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Capons
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CAPONS

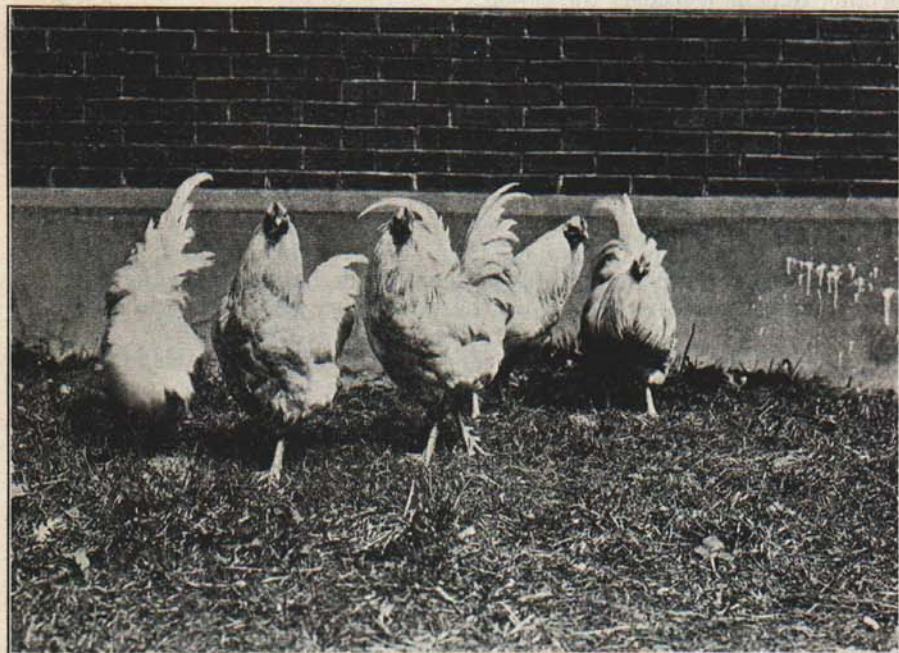


FIG. 1.—White Orpington Capons.

MICHIGAN AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE

Extension Division

R. J. BALDWIN, Director

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CAPONS

By C. M. FERGUSON, Extension Specialist

A steadily growing interest in capons has been evident recently throughout the state. The general production of poultry products is increasing rapidly. It has been found that on the New York market alone the shipments of live and dressed poultry increased by 435 car loads during the year 1922-23. In times of increased production such as this prices are naturally forced down, and the poultryman turns to producing a product of higher quality in order to obtain a premium for surplus poultry meat. It is in this connection that he considers the capon.

ADVANTAGES FROM CAPONIZING

Early hatched chicks usually make a good return as broilers, but later hatches come at a time when the market is crowded and the price down. These later chicks are the ones which can be carried over to advantage as capons and placed on a winter market with profit.

Capons grow to a larger size than cockerels, as a general rule. Besides the extra size and weight which is attained, the birds sell at a premium and show a decided improvement in quality of meat. The advantages secured in raising capons are due largely to the more docile habits which they acquire. This permits their being raised on the same range as pullets without interfering with the growth of the pullet flock.

Capons can be induced to hover chicks, but commercially this is not practiced to any extent. It has been frequently done, however, on a small scale

BREEDS FOR CAPONS

Good capons will result only from the castrating of well bred cockerels. Inferior stock, small and low in vitality, will never make choice capons

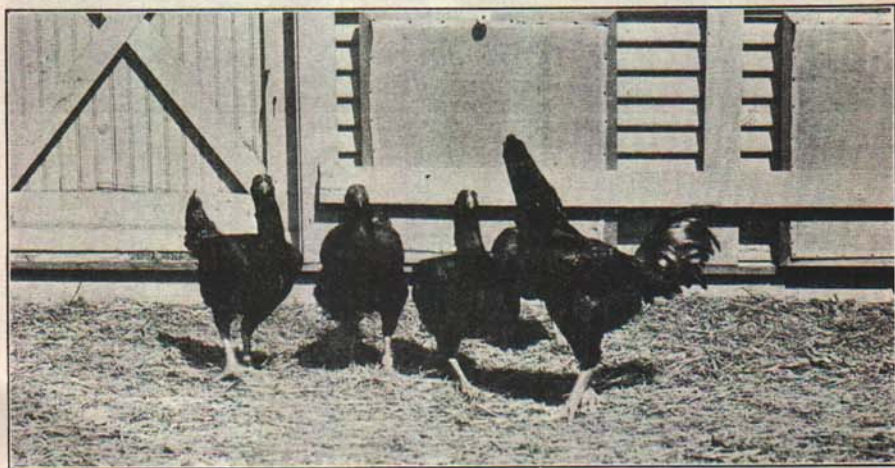


Fig. 2.—Dark Cornish—Heavy Muscling Makes Them Very Valuable for Cross Breeding for Capon Production.

