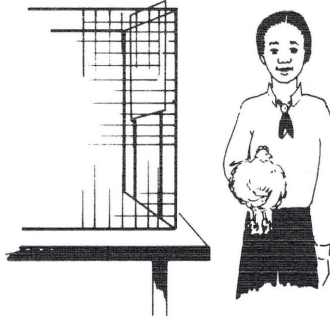


Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12

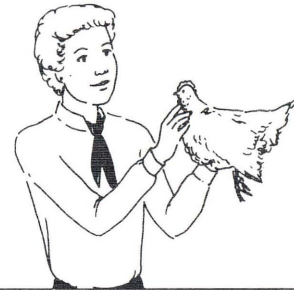


Figure 13

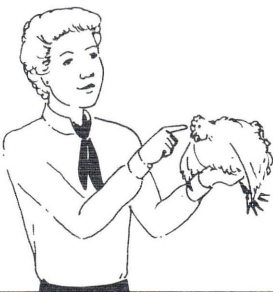


Figure 14

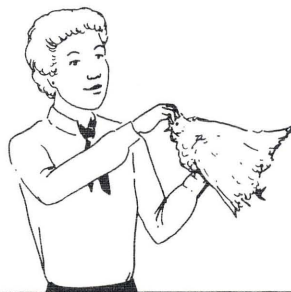


Figure 15

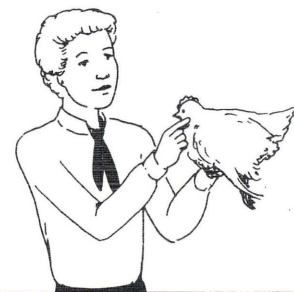


Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18

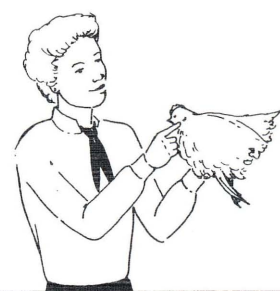


Figure 19



Figure 20



Figure 21



Figure 22



Figure 23



Figure 24



Figure 25



Figure 26



Figure 27



Figure 28



Figure 29

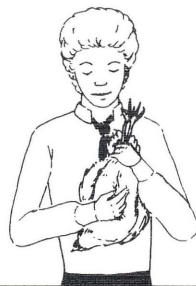


Figure 30



Figure 31



Figure 32



Figure 33



Figure 34

Step 2. Examine the **head** area. Let the bird rest in your left hand while you use your right hand to examine the bird (fig. 13).

- a. Look at both **eyes** to make sure they are not blind. Point your index finger at the eyes (fig. 14). Notice the pigment around the eye-ring.
- b. Look for defects on the **comb**. Point your index finger at the comb. Also feel the condition of the comb (texture) by holding the comb between your thumb and index finger (fig. 15).
- c. Feel the texture of the **wattles** and look for any apparent abnormalities (fig. 16).
- d. Examine the condition of the **feathers** on the head area for any sign of molting (fig. 17).
- e. Look at the **beak** for any defects such as crookedness. Point your index finger at the beak (fig. 18). Also examine the pigmentation of the beak.
- f. Examine the color of the **earlobes** to see if they are true to the breed. Point your index finger at the earlobes (fig. 19).

Step 3. Run your fingers over the **neck area** to feel for smoothness. Also notice the feather condition for any sign of molting (fig. 20).

Step 4. Examine the **back area**. Run your hand over the back area to feel for any abnormalities (fig. 21). Use your hand to measure the length and breadth of the back area to check the conformation of the bird. Check for any sign of molting.

Step 5. Run your hand down the bird's **tail**. Press the tail feathers toward you and examine the condition of the feathers for any sign of molting (fig. 22).

Step 6. Examine the **vent area**. As the bird rests on your left hand, raise your palm toward your head so that the bird's head is facing the ground and the vent area is toward you (fig. 23). Look for lice and mites. Examine the condition of the vent to see if the hen is in laying condition. Also look for pigmentation loss.

Step 7. If your bird is a hen, measure the distance between its abdominal **bones**. Use your fingers to estimate the distance between the pubic bones (fig. 24). These measurements will indicate past egg production. If the distance is 1½ inches or less, the bird is not laying at present and has probably not laid many eggs in the past. A distance

of over 1½ inches indicates that the bird has laid eggs in the past and may be laying now. Also measure the distance from the tip of the keel (breast) bone to the base of the pubic bones (fig. 25). A distance of 2 inches or more indicates the chicken has laid many eggs in the past.

Step 8. Check the **abdomen**. Use your fingers to grasp the abdomen to determine hardness or softness (fig. 26). This will further indicate the bird's condition of egg production. A soft, pliable abdomen indicates the bird is currently producing eggs. A hard abdomen indicates that the bird is not producing at present or that the bird is a poor producer. Also check the abdomen for any sign of molting.

Step 9. Examine the **thighs**. The thighs are especially important in meat-type chickens. Examine them to feel the quality of the meat (fig. 27).

Step 10. Examine the **shanks**. Check to see if the shanks are clean and whether there are mites present (fig. 28). A crusty condition indicates that mites are present. Look at the pigment condition on the front and back of the shanks.

Step 11. Examine the **toes**. Check the number of toes present. Remember that certain breeds have five toes. Look for defects on the toes and examine the pigmentation on the toes and the condition of the toenails (fig. 29).

Step 12. Examine the **breast**. In broiler chickens, the breast is the most important meat area. Use your right palm to feel the size of the keel bone and the meat on it (fig. 30). Check the straightness of the keel bone and look for any abnormalities (such as curvature). Feel and look at the breast area to determine if there are any breast blisters.

Step 13. Examine the **wings**. Open and stretch the right wing with your right hand (fig. 31). Tilt the bird slightly forward. Check the primary and secondary feathers for signs of molting (fig. 32). Take a closer look at the skin on the inside of the wing for lice and mites. Transfer the bird to your right hand. Follow the above directions using your left hand to examine the left wing.

Step 14. Examine the **crop area**. Feel it with your hands for any abnormalities (fig. 33).

Step 15. Return the bird to the upright position (resting on your right hand) (fig. 34).

Condition of the Bird

The condition of the bird in this case denotes its production characteristics (meat or egg), feather condition, freedom from defects, and general health. The breed characteristics should also be considered. The judge will examine each bird on the table in a general way; this may not be a very detailed examination due to the time factor. However, the judge will thoroughly examine the fitting of the bird.

Attitude and Behavior of the Participant

Every eye will be on the participants; therefore, it is absolutely necessary for you to act properly. Remember that this is also a time of fun for you. You have the opportunity to show the audience and the judge that you are competent and proud to be a part of the contest. Be alert and put on a smile as you complete the various steps. Look at the judge from time to time to make sure you have his/her attention.

Be on your best behavior and be courteous. If the judge asks you questions, answer them politely. Use the word "sir" or "madam" when asking or answering questions. Remember, if all contestants know what to do and how to perform the various steps, the judge will then have to make a decision based on the minor points. Display sportsmanship and congratulate your peers.

Quiz

At the state level, the poultry quiz is part of a separate option of the Michigan 4-H Poultry Expo. In the county, the quiz is generally given to each participant in each division at the end of the contest to test his/her general knowledge about poultry. There are several ways this can be done. If there are only a few contestants, the judge may decide to call each participant to an area to answer a set of questions on a one-to-one basis. Each contestant will be instructed not to talk to the other contestants about the quiz. Everyone will be given the same quiz to allow for consistency within each division.

The number of questions asked will depend on the age division, the time allowed, etc. The quiz will usually consist of questions of general knowledge of poultry. The quiz may be oral or written. The advantage of a written test is that every participant can take the test at the same time and thus time is saved. The written quiz requires prior planning; however, the oral quiz gives each participant a chance to experience the interview process.

SCORECARD

	County Points Allowed	State Points Allowed
I. Handling and posing bird	30	30
— holding prior to entry (3)		
— entering bird in cage (3)		
— posing bird in cage (15)		
— removing bird from cage (6)		
— final pose (3)		
II. Posing bird on table	20	20
III. Examination of bird	20	25
IV. Condition of bird	10	15
V. Poultry quiz*	10	---
VI. Appearance, attitude, and behavior of participant	10	10
— appearance (5)		
— attitude (2)		
— behavior (3)		
	—	—
TOTAL POINTS	100	100

*At the state level, the poultry quiz is part of a separate option of the Michigan 4-H Poultry Expo.



Figure 35. These 4-H members are at various stages of examining their birds.

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