



SELECTING & JUDGING LAYERS

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Judging birds for heavy egg production is useful not only for the exhibitor when deciding on which bird to place in a production class at a show or fair, but also for the keeper of poultry who desires to get the most egg production from the flock when deciding which birds are worthy of keeping.

Birds should be closely looked and culled from hatching. Birds that hatch with crooked legs, beaks, or show signs of being weak should not go into the brooder. These birds do not possess the ability to be heavy layers.

Over the next several months close monitoring is important. The pullets should be handled several times to determine some key areas that point to her future production:

1. Heads should be wide and consistent with the breed with no sign of crow headedness.
2. Body measured at heart girth behind wings should be wide to allow for good heart and lung development.

3. Back should be wide and even the entire length without showing signs of a pinched tail.
4. Pubic bones should be straight and not show any sign of being hooked inward.

Start of lay generally happens when these layers are approximately 6 months old. Some breeds, such as commercial leghorns will start laying at 20 weeks old, and some breeds will take a little longer. When a pullet starts to lay she displays these visible signs:

1. Her comb will be thick at base; wattles and earlobes will lengthen and brighten.
2. She will be fully feathered, alert, active and singing.
3. Her body shape will change slightly to show fullness around the abdomen.

When handling this pullet, one will notice very definite changes to her body:

1. Her body will be heavy and abdomen will feel full.
2. Her vent will be oval, moist, somewhat paler than skin color and show movement.
3. Her pubic bones will become thinner, be somewhat pliable with a span of 3 finger width.
4. The distance between the hip bone and the tip of the keel should have lengthened.
5. The distance between the pubic bones and the tip of the keel should have at least a 3 finger width (wider being preferred).

In order for layers to reach their full potential, they should be fed a well- balanced feed designed especially for laying and they should have access to clean water at all times. Any time a layer is stressed it can negatively affect egg production. The yearly process of molting will slow or stop egg production for a period of time.

