

Judging Poultry at the County Fair

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Most classes of poultry at county fairs are divided into two divisions: Open and 4-H production and exhibition. Some counties have recently started to offer a broiler competition. Criteria for judging classes within these divisions are different.

Health Requirements

In Kansas, county fair blood testing must occur for all exhibits east of U.S. Highway 81 in odd-numbered years and all exhibits west of U.S. Highway 81 in even-numbered years.

The blood test must have been conducted within 90 days of show. Judges should acknowledge any signs of disease and notify the show chair to consider removal of the birds for safety of the other entries.

Production Division

The production division consists of birds bred primarily for egg or meat production.

Egg Production Classes

Trios of pullets or hens belong in this class. Examples are the egg-type breeds of chickens such as White Leghorn, or crossbreeds like the Austra White and California White, and dual-purpose breeds like the production Rhode Island Red, New Hampshire, Plymouth Rocks and crosses. Some shows, such as the state fair, have different classes for the egg-type and dual-purpose hens and pullets. This classification is recommended.

An important point to remember is that production classes are not judged according to exhibition standards but are judged according to their ability to produce quality eggs.

Judging of birds in these classes should be based on the following characteristics:

1. Uniformity of size, head-type, shank color, and stage of maturity. Uniformity of plumage color carries weight if the trio is purebreds.

2. Good egg-production type, normal size, well feathered if pullets, free of serious deformities such as crooked legs or beaks, vigorous, healthy, alert, and clean.

3. Pullets that show characteristic femininity refinement and sexual maturity as indicated by enlargement and redness of the comb and wattles. They should be free of signs of old age as evidenced by bleaching of the legs.

4. Hens should show traits that indicate good past and present egg production. These are described below.

Meat Production Classes

Meat-type chickens (broilers, roasters, capons) should be shown as trios of the same sex. As you handle the birds, try to visualize how the trios compare for the following characteristics if they were ready-to-cook carcasses.

These birds are judged using the following criteria:

1. Uniformity of size, body conformation, fleshing (particularly on the breast, legs and thighs), and finish (fat covering).

2. Freedom from defects such as breast blisters and calluses, curved or crooked

Comparing Good vs. Poor Layers

Trait	Good Layer	Poor Layer
Head	Short, deep	Thin, shallow
Eye	Bright, bold	Dull, glazed
Comb/ wattles	Enlarged, red, waxy, warm	Shriveled, cool, dry appearing
Pubic bones	Thin, flexible, well spread	Rigid, close together
Feathers	Worn, some broken or missing	Maybe molting, new appearance
Abdomen	Soft, pliable skin, enlarged	Firm, withdrawn, thick, skin
Vent	Enlarged, bleached*	Constricted, dry, pigmented*
Molt	None or if in progress, a rapid molt	In progress, slow
Pigmentation*	Bleached head, beak, legs	Pigmented head, beak, legs

*Only applicable to yellow-skinned breeds.

breastbones, bruises, cuts and tears, and hunched backs.

3. Fleshing and finish develop with age, so older birds will have more desirable market qualities than younger birds.

Exhibition Division

Exhibition or fancy classes of poultry include young and old purebred large and bantam chickens, and purebred turkeys, ducks and geese. Depending on the show, entries of exhibition-type chickens consist of a trio of two pullets and a cockerel, two hens and a cock, or one bird of either sex and age.

Entries of turkeys and waterfowl consist of a bird of either sex and age and waterfowl of either a single bird of either sex or a male or female pair.

Exhibition classes are judged on condition, health, cleanliness, and breed type and characteristics. Information on the characteristics of the recognized pure breeds of large and bantam chickens, and turkeys, ducks and geese is available in the following book: *The American Standard of Perfection*, American Poultry Association, Inc., 133 Millville Street, Mendon, MA 01756 (Price-\$48.00), the Web address is www.ampltya.com.

The Bantam Standard, American Bantam Association, P.O. Box 127, Augusta, NJ 07822, contains information only on bantams. The information is available on the Web at www.bantamclub.com.

The body, comb, feather color and pattern types of birds in these classes should be characteristic of the breed. The birds should be well developed, have well developed (but not worn or ragged) feathers, be healthy and free from external parasites, clean, show no evidence of tampering and free of defects and disqualifications.

Common Defects and Disqualifications

A defect is anything short of perfection. The cut for a defect should depend on its severity and how it compares to the severity of a defect of another bird. A serious defect or deformity that bars a bird from an award is called a *disqualification*. Following is a list of the major disqualifications by categories. Consult the *Standard* for a more detailed list and description.

Shape

Back — crooked, roached or deformed.

Beak — deformed in chickens and turkeys.

Beard and Muffs — absence of beard and muffs in bearded varieties and presence of a beard in non-bearded varieties.

Bill — scooped or deformed in ducks and geese.

Body — crooked keel or breast bone in all breeds of turkeys and Cornish chickens.

Comb — one foreign to the breed or variety. For example, a rose comb so large or lopped that it obstructs the sight; absence of spike or more than one on a rose comb; a pea comb lopped below the horizontal where the bend occurs, except where this condition is a breed characteristic; a split comb with a side sprig; a cushion comb with a spike or spikes.

Crest — absence of crest or lopped crest.

Neck — pendulous crop in turkeys.

Plumage — hen feathering in males of all breeds except Sebright.

Shanks and Toes — all breeds - bowlegs, deformed foot or foot joint, duck foot in land fowl, enlarged and misshapen shank or hock, knock knee, web foot in

landfowl, more or less than correct number of toes; absence of spurs in Old English and Sumatra cocks; presence or evidence of any down, stub, feather or part of feather from shank below the hock joint, or foot or toe on clean-legged breeds; shanks not feathered down outer sides on feather-legged breeds.

Tail — In all breeds, complete absence of tail feathers (except Araucanas); one or more reverse tail feathers; split tail in cock and hen; squirrel tail (except Japanese bantams), and wry tail. Americana breeds have a tail; Araucanas do not.

Wings — in all breeds, twisted primary or secondary feathers (except in Sevastapol geese and Frizzle chickens), split wings, slipped wing, one or more reversed main wing feathers and one or more primary or secondary feathers with a split quill in all breeds; clipped primary or secondary feathers in all breeds of chickens and turkeys, and all breeds of waterfowl except Canada and Egyptian geese, and Muscovy, East India, Call, and Mallard Ducks. Inverted wing tips in all breeds of ducks and geese.

Color

Bill — black in bill or beak of white-colored drakes; more than 10 percent black in bill or beak of ducks.

Earlobes — positive enamel white in red earlobed breeds.

Face — positive enamel white in face of all breeds except White-Faced Black Spanish.

Plumage — red or yellow in all barred, black and

mottled varieties; black in quills of primaries and secondaries, and foreign color, except slight gray ticking, in all white varieties.

Shanks and Toes — color foreign to the breed, except slight reddish tinge, or mahogany of pigment in yellow shanks.

Rules for Judges to Consider

1. In the 4-H classes, do not give a purple or qualify an entry for the state fair that has an obvious disqualification.

2. Encourage the youth to be present when you judge and be willing to explain to them the basis of your placings. They love to talk to the judges.

3. Do not give a top placing to birds that are dirty, poorly groomed, or infected with mites or lice regardless of how good their quality.

4. Always emphasize both the good, as well as the bad points of an entry. This will encourage the owner and serve as a learning experience.

5. Carry a copy of the *Standard of Perfection* with you and use it when in doubt.

6. Work closely with the show superintendent because that person is familiar with the different classes to be judged and the awards to be given. The rules for shows are seldom uniform.

7. Handle the birds carefully because they are the pride of the exhibitor. Always remove a bird from the coop head first. To remove a bird reach one hand into the coop, take hold of a bird's opposite wing close to the body, and turn the bird around in the coop with its head toward

you. Slide your other hand palm upward underneath the bird's breast until you can grasp the legs up close to the body. Keep one or two fingers inserted between the legs of the bird to give a firm grip as you examine the bird. Return the bird to the coop head first.

8. Be acquainted with sources of good breeding stock if asked for recommendations.

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Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

EP-112

June 2002

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File Code: Animal Sciences