

Let's talk Chicken

With

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NEW POULTRY DISEASES REPORTED!

FARM SECURITY REVISITED! Part-1

Sorry, these diseases are not new; in fact, I have called them 'new' just to sensationalize the topic (to draw attention of every poultry farmer in Zambia!).

Truth is that, these diseases are quite old and they had been in existence since time immemorial, at every production area around the world, in varied degrees of prevalence and severity. In Africa, Asia and other developing economies, they are predominantly present and recur very frequently.

Let me break the moment of suspense and name them. They are:

- Egg Disappearing Syndrome (EDS-New Version!)
- Chicken Disappearing Syndrome (CDS!) and
- Feed Disappearing Syndrome (FDS!).

We call them syndromes because they can be caused by a set of complexities!

Egg Disappearing Syndrome

The egg production usually takes a pattern of increase or decrease depending on the input management; it could be –provision of water, feed and light, birds' or age, stocking density, disease conditions and other environmental factors.

But you can not expect sudden or unusual dips in production unless the eggs form legs and walk away from your farm!

That is the time you should suspect whether there is any possibility of stealing done with in or by intruder/s from outside. Usually if the stealing is done by some one outside who is not working for you the number of eggs missing can be large and happens with out giving you a warning or some sort of indication.

You can rule out any outbreak of infection, sudden water deprivation, and feed starvation, sudden change in the weather or black out causing lighting interruption. Once you rule out these factors and are satisfied with the knowledge that they are not the causes, and then your mind should focus on the internal control of people who collect and store the eggs and their movement in and out of the farm. The very clever workers will make sure that the stealing of eggs is 'professionally' carried out without giving any suspicion at all. The disappearing of eggs happens every day and there will not be any sudden production drop per day, but the number of eggs produced every day is consistently low.

What do you do to prevent this very special syndrome of egg disappearing?

In the first place, poultry farming whether it is for eggs or meat can not be practiced on remote control unless you have trust worthy and honest managers and workers at your farm. They unfortunately are rare commodities! If you stay in the city and control and manage your farm by phone calls but not in person, you are inviting trouble already! Let us go through some of the aspects of the management of your flocks in the farm whether you stay in or out of the farm.

- The most important thing is record keeping and inventory control: updating daily on egg collection, stock of birds, feed consumption, mortality or culling, sale of eggs, chicken and manure. A random check (stock taking) by you on number of birds, eggs, feed bags and other inputs should be part of your routine. This not only helps you get the grip of what is going on in the farm but also send an important signal to the entire staff of the farm so that they will hesitate for a moment when they get tempted to steal. During my visits to numerous poultry farms in Zambia, the most critical and shocking revelation in a number of such farms is that the owner or the workers who look after the chicken do not have a clue about the number of birds they have in the farm. In most of the layer farms the egg production is recorded as number of trays of 30 eggs and no mention of number of eggs or percentage of production.
- We need to compare the percentage with the age of the hens all the time in order to know whether the egg numbers match with that of the standard production for the specific age in weeks. The table of egg production standards from breeder companies should be used as a guide to do the same.
- The counting of hens in cages is easier than those in deep litter. But you need to do this periodically, at least once a week without fail. During this time, especially if the birds are old you can also get a chance to cull some non-layers. Whether they are in deep litter or in cages, you can make use of this time to check also on their welfare, de-beaking defects, pecking, nesting, defects of cages, water flow, manure build up and other general aspects of the management etc.
- Be alert on marketers and other people coming for buying eggs from the farm, find out any 'out of the way' alliance that your staff is making with them. Please also check whether eggs are sold in your neighbourhood at a much reduced price and who is behind!
- Egg breakages are common especially if there are not enough nests in the deep litter system and hens lay eggs on the floor. In defective cages also the broken

eggs are quite common. During summer months the egg shell tends to be weak especially since the older hens lay larger eggs. Your workers should not use this as an excuse to steal eggs in the pretext of telling you that there are so many trays of eggs that can not be sold since they are broken; it could be an exaggeration of facts!

- **Security and bio security should stay at your farm hand in hand. You need to count the benefits and cost effectiveness and saving in the scheme of things, when you implement certain security measures in the farm, in terms of fencing, control of movement of people or selective permission for any one to enter egg storage or farm premises in general.**
- **Collection of eggs: The best practice is that the first collection of eggs has to be done before 10.00 hrs and the last one before 17.00 hrs. The collection has to be recorded and checked every time the eggs are taken to the egg store.**
 - ✓ **Monitor the number of eggs collected each time and on a daily basis. If the production drop is in birds kept in cages find out whether the drop spreads through out the house or in specific areas or rows with in the house. It has been time and again observed that there can be a drop in production soon after the peak production. Remember peak production itself is a major stress and the hens tend to underperform if the peak is not taken care of promptly. Vitamins and electrolytes through water can help fight stress to some degree during the peak. How ever, some of the major underlying stressors that surface during the peak production, and contribute to the production drop are:**
 - **Lack of ventilation and build up of ammonia. Ventilation becomes the most important issue to be sorted out. What ever you do to improve it will make your birds' performance steady and high**
 - **Improper disposal of manure. Manure disposal is a real problem in layers in cages where as, if there is not enough cross aeration at the level of manure at the bottom under the cages, it does not get dried faster resulting in Ammonia build up and in breeding of flies in the manure.**
 - **Over crowding. In deep litter do not keep laying hens at a stocking density of more than 6 birds/m².In cages, follow the specifications on stocking numbers based on the measurement of cages.**
 - **No change in the Feed intake. In fact, we need to gradually increase it as the production goes up.**
 - **Improper lighting pattern/progarmme. The light has to be provided to the birds and lighting period has to be extended as**

the birds go into peak in such a way that the total lighting hours should be around 16 hours daily at and after the peak.

- **Incorrect and improper deworming.** If the hens peak and they have intestinal worms, the peak production will not stay sustained. The de-worming has to be carried out way before the birds start laying, say by before 16th week of age.
- **Any disease conditions especially digestive or respiratory infections.**

The birds under stress are more prone to infections especially by bacteria, e-coli.

All these observations do point to one thing you need to do: Be proactive.

✓ **Egg Storage:**

- **Keep the counted eggs separately for each day's collection with a date label. Rejects/broken etc should properly be accounted for as well.**
- **Rotate the eggs properly while selling, first collection to go out first and the last collection to go out last.**
- **Any returns should be counted and accounted for.**

All these actions help us pluck the stealing or pilferage of eggs right at the bud.

Make sure that your workers are compensated fairly for their work. Give them incentives for higher performance and for their honesty. Let them know that you are a caring but strict employer. You can also introduce special incentive to staff for unearthing any incidence of stealing from within or from outside. Instead of having constant suspicion on your workers, build them as your pillars of security.

It is easily said and done! It is not that easy for you to stop the problem, but with constant vigil, strict monitoring of things, people and events at the farm, your presence and your presence of mind and proactiveness, you can zero down this costly menace and have a more secure farming.

In the next issue we will discuss 'Disappearing of Chicken and feeds'

COUNTING CHICKENS WITH DR ANTHONY CHACKO

RED ALERT!

**NEW POULTRY DISEASES
UNEARTHED!**

Part 2

CDS & FDS

We have discussed at length the profile of Egg Disappearing Syndrome in the last issue. In fact most of the signs, reasons and remedial measures for these two conditions (!) namely Feed Disappearing and Chicken Disappearing Syndrome are the same as those of the first syndrome Egg Disappearing Syndrome, discussed earlier!

Let us take 'Chicken Disappearing Syndrome' first

What do you need to look around?

- As mentioned earlier taking stock of birds on a weekly basis and strict adherence of daily record updating on mortality or any sale of weak or spent (culls) hens in the case of layers.
- In the case of broilers you need to be sure about the number of chicks started with, mortality during growing and number of finished birds. Once you do that and every at the farm knows that you are very particular about the proper checking and record keeping the stealing can be minimized.
- In a few farms it was observed that the mortality happens with out any sign of sickness or accidents and the birds are seen strangled in view of taking them out as mortality!
- The best way to sort out this problem is making sure that all the dead birds are seen by you and checked physically to know if there is any foul play at all, before they are disposed off.
- You need also to check non layers in the house and remove them with your supervision and knowing.
- If you keep the surrounding clean and tidied and abnormal feathers can be detected easily in the farm premises if the birds are taken out alive. Please also check with the neighbours if they have noticed any abnormal behaviour of your staff. Be alert and vigilant to see if any suspicious sale of chicken (much cheaper)is taking place in your neighbourhood.
- Please make sure frequently that the poultry houses are properly secured. Check if there is any breakage in the wire mesh fastened to the wall of the poultry house.
- It is equally important that you show to your staff the seriousness in whatever you do at the farm whether it is strict monitoring of all the activities or being vigilant of every movement of people and things in and out of your farm. The accountability and responsibility should grow and flow from top to bottom.

FDS: Feed Disappearing Syndrome