



# POULTRY POINTERS

A FACT SHEET FROM THE WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY POULTRY COUNCIL

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## SMALL POULTRY FLOCK HEALTH TIPS

Maintaining a healthy poultry flock is easier, but more complicated today than it was only a few years ago. We now know more about cause, effect, immunity, chemical residuals, viruses, molds, and toxins. Poultry always has been unique in the animal world because the chick can be hatched and reared separately from its mother. This allows for a clean separation of flocks.

Unfortunately while the poultry industry and science have advanced, the average person, and youth in particular, has lost contact with agriculture. Much of today's society no longer has a personal reference point to compare today's bird and animal health against. Many are needlessly afraid of animals and birds.

The purpose of this publication is to acquaint you with the small poultry flock—its health, maintenance, and ways of reducing disease—and to reassure you that poultry is still one of the safest hobby and recreational pursuits, as well as a wholesome source of meat and eggs.

### How Poultry Diseases Are Spread

Generally, most diseases are spread by contact with contaminated dust, water or air, or other poultry. Scientists can, through isolation and sanitation, raise specific pathogen-free chicks and hens. This is not practical for a backyard flock, so we offer the following suggestions:

1. Screen out wild birds from the chicken building. This will reduce chances of disease sites and contact with mites. Wild birds are a reservoir of many diseases, for while the sickest of the wild birds die, the carriers of the diseases still fly.
2. Do not mix avian species; that is, don't mix chickens with turkeys, peafowl, ducks, canaries, lovebirds, or parrots. We know, for example, that different species have different nutrient requirements and management needs. What has little effect on one species can be deadly to another; however, a number of ectoparasites, protozoan organisms, and viruses are host specific.

Examples:

- (a) Blackhead is a serious disease for turkeys and peafowl. Chickens seldom suffer from it, but cecal worm

of chickens transmits Blackhead organisms to turkeys and peafowl. Likewise turkeys have few coccidiosis problems, while chickens have many.

- (b) Viruses. The most troublesome diseases to which poultry are susceptible are the viruses. They are often extremely virulent, quick to spread, and can cause heavy mortality. Among the viruses are:
    - (1) Newcastle Disease virus, primarily exotic Newcastle virus, replicates in wild parrots and lovebirds. These birds are shipped interstate and frequently cause great problems, as the diseases transfer readily to all poultry.
    - (2) Various strains of Avian Influenza are common in wild ducks. Occasionally, as in 1984 in the eastern U.S., a strain of A.I., carried by water fowl, mutated in chickens to a pathogenic virus, causing tremendous losses.
    - (3) Fowl Pox is common among wild birds. Instead of coughing and sneezing, the birds get skin eruptions (scabs) on their combs and wattles and large plugs in their pharynx. Severity of reaction varies, but egg production suffers. Birds with large plugs in the pharynx or trachea usually die.
  - (c) Intestinal Diseases—Coccidiosis is a protozoan parasite infection. The organism multiplies in wet litter conditions and causes diarrhea and high mortality in young birds. Medicated feed with anticoccidial drugs practically eliminates this problem. Placing the water containers or automatic waterers over 1" x 1" welded wire frames, 2 ft. square and 4" high, will improve litter conditions, thus reducing wet spots and coccidiosis.
3. We feel that it is good for poultry fanciers to get together, but if one has sick chickens, do not visit another poultry flock or their owners' homes. Use the telephone instead. Call WSU Poultry Diagnostic Lab., WWREC, Puyallup, at 593-8536. Disease travels on clothing and shoes; direct mechanical transfer is the term used when manure, feathers, or dust particles are carried from place to place.
  4. When renewing your flock, purchase chicks to reduce chances of disease. These chicks are usually vaccinated against Marek's at the hatchery.

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