

# HENS - JUDGING A GOOD LAYER vs. A POOR LAYER

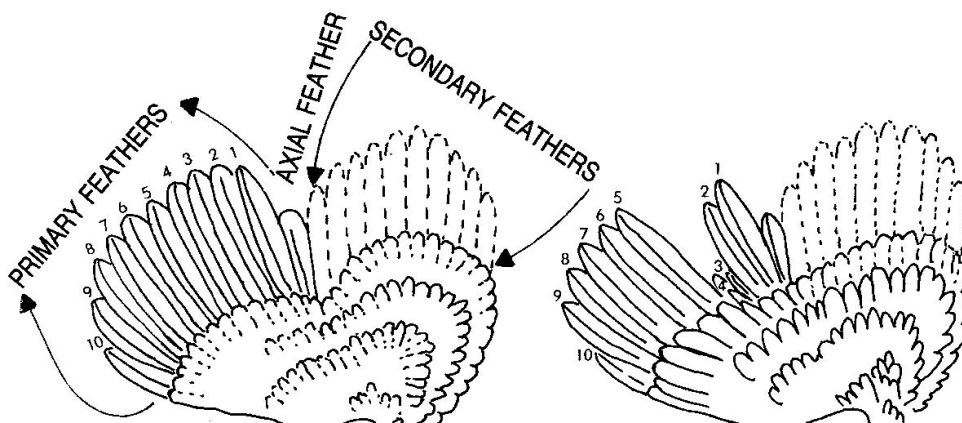
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Information taken from materials submitted by Clemson University and Dr. Ben Mather, University of Florida. Thank you, Dr. Mather for your time and patience in demonstrating and teaching me to judge production birds.



**REMEMBER, YOUR PLACINGS AT A COMPETITION IS BASED ON BLEACHING OR PIGMENT LOSS FROM THE VENT, EYE RING, EAR LOBE, BEACK, BOTOOMOF THE FOOT, FRONT OF THE SHANK, BACK OF THE SHANK ANDHOCK AND TOP OF THE TOES, IN THAT ORDER. THE MORE OF THESE PARTS THAT ARE BELACHED IN ORDER, THE MORE EGGS THE HEN HAS LAID. BIRDS WITH IDENTICAL BLEACHING ARE SPLIT ON HANDLING QUALITY, NEXT ON ABDOMINAL CAPACITY AND THEN MOLT.**

1. **Check your layer for molt.** A good producer shows all old, worn feathers, indicating she has not molted. A poor producer has some short new feathers just outside the axial, showing she is not in a molt. Some birds will continue to lay while molting, but usually at a reduced rate. This means they will have laid fewer eggs than those that have not molted. Preferably a hen should not molt until she has completed 12-14 months of production.



Above illustration shows what the wing feather look like. It shows a normal wing with the axial feather dividing the primaries from the secondary feathers. The more primaries molted, the longer the hen has been out of production and the fewer eggs she has lay.

2. **Look at the comb, wattles, eyes, and head.** These features can change rather quickly, but should be used to gain an overall impression of health and vigor. The comb and wattles should be bright red and glossy. Eyes should be bright, alert and round. Balance of the head means that there is good proportion to its length, width and depth.



GOOD LAYER



POOR LAYER

Of the good layer there is bleaching of the eye ring, ear lobes, and beak of the good layer. The comb and wattles are bright red and glossy. There is good balance to the head. Notice the bright, alert, round eye. In the poor layer there is yellow pigment present in all part of the poor layer's head. The comb is small and pale and the eye is dull and sleepy. The head is too long or shallow in proportion to its depth.

3. **Check the bottoms of the feet.** The bottoms of a good layer's feet are pink and show a loss of yellow pigment. If there is too much dirt on the foot, gently bend the toe and look in the skin cracks at the joints. There is too much pigment in the bottom of the foot of the poor producer.



GOOD LAYER



POOR LAYER

4. **Check the *front of the shanks* on the birds you are judging.** Cover the top of the foot with your hand to hide any pigment that may be there. (Some very good layers may never bleach at this part of the foot). Start at the top of the shank and study the loss of pigment down the front toward the foot. The good layer has bleached this area of the shank. Just below the feathers at the top look at the yellow in the front of the shank of the poor producer, it extends down to the foot.



GOOD LAYER

POOR LAYER

5. **Check the *back of the shanks* on the birds you are judging.** The back of the shank has bleached from the foot up to the hock. Look closely at the bottom of the shanks on the left. There is no pigment to be seen in the area up to the hock. The poor layer has yellow color at the bottom of the shank and on up to the hock.



GOOD LAYER

POOR LAYER

6. **Further in-depth examination of hock scales, hocks and feet.** Sometimes you can't get enough visual concepts of pigmentation changes in the feet and of the hock of some layers. This exam is to remove any doubt of changes that might fool you.

Pull the feathers back from the hock to see the last of the scales in this area. There may be a few of them that have pigment. *If you don't look, you can be fooled.*

Curl one toe back to see if pigment is in the top of the toe.

The good producer is bleached in the hock and toes. There is yellow in the hock and toes of the poor layer.



GOOD LAYER



POOR LAYER

**7. Vent Examination is one of the first places we all look when examining for egg production. This does not always mean this bird is a high producer. Pigment examination of all parts is important.**

The good producer has a bleached vent. Look at its outer edges shown on the good producer in the picture below. Notice its moistness. Also the vent is large and oblong in shape. This is the appearance of the vent of a high-performing layer.

Notice the yellow pigment in the vent of the poor layer. It has some moistness, but the vent is small and round in shape.



GOOD LAYER

POOR LAYER

**Synopsis:**

It doesn't matter if you are learning to judge hens for commercial type production birds or fancy purebred bird's, they all have the same appearances of either a good layer or a poor layer.

If your intentions are to set up breed pens for show birds once your birds begin the lay, you will want to examine each bird to know who is laying and who is not. The hens that aren't laying eggs as they should might be replaced by other birds. Of course, when we set up breed pens for show birds we also are looking at genetics and don't want to put birds that will conflict with the points you are trying to avoid when breeding. In the early stages of production the best way to examine for production is the vent. A tight roundish vent shows your bird isn't laying eggs at this time, but the hen with the large, oblong vent is in the laying mode. Eventually, the pigmentation in other features will appear the long and heavier they lay the more dramatic the pigment changes.