

Poultry Handbook

Judging Past Egg Production Hens

Pigmentation or Bleaching

Leghorn hens used for egg production have yellow-pigmented skin, beak, shanks, and feet while the bird is a growing pullet. At sexual maturity, which is 16-22 weeks of age, she starts to lay eggs. Pigment loss is the first characteristic that should be used to place the class. The hen that has bleached the most should be placed first. The pigment bleaches from the pigmented areas in a definite order according to the approximate number of eggs she has laid. The terms bleach, bleached, and bleaching mean the loss of yellow pigment. When the yellow skin pigment is bleached or lost the skin color becomes a creamy white.

Pigment loss is the first characteristic that should be used to place the class.

When the yellow skin pigment is bleached or lost the skin color becomes a creamy white. If you learn the order of pigment loss or bleaching, you can easily rank the hens for past egg production.

The order is:

(1) vent, The vent of a good layer should be:

bleached (no yellow pigment)
moist
large
oblong in shape

(2) eye ring, (3) ear lobe, (4) beak, The good layer has no pigment in these areas.

(5) bottom of the foot,

(6 & 7) Entire Shank (front, back, sides),

EVALUATING PIGMENTATION OF THE SHANKS

Cover the top of the foot with your hand to hide any pigment that may be there.

Some very good layers may never bleach this part of the foot.

Start at the top of the shank and study the loss of pigment down toward the foot.

The good layer has bleached this area of the shank.

(8) Hock and top of toes

To begin stand back and look at the class as a whole. Look for the best producers first. Their beaks and shanks should be well bleached.

Hens regain their pigment when they stop production, as in a molt.

The pigment returns to the skin in the same order it is bleached: vent, eye ring, ear lobe, beak, bottom of the foot, entire shank, hock and tops of the toes.

Hens that show signs of re-pigmentation are poor producers.

So don't forget to look at the face and vent for pigmentation - not just the shanks.

Yellow face and white shanks equals poor production (molt) and the hen would be ranked lower.

