

Minimizing Floor and Slat Eggs

***NC Breeder Hatchery Association
Meeting***

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Pullet Conditioning

- Limit the use of shock wires during the growing period. Only use shockers to train the flock not to roost on feeders/nipple lines. Excessive use of shockers may condition birds not to jump.***
- Install roosting perches throughout the house to train the flock to jump and roost.***
- Spend as much time interacting with the flock as possible to familiarize the birds with human noise and activity.***

Nest Management

- Provide sufficient nest space for the size of the flock. A maximum of 5.5 hens per nest hole is the present recommendation for most mechanical nest systems. Nest hole size should be a minimum of 9 inches wide and 7 inches high.***
- Have nests in position and ready for use no later than 22 weeks of age. Birds begin looking for nests prior to commencing egg production.***
- Check the nest system for stray voltage, particularly if floor eggs have been a problem within a particular house in the past.***

Litter condition

- *Litter depth should be 4-6" at housing. Avoid adding additional litter to the floor until peak production has been achieved.*

Ventilation

- *Probably the most overlooked factor when floor eggs are a problem.*
- *Watch for bird migration*
- *When tunnel ventilating, air velocity along sidewalls is typically 10% less than the average air velocity in the center of the house. High temperatures on the slat can result in less nest usage on the backside of the nest during the summer months.*
- *Hens lay outside the nest when ideal environmental conditions are not being met.*

Light Intensity and Distribution

- *Needs to be uniformly distributed throughout the house with a minimum of 3 foot candles at bird level.*
- *Have 3 to 4 rows of lights when using incandescent bulbs. In clear curtain sided houses, leave lights on all day until peak production.*
- *White walls and ceilings are more reflective and help reduce shadows.*
- *In cool cell houses, install additional lamps in the pad end of the house and operate them on a separate light clock.*

Feed and Water Management

- *Minimize the time interval between lights on and feed distribution. Watch for feed spills and skips during feeding.*
- *Feed roosters 5 minutes after hen feeder cuts on.*
- *Check flow rate on nipple water lines to ensure it is not less than 50 cc per/minute.*
- *Closely monitor the height of bell drinkers (17 inches from slat to top lip of bell) and trough feed lines (8.5 inches from slat to bottom of trough) to ensure eggs are not being laid under the equipment.*
- *Raise male feeders during the day to discourage hens from nesting underneath. Lower back into position after 3 pm for the next day's feeding.*

Nest Sanitation and Preparation

- *Maintain nests in good condition. Keep pads and belts clean and as free of odor as possible. Flaps covering the belts should hide the moving belt at all times. Hens appear to have a preference for new belts.*
- *Research has shown that gray colored, concave shaped nest pads appear to be preferred by hens. Use of decoy eggs may help attract hens to nests. The presence of other eggs in a nest is often a cue for hens looking for a nest site.*
- *Run belts at slow speed when first starting the system. Do nothing to drive birds out of nests. When first starting up the belts, run them once late in the day. Gradually move the belt run time up by one hour per day. This will acclimate the hen to the sound and vibration of the belts in a gradual manner while birds are exploring nests.*

Bird Training

- *Walk the house and slat area frequently in a slow, quiet manner. Hourly walking should be done at the start of production to collect floor eggs as soon as they are seen. There is no "ideal" number of times to walk the house. Walk as many times as necessary to keep eggs off the floor.*
- *Block off particularly troublesome and attractive nesting areas such as corners, etc. to discourage hens from laying in those areas.*
- *A good program to follow is to benchmark the floor egg % at 25 weeks. The goal would be to reduce the % by 1% every day until 1 to 2% is reached. It's ok to have a day where the % does not decrease but you never want to see it increase. If it does, shorten times between walks. Never have more than 40 to 50 floor eggs in any one gathering. If you do, shorten times between walks until 40 to 30 eggs are attained.*

Nest Access

- *Slat height should be no more than 18 to 22 inches from the floor*
- *The distance from the front edge of the slat to the nest should be 16 to 18 inches. The distance from the back of the nest to feeder should be 18 to 24 inches*
- *Use ramps to assist birds getting onto the slat and to reduce the incidence of leg injury*
- *Use a ramp leading up to the nest itself. A perch ramp made from 1"x 1" wood is fairly common*

*THANKS FOR THE
OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK AT
THE NC BREEDER HATCHERY
ASSOCIATION MEETING!*

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