

How to Select Poultry for Market Qualities

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4-H Club boys and girls show thousands of broilers and turkeys each year in local, county, district and state shows. They may be live-stock and poultry shows or in the poultry division of fairs held throughout the State. Most poultry is entered on the basis of market quality.

You should select the best possible exhibits from the poultry grown in connection with your project. To do this, you need to know the standards for Grade A poultry and the conditions that will lower the grade. In addition, you should know how to select exhibits that will be most competitive. In poultry judging contests, there are several classes of live and ready-to-cook poultry to be judged on the basis of market quality. Know and be able to identify the standards for each grade of poultry.

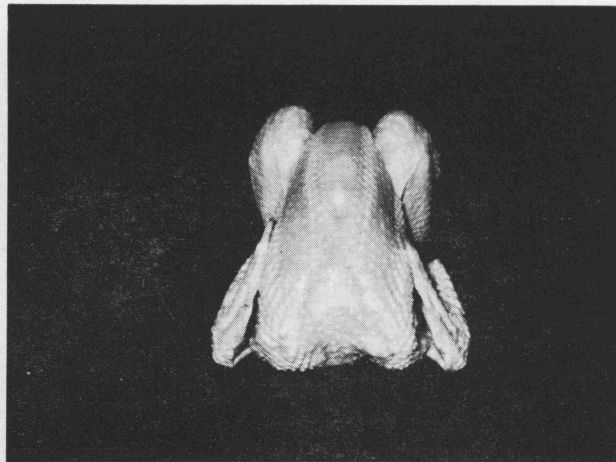
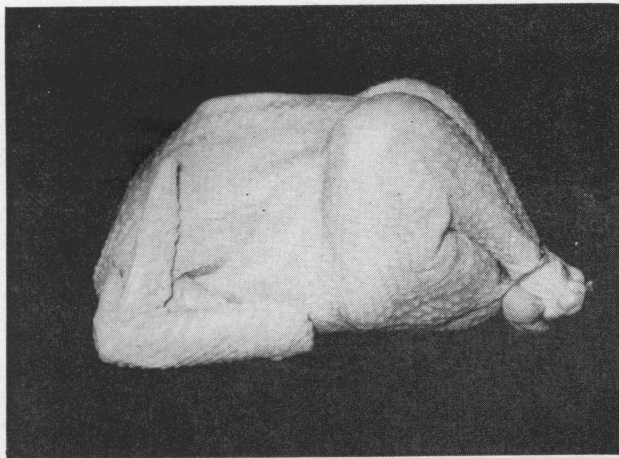
The following material will be helpful when judging in contests and making selection of exhibits. Study it carefully. Consult your 4-H Club leader and county extension agent also. When judging or selecting live birds, it is necessary to both feel and look for market qualities.

Body Conformation

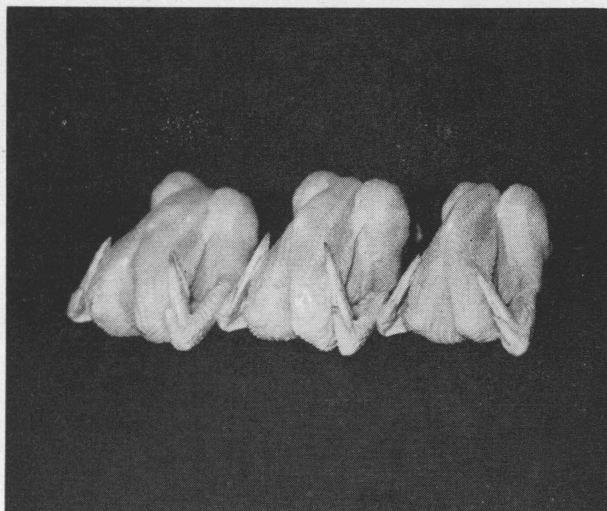
Dressing percentage and percent of meat to bone in the live and ready-to-cook carcass is largely influenced by body conformation. It is also a major factor in determining the grade. The relative width, length and depth of the body will influence body conformation. Poultry that have wide breasts, carrying the width the entire length of the keel; medium-length keels that are parallel with the back; broad and straight backs; thighs that are bulging; and heavy-meated drumsticks of medium length exhibit good body conformation.

Fleshing

Flesh is muscle tissue and has a large influence on the percentage of meat to bone and body conformation of the live bird or the ready-to-cook carcass. The breast of a grade A turkey is about 31 percent of the ready-to-cook carcass and for chickens, it is about 29 percent. The drumstick and thighs of turkeys and chickens of A quality are about 27 and 32 percent respectively.



BODY CONFORMATION: Side view shows body depth; also keel and back are parallel. Front view shows length and width of body. These characteristics determine body conformation.



GRADE: Broilers show variation in amount of fleshing. This alone may determine the grade. Produce and select broilers with grade A fleshing for exhibits and sale.

Flesh should be well distributed over the back. There is more likely to be a thick layer of flesh on the back when the breast and legs are fully fleshed, as indicated under "body conformation".

Finish

This has reference to fat. Chickens and turkeys should carry an abundance of fat but not to the extent that they have waste. Fat should be evenly distributed over the entire body. Fat of a light-cream or light-yellow color is usually preferred. It has eye appeal and consumer acceptance. Study the requirements for amount of fat needed for a bird to grade A, B or C. Well-finished poultry will have skin of a light-yellow or cream color. Poultry which have poor finish will have a bluish color. This information may be found on inside cover of Bulletin 234 "Market Demands on Turkeys" and Bulletin 904 "Market Demands on Broilers."

Uniformity

When selecting an exhibit of more than one turkey or chicken, such as 3 or 5 to be shown as a trio or pen, uniformity is a "must" if the exhibit is to furnish strong competition. The birds must be uniform in size, body conformation, fleshing, finish and all of the same sex. Do not try to select exceptionally large specimens, nor the smallest in the lot. Medium sizes usually are easier to select for uniformity and still be good specimens.



UNIFORMITY: Broilers are uniform in width and length of breast, depth of body, body conformation, weight, color and amount of fat over entire carcass.

Pin Feathers

Pin feathers may lower the grade of poultry. This is an important item in selecting the exhibit for a poultry show, fair or when selling commercial poultry on the market. It likewise is important for the Club member to remember when judging for market quality in contests.

Pin feathers are known as protruding and nonprotruding. Protruding pin feathers are those that are out from under the skin and the feather has not matured but may be partially fanned. An A quality ready-to-cook broiler or turkey must be free of protruding pins. Nonprotruding pin feathers are those that have not grown enough to come through the skin. These are more difficult to remove because they cannot be removed without injury to the skin of the carcass. An A quality ready-to-cook broiler or turkey must be practically free of these pins on the legs and all parts of the body.

Diseases

Poultry which show symptoms of disease usually are not in good show condition. Most shows have rules prohibiting their acceptance in the show. If they develop symptoms of disease after entering the show, they usually are disqualified and removed.

Most diseases cause a loss in quality and thus lower the grade of the individual bird afflicted. Be sure to look over the exhibit carefully for any sign of disease and select only those in good health.

External Parasites

External parasites such as blue bugs and lice lower the grade of poultry. Be careful to select an exhibit free of external parasites or damage caused from parasites.

The poultry from which the exhibit is to be selected should first be checked at regular intervals for several weeks before final selection, to be sure there is no infestation. If allowed to feed on poultry for many days, external parasites cause skin irritation, and results in discolorations on the ready-to-cook broiler or turkey.

Internal Parasites

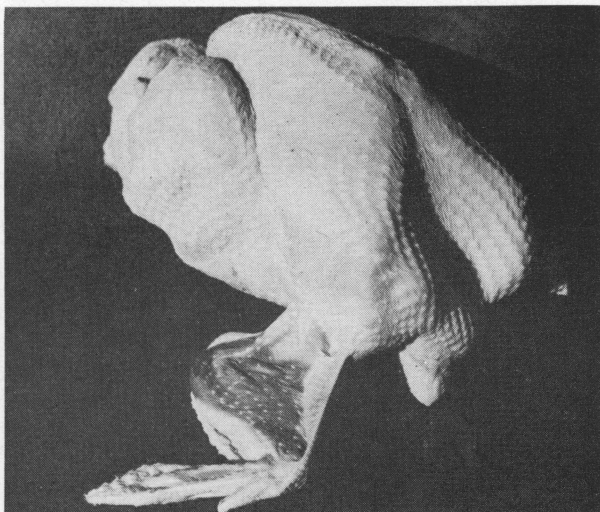
Internal parasites may cause poultry to lose flesh, finish, and cause poor development, thus lowering the grade. Such poultry usually will not be in show condition and likely will not pass the sifting committee.

Defects

One or more defects can reduce the market grade and in most cases are serious enough to cause poultry to be sifted at the show.

Some common defects are:

Curved breastbone	Crooked back
Crooked breastbone	Callouses
Hunch back	Blisters



BRUISES: Flesh and skin bruises may be caused any time before bleeding. Flesh bruises are most serious. Either may lower grade and thus lessen demand on product.

Torn skin
Dented breastbone

External parasites

Chickens or turkeys with any of these defects should not be selected for a show exhibit. Crooked toes generally are not considered a defect which lowers the grade.

Bruises

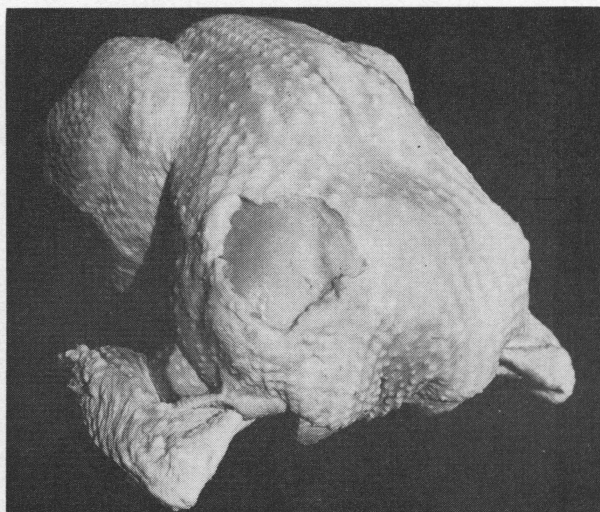
Bruises can be either skin or flesh. They always occur while the chicken is alive—never after it is bled. Rough handling, fighting or hauling in coops without ample litter to cushion and protect their breasts cause either skin or flesh bruises. The flesh bruise is most serious with respect to grade.

Disjointed Wing

Turkeys with the last joint of wing removed (commonly called wing clipping or notching) usually develop scabs, bruises or infection. These conditions usually reduce the grade of the turkeys affected. Such birds, even though they pass the sifting committee, show at a disadvantage.

Discolorations

These may be caused from flesh or skin bruises, hard scalding, external parasites and rough handling. See inside cover pages of Extension Bulletins 234 and 910.



TORN OR CUT SKIN: Requirements for A quality broilers and turkeys do not permit cuts or tears on breasts or legs and only limited amount for B quality.

ADDITIONAL HELPFUL SUGGESTIONS

Rules and Regulations

Read the rules and regulations of the show in which poultry is to be entered. Make sure the entries meet all requirements. If the rules state that all poultry must be of A quality, be sure each of the chickens or turkeys to be exhibited meet the minimum standards.

Dates are important. Give special attention to the closing entry date, time of arrival at show, judging, sale and release dates.

Selecting for Market Quality

Selection should be made for maximum market qualities in any choice made with reference to breed, variety, strain or cross. Some strains in certain breeds, varieties and crosses seem to win more in competition than others. This being true, there is greater chance of winning the top award if these strains, breeds and varieties are used. However, this fact does not reduce the importance of an excellent feeding program and good management. See L-402 "How to Produce Broilers for Show."

Before purchasing baby chicks or poults, consider the class of poultry for which exhibits are to be entered and consider the objectives to be attained. Consult your county agent or 4-H leader about this.

Summary

To keep poultry from being sifted at the show, avoid exhibits which have these defects: bare backs, pin feathers, breast blisters, crooked breasts, poor flesh and finish, external parasites, obviously knobby breast bone, or low vigor.

Remember that all these items are considered by judges when judging chickens or turkeys in the show, and should be considered by Club members who compete in judging contests. Consult county extension agent or 4-H Club leader when buying chicks or poults and selecting poultry exhibits. High market qualities in show poultry are greatly influenced by breeding, feeding and management.

References

The following publications give additional information on market qualities and defects of broilers and turkeys; also producing market quality:

- B-234 MARKET DEMANDS ON TURKEYS
- