

# Poultry Handbook

## Judging Past Egg Production Hens

### Molt and Plumage Condition

Two factors are considered in appraising the plumage condition of hens.

The first consideration is the overall condition of the plumage.

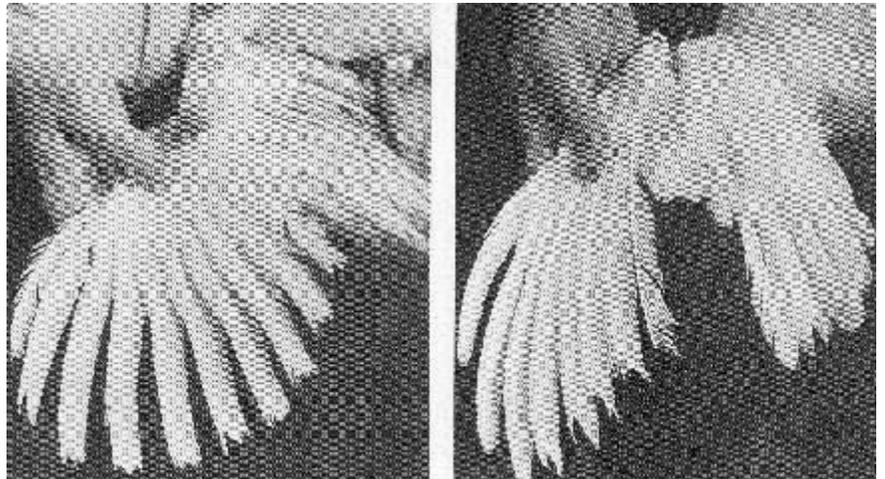
- T** The feathers of a high producing hen will be dirty, frayed, ragged, and have a dull appearance. A hen of this type spends her time performing the functions associated with high production.
- T** In contrast, the feathers of a non-layer will be smooth, show no wear, and possess a great deal of sheen (shiny appearance).

The second consideration is the rate of molting. The molting rate is based on the rate hens shed their feathers, rather than on the rate they grow new feathers.

In judging hens, the rate of molt is determined by observing the primaries (the outer wing feathers). The primary feathers are dropped from the axial feather (x) outward in order from number 1 to number 10.

Molt and Plumage is the fourth characteristic that should be used to place the class.

With the hen tucked under your arm, hold the wing open like a fan. The short feather in the middle is the axial feather. There are ten primary feathers on the outside of the axial toward the wing tip. These are the feathers we will study. They molt from the axial to the tip. Old feathers that have not been molted will be worn on the ends and may be broken or dirty. New or molted feathers will have neat, smooth ends and appear clean. They also may show different lengths if the bird is molting now.



#### PRIMARY FEATHERS



THE 10 OLD PRIMARY FEATHERS OF A HEN NOT IN MOLT. THE SECONDARY FEATHERS ARE SEPARATED FROM THE PRIMARY FEATHERS BY THE AXIAL FEATHER (X).



PRIMARIES OF A SLOW MOLTER AT SIX WEEKS OF MOLT. ONE FULLY GROWN PRIMARY FEATHER AND FEATHERS 2, 3, AND 4 DEVELOPING AT TWO-WEEK INTERVALS.



A FAST MOLTER HAS ALL NEW PRIMARIES. FEATHERS 1 TO 3 WERE DROPPED FIRST, FEATHERS 4 TO 7 DROPPED NEXT, AND FEATHERS 8 TO 10 WERE DROPPED LAST.



TWO WEEKS LATER FEATHERS 1 TO 7 ARE FULLY GROWN. THE FAST MOLT TAKES 10 WEEKS AS COMPARED TO 24 WEEKS FOR THE SLOW MOLTER.

- i** The good producer shows all old, worn feathers, indicating she has not molted.
- i** Our poor producer has some short new feathers just outside the axial, showing she is now in a molt.
- i** Some birds will continue to lay while molting, but usually at a reduced rate. This means they will have laid fewer eggs than those that have not molted.