The caponizing of the light breeds, such as Leghorns or Anconas, will meet little success, as they never attain sufficient size to make choice capons. The American breeds make excellent capons, and the English and Asiatics excel as producers of flesh. It is doubtful, though, if the average farmer should breed with the sole purpose of producing meat. It will usually prove more profitable to breed a type suited to egg production and to regard the capons as a side issue. However, where one intends breeding especially for prime capons, egg production can be sacrificed to get heavier muscle development and larger birds.

Cross breeding for capon production has met with excellent results. Cornish males are very commonly used, owing to the remarkable development of breast and thigh. These, bred to females of the Brahmas, Orpingtons, or American breeds, produce excellent cockerels for caponizing. Care must be taken, however, to breed the most desirable individuals of each breed, and the cross bred pullets should never be used for breeders. They should be sold.

INSTRUMENTS

The selection of good, reliable instruments is the first requirement for success in the caponizing operation. The essentials are a good knife, dilaters, a tearing hook, and removers. The accompanying diagram shows various



FIG. 3.—Cockerel Secured for Operating—Instruments in foreground are: 1, knife; 2, dilator; 3, probe; 4, three types of removers.

types of instruments used in the operation. It must be remembered that these instruments are finely made and should receive good care to insure the best results from their use.

1 **The Knife** should be one of good material which will retain a keen cutting edge. The shape preferred is one with a sharp tapering point, and the knife should have a handle sufficiently large to permit a firm hold of the instrument.

2 **The Dilater** is used to open the incision. Care should be taken to

secure one which is not clumsy and too severe. One which can be opened to varying widths and locked there is preferable.

3. **The Tearing Hook** is not so important, as its use is limited to the tearing of the membranous tissues.

4. **The Remover** should be so designed that too large an incision is not required. It should be well made and of a type that will quickly envelop the testicle and remove it entirely, leaving no bruised or cut tissue adhering. This is the most important instrument and care should be taken in the selection of one which is reliable.

WHEN TO OPERATE

The important factor in securing best results is to have the birds at the right stage of development at the time of operation. This is not a matter of age or weight, but is rather the stage of sexual development. This varies in the heavy breeds between the ages of six and twelve weeks. In the light



FIG. 4.—Cockerels at the Right Stage for Caponizing.

breeds, the operation must be performed while the cockerels are much younger. The indication for this time determination is the fact that the testicle starts to grow and develop at the same time the comb and wattles start to show development. The proper stage is just as the chicks start to show sexual development and as the comb commences to grow. At this time, the testicle is at its best size and stage for removal. It should be about the size of a large, plump grain of wheat, or a little larger. There is a period of from ten days to three weeks in which the operation can be made successfully. After that time the birds are harder to "work" and more slips and deaths result. The accompanying picture gives a good idea of chicks at the "right stage."

PREPARATION FOR OPERATION

Birds should be starved for at least 36 hours before the operation. This is to reduce the bulk of the intestines and leave more room for working and less obstruction to the vision. *"There will be less bleeding if water is withheld."

THE OPERATION

The accompanying illustration shows the method of securing a bird for caponizing. A string tied about the shanks and one about the wings are either weighted or fastened to some stationary device. Some prefer a capon bow, which is simply a convenient arrangement to keep the bird in place by means of the tension of a bow-shaped piece of wood with a device on either end for attaching the strings. Where weights are used, a half brick or article of similar weight can be used to maintain the tension.

There is a twofold purpose in using this method of securing the bird. The cockerel is held to prevent struggling, and the stretching removes the muscles of the thigh from the seat of the operation.

After the bird is secured, a few feathers are plucked off immediately in front of the hip joint, leaving a space about an inch or an inch and a half square.



FIG. 5 (a).—The Operation—Making the Incision.

By manipulation, the location of the last two ribs can be discovered. The incision is made between these two, starting at a point slightly lower than the point of the hip joint and extending down for about an inch.

On determining the location of the ribs, draw the skin slightly to one side, press the nail of the forefinger between the ribs, and insert the blade alongside the nail. Press down hard and draw toward you, forcing the blade clear through in the one attempt. This saves time and causes less bleeding. Make the incision about an inch in length. Insert the dilater, opening the wound up to a convenient size. The omentum, a thin membrane,

*Lippincott—Poultry Production.



FIG. 5 (b)—The Operation—Dilators in Place, Tearing Hook Being Used to Remove Membrane.

still hides the organs. This is torn away with the tearing hook. When this step is completed, the organs of the abdominal section lie clearly in view. If the bird has been well starved the intestines will occupy but a small space and will not hide the other organs.



FIG. 5 (c).—The Operation—Removing the Testicle.

The testicles lie along the vertebrae, or back bone, and appear as small yellow organs about the size of a navy bean at this period of development. The spermatic artery lies along back of the testicles. Care must be taken to avoid severing this, as it will cause immediate death.

Press the intestines down with the probe, if necessary, until the testicle is brought to view. Insert the remover, closed, and carefully manipulate the

organ into the opening of the remover, being careful not to pinch the artery in so doing. The testicle can now be removed by drawing out and twisting the cords.

Remove the spreaders, turn the bird over, and repeat the operation. It is possible to remove both organs from the one side, but in my experience there is less danger in performing the operation from both sides.

Do not sew up the wounds. Release the bird and note that when he stands the muscles of the thigh cover the inner incision.

CARE AFTER OPERATION

The young capons should not be housed in large numbers for the first week or ten days. Put them in coops of not more than 10 or 12 birds together, to prevent crowding. Care must be exercised in starting to feed, as the birds have been on a starvation diet and are very hungry. They should have a light feed of moist mash, consisting of bran and ground oats moistened with sour milk or buttermilk. This system of feeding should be adopted for a couple of days, gradually bringing the birds back to their regular feed.

WIND PUFFS

A condition known as wind puffs is likely to develop a few days after the operation. This is nothing serious and results from air accumulating under the skin. It can be remedied by puncturing the skin with a pair of shears.

*"I have found that if coarse woolen yarn is made four ply, by doubling and twisting, and inserted loosely through the thin skin under the wing, the air is let out automatically. Make two incisions large enough to allow a buttonhook or nail head to pass; draw the yarn through and tie firmly, making a ring or seton about two inches in diameter. The oily, slippery nature of woolen yarn prevents sufficient adhesion to hold when pressure from gathering air is applied, thus giving relief automatically. Remove the yarn seton after three or four weeks."

Capons require an abundant range in order to grow and develop a large frame capable of carrying a heavy fleshing. If possible put them out in a colony house on free range and feed the same as the growing flock.

The capon season is from Christmas to Easter. Previous to killing, confine the birds to crates and finish with a soft feed. This softens the fleshing and adds fat. Capons make excellent roasters, having a finer flavor and being more tender than cockerels. A good crate fattening ration can be made up of equal parts of low grade flour and finely ground yellow corn. This is mixed to the consistency of a pancake batter and fed twice a day. Small quantities must be fed at first in order to accustom the birds to the ration. It can then be gradually increased until at the end of the fattening period, which ranges from 14 to 21 days, the birds are being fed all they will consume at each feeding.

*Burdin.

DRESSING

Capons should be dry picked according to "capon fashion." This means that capons are recognized on the market by the method of plucking. The upper half of the neck, a garter of feathers around each hock, and the tail

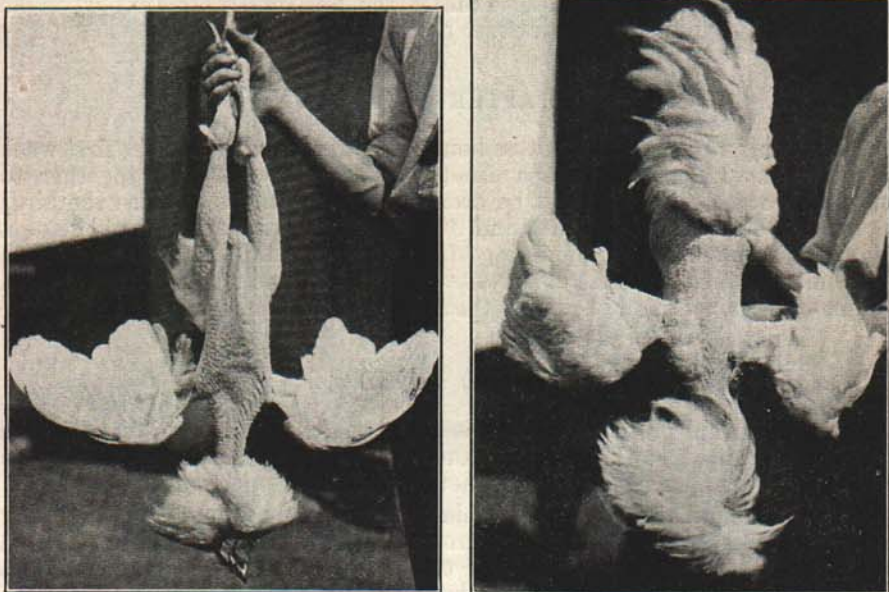


Fig 6 (a and b)—Dressed Capon.

and tail coverts should be left on. The entire under side of the wing should be picked and the upper side from the shoulder to the first joint, leaving all the rest of the feathers attached.