

March 1944

AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION

of The Alabama Polytechnic Institute, Auburn, Ala.

M. J. Funchess, Director

STIMULATING HENS TO SET

D. F. King, Poultry Husbandman

Farmers have always been handicapped in their poultry enterprises because they had to wait to reproduce their flocks until the hens wanted to set. Artificial incubation and brooding have to a certain extent removed this disadvantage for a few, but the large majority of farmers still hatch and raise their chicks with hens. In following this natural method, they have assumed the burden of hatching their chicks over a long season and caring for many different ages of chicks at the same time. In addition, the chicks are hatched too late in the spring to mature and lay eggs the following fall and winter when prices are high.

Experiments completed at the Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station reveal that hens may be induced to set at any time desired. The method is simple, quick, inexpensive, and highly efficient when all factors are controlled. If the directions are closely followed, the mothering instinct of the hens will be stimulated in about four days. They will then set on eggs or brood chicks as other setting hens. The procedure is as follows:

1. At night, catch the number of hens you wish to set.
2. Place them in a coop without feed or water.
3. The next night (24 hours after catching) give each hen a little grain and a drink of water. Then place them on nests containing four or more hard boiled eggs and two one-day-old chicks or 10 hard boiled eggs. If only eggs are used, about half the hens treated will be stimulated to set. The nests should be about 12 inches square, and the fronts should be covered with burlap sacks to keep the hens in and the nests dark.
4. The hens and chicks should not be disturbed except to feed once daily.
5. The hens will start setting in about four days. They may then be given eggs to hatch or chicks to brood.
6. The same chicks may be used to stimulate a second or even a third group of hens.

The correct time to hatch chicks for fall and winter layers depends on the feeding methods to be used. If the chicks are fed all the starting mash, growing mash, and grain they will eat throughout the spring and summer, they may be hatched in March or April and be ready to lay during September. If, however, the chicks have to rustle for themselves and receive only a little bread or dough when young, and a limited amount of corn during the summer, they should be hatched in December or January to be mature and ready to lay in the fall. Pullets that do not start laying before cold weather usually do not lay until early spring.

