



Transforming Lives through Quality Education

DIVISION OF RESEARCH & EXTENSION

Cannibalism: Causes and Management

What is Cannibalism?

Cannibalism is a prevalent problem among poultry flocks where birds kept in close confinement peck at associated birds. It may begin as a simple pecking during the establishment of a social order. In other cases, it usually occurs when birds are stressed by poor management conditions. It starts by one bird picking feathers, comb, toes or vent of another bird. Once an open wound or blood is visible on the bird, the vicious habit of cannibalism can spread rapidly through the entire flock. Cannibalism affects the value of birds as result of poor feathering, damaged flesh, and reduced egg production and in most cases, mortality. Numerous environmental factors result in cannibalism outbreaks, and as such control should be part of the management program.

What are the Causes and Preventive Measures?

1. Overcrowding: - Allow adequate spacing of 20 chicks/m², 6 growers/m² and 4 adults/m² to enable free movement. Allow 20 chicks/feeder and 50 chicks/drinker; 15 growers/ feeder and drinker; 10 adults/ feeder and drinker to enable free access to feed and water at all times.
2. Excessive heat: -Adjust the brooding temperature as the chicks grow older. Brood at 32^oc for the 1st week and then decrease by 2^oc per week until when the temperature is 24^oc (room temperature).
3. Excessive light: - Keep light intensity low by using white light bulbs of 40 watts and below or use red light or infra-red bulbs.
4. Unbalanced diets: - Provide balanced diets for each class of birds with appropriate levels of methionine and salt (sodium) as deficiency increase the craving for feathers and blood.
5. Vulnerable birds in the flock: - These include cripples, injured, slow feathering or dead birds. Isolate the birds to avoid being picked on, especially the slow feathering birds with immature tender feathers.
6. External parasites: - Pests can stimulate birds to peck and injure the skin, resulting in cannibalism. Regularly treat birds for external parasites
7. Abrupt changes in the environment: -Introduce birds to new environment, management or feed gradually to help them adapt without stress.
8. Brightly lit nests or shortage of nesting boxes: -Avoid bright lights near the nesting areas and allow one nest for every five hens to avoid vent pecking by layers.

Additional Preventive Measures

1. Debeaking to give the beak a square tip make it difficult for the birds to harm each.
2. Provide enclosed outside runs to allow birds to use up their energy. This will keep the birds busy and allow them to peck greens, ground and insects instead of other birds.
3. Provide fresh greens for high fibre to keep the birds' crops full and make them content.

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