



UNIVERSITY OF
FLORIDA

IFAS EXTENSION

Youth Poultry Shows ¹

Jacqueline P. Jacob and F. Ben Mather²

Youth poultry ³ shows typically have one or more of the following categories: production chickens, purebred birds, eggs or special projects. Production chickens are sometimes called commercial chickens. Purebred birds are sometimes called exhibition birds.

PRODUCTION CHICKENS

The eligible breeds and crosses for production (commercial) chickens are male and female White Leghorn, Rhode Island Red, White Plymouth Rock, Barred Plymouth Rock, as well as female black or red sex-links. Male black or red sex-links will only receive a white ribbon because they are crossbreds and are not used for breeding purposes.

FEMALES

Female production chickens are normally entered as hens. They are judged on their past and current level of egg production on the basis of abdominal capacity (area between the pubic bones and between the pubic bones and keel) and handling qualities (amount of abdominal fat and thickness of pubic bones).

Hens receive a blue ribbon if they are sexually mature (in egg production), in good physical condition, have a minimum abdominal capacity of 2x3 finger widths, and have good or better handling quality (little abdominal fat and thin, flexible pubic bones).

Hens receive a red ribbon if they have an abdominal capacity of less than 2x3 finger widths, fair or worse handling qualities, are sexually immature, or are blind in one eye.

Hens receive a white ribbon if they are emaciated, lame, blind in both eyes, or are a crossbred, other than the black or red sex-links.

The presence of live external parasites (lice, mites, fleas, etc.) will lower the award one color after the handling quality and abdominal capacity evaluation is completed. The presence of parasite eggs, however, does not lower the award.

MALES

Males can be entered as cockerels or cocks. They will receive a blue ribbon if they are in good physical condition, alert and active. If not, they will receive a red ribbon. They will also be awarded a red

-
1. This document is PS31, one of a series of the Animal Science Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Original publication date November 1997. Reviewed June 2003. Visit the EDIS Web Site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
 2. Jacqueline .P. Jacob, poultry extension coordinator, and F. Ben Mather, poultry extension specialist, Dairy and Poultry Sciences Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, 32611.
 3. Poultry refers to birds that people keep for their use and generally includes the chicken, turkey, duck, goose, quail, pheasant, pigeon, guinea fowl, pea fowl, ostrich, emu, and rhea.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A. & M. University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Larry Arrington, Dean

ribbon if they are blind in one eye. If the cock or cockerel is emaciated, lame or blind in both eyes it will be awarded a white ribbon. Sex-link or other crossbred males will also receive a white ribbon.

The presence of live external parasites (lice, mites, fleas, etc.) will lower the award one color after the evaluation for physical condition, alertness, and activity is completed. The presence of parasite eggs, however, does not lower the award.

PUREBRED BIRDS

STANDARD OR BANTAM

Chickens and ducks come in two sizes referred to as "Standard" and "Bantam". A few types of birds come only in standard or bantam, but most can be either. The goal is to have virtually the same type of bird, except for size. Bantams usually weigh 1/4 to 1/5 that of the corresponding standard breed.

East Indies and Calls are the two breeds of ducks which are bantams.

CLASS

Chickens are divided into classes. Within each class there are several breeds. For large fowl, the classes are named after the area of origin. They are American, Asiatic, English, Mediterranean, Continental, and All other Standard Breeds. For Bantams, classes are named after physical characteristics. These include Game Bantams, Single Comb Clean Legged, Rose Comb Clean Legged, All other Comb Clean Legged, and Feather Legged.

BREED

A breed is a group of birds having the same general size, shape, and carriage. Within some breeds there are different varieties. There are 113 breeds of chickens currently recognized by the American Poultry Association. Each breed has specific characteristics that differentiate it from all other breeds. One example of a chicken breed is the Plymouth Rock. Breeds will differ in size, shape, feather characteristics, comb type and size, skin color, number of toes, or other attributes.

VARIETY

There are often many different color patterns found within a poultry breed. For example, both standard and bantam Plymouth Rocks can be Barred, White, Buff, Silver Penciled, Partridge, Columbian, and Blue varieties. Varieties can also differ in the type of comb. For example, there are single or rose comb varieties of Rhode Island Reds, Leghorns, and Minorcas. Each of these varieties has distinctive traits that set it apart from other varieties.

GENDER AND AGE

Within each variety, birds are divided based on gender and age. A pullet is a female chicken under one year old, while a hen is a female chicken over one year old. A cockerel is a male chicken under one year old, while a cock is a male chicken over one year old. Chickens might also be placed in a trio, which will be either an old trio (two hens and a cock) or a young trio (two pullets and a cockerel).

A male duck is called a drake, while a female duck is simply referred to as a duck. Similarly, a male goose is called a gander, while a female goose is simply referred to as a goose. A male turkey is a tom, and a female turkey is a hen.

During the summer, old drakes with the color pattern of the Gray Runner, Mallard, Rouen and Gray Call shed their showy male plumage and take on a plumage resembling that of the female. In the fall, they molt again and take on the male plumage. Young drakes may carry the less showy female color before they take on adult plumage.

HOW BIRDS ARE JUDGED

The American Poultry Association (APA) publishes a breed standard book, the APA Standard of Perfection, which describes all the breeds and varieties recognized by the organization, and the standards or guidelines by which they are judged.

In youth poultry shows, a modified Danish system is used whereby each bird gets a ribbon. Birds are awarded a blue, red or white ribbon, depending on their quality. In the purebred (exhibition) category a bird receives an automatic white ribbon for:

1. Any disqualification (refer to the APA Standard of Perfection or Fact Sheet PS-33, "Selecting Chickens for Show"). Examples include comb foreign to breed or variety, feathers or stubs on shanks and toes in clean-legged breeds, wry tail, and side sprigs on comb.
2. Any obvious crossbred
3. Emaciated, lame, blind in both eyes, etc.
4. Any evidence of faking

Worthy birds (meaning those that are not automatic white ribbons) are then evaluated for proper type and color. Either incorrect type (body shape, skin color, number of toes, etc.) *or* incorrect feather color will result in a red ribbon. Incorrect type *and* incorrect feather color together result in a white ribbon. It is important to note that incorrect feather color can include brassy or dirty birds. Brassiness refers to the light yellowish metallic tinge that can sometimes be found in white feathered varieties. It may be hereditary, affected by exposure to sun, or caused by the diet.

The presence of a defect (refer to the APA Standard of Perfection or Fact Sheet PS-33, "Selecting Chickens for Show") will lower the award one color. Defects include, but are not limited to, thumb marks in the comb, frosting on laced feathers, black in bill of female ducks, irregular serration of single comb, and crooked toe.

The presence of live external parasites (lice, mites, fleas, etc.) will lower the award one color after the type and color evaluation is completed. The presence of parasite eggs, however, does not lower the award.

WHAT IF A BIRD IS NOT IN THE STANDARD?

There are many breeds, varieties or hybrids that are not recognized in the American Poultry Association and American Bantam Association Standards of Perfection. If the standard of perfection for the breed has not been officially determined, there are no standards by which a bird can be judged and, depending upon the judge, the bird may receive a white ribbon.

WHAT BREED TO BUY?

There is no "best breed" of poultry for everyone. Personal preference as to shape, color, size, temperament, etc., go into a decision as to what to choose.

Different breeds, and different strains within a breed, vary in temperament, and temperament varies with management style. Some of the extremes in temperament are shown in Table 1 .

The Mediterranean breeds, especially Leghorn, are efficient egg layers. Good laying hens share four characteristics:

- They lay large numbers of eggs.
- They have small bodies.
- They begin laying at about 5 months of age.
- They are not inclined to brood.

Breeds originally developed for meat include Brahma, Cochin, and Cornish. The Jersey Giant is among the largest breeds but does not make an economical meat bird because it first puts growth into bones, then fleshes out, reaching 6 months of age before yielding a significant amount of meat.

Dual-purpose chickens do not lay as well as the laying breeds and do not grow as fast as meat birds, but they lay better than meat birds and grow faster than laying hens. The chief advantage of dual-purpose birds is that young excess males and spent layers have an appreciable amount of meat on their bones. Their advantage over a meat breed is that the hens lay a reasonable number of eggs for the amount of feed they eat.

Most dual-purpose chickens are in the American and English classification, but not all breeds in these two classes are dual-purpose. Among the breeds that are, some are slightly more efficient at producing eggs than at growing, some are faster growing and therefore more efficient at producing meat (see Table 2). These characteristics vary not only from breed to breed, but also from strain to strain within the same breed.

While the same breed might be raised for both show and production, rarely will you find exhibition and production qualities in the same strain.

Some poultry fanciers prefer to raise "rare" breeds. A number of breeds are classified as being "endangered". That is, they are in jeopardy of being lost. Among the breeds listed are Ancona, Australorp, Delaware, Dominique, Jersey Giant (black and white), Brown Leghorn, Black Minorca, New Hampshire, Barred Plymouth Rock, Rhode Island Red and White Wyandotte.

Some breeds are inherently more self-reliant than others. Good foraging breeds include Ancona, Aseel, Campine, Dominique, Hamburg, noncommercial Leghorn, Minorca, Old English Game, Orpington, Rhode Island Red, Sussex, and Wyandotte.

Chickens can also be raised for their feathers which are prized for tying fishing flies, making jewelry and home decorations, and trimming hats and other clothing. The most lucrative feather market is fly tying. Only the pointed hackle (neck) and saddle (lower back) feathers are used. The best feathers for fly tying come from fast-growing, hard-feathered breeds in colorful varieties such as Barred Plymouth Rock, Blue Andalusian, Buff Minorca, and Silver-penciled Wyandotte.

PREPARING FOR A SHOW

To prepare a bird for show, the bird needs to be healthy, free of broken feathers, clean and presentable. Information on preparing a bird for show can be found in Fact Sheet PS-34, "Preparing Poultry for Show".

EGGS

White or brown eggs, in dozen cartons, may be entered in the egg contest and there is often a class for each. They are judged by exterior as well as interior egg quality. Most fairs do not allow eggs from Araucana or Ameraucanas to be entered. These eggs may be green, blue, or pinkish. Duck and goose eggs are also usually not eligible for the contest.

For more information on judging eggs, refer to Fact Sheet PS-32, "Selecting Eggs for Show" or Fact Sheet PS-24, "Egg Quality".

SPECIAL PROJECTS

BROILERS

Broilers are sometimes included in youth poultry shows. Preregistration is usually required. Broiler chicks are purchased in bulk from a single hatchery and distributed to registered participants on a predetermined day (6-8 weeks before the fair). In most cases the participant must locate his own source of feed.

Pens of 2-3 broilers are entered and judged on individual size, condition, and conformation, as well as pen uniformity.

LAYING HENS

Another project occasionally included in youth poultry shows is laying hens. Preregistration is usually required. Female chicks of a laying strain (often Barred Plymouth Rock or Rhode Island Red) are purchased in bulk from a single hatchery and distributed to registered participants on a predetermined day (about 7 months before the fair).

Pens of 2-3 laying hens are entered and judged on egg production capacity (handling qualities and abdominal capacity; for more information refer to Fact Sheet PS-33, "Selecting Chickens for Show"), body conformation, sexual maturity, and health, as well as pen uniformity.

MISCELLANEOUS SPECIES

Some youth poultry shows have a miscellaneous species category to allow entry of other poultry projects. This category can include turkeys, ducks, geese, guinea fowl, pea fowl, pigeons, quail, pheasants, emus, ostriches, and rheas.

Table 1.

Table 1. Common temperament of different chicken breeds.		
Docile	Flighty	Aggressive
Cochin	Hamburg	Aseel
Dorking	Lakenvelder	Cornish cocks
Orpington	Leghorn	New Hampshire cocks**
Plymouth Rock	Polish*	Rhode Island Red cocks
* If they have large crests preventing them from seeing well.** Production strains, closely related to Rhode Island Red.		

Table 2.

Table 2. Classification of some of the dual-purpose chicken breeds.		
General Purpose	Better for Eggs	Better for Meat
Dominique	Australorp	Black Sex-link*
Houdan	Red Sex-link*	Langshan
Plymouth Rock	Rhode Island Red	New Hampshire
Sussex		
Orpington		
Wyandotte		
* crossbred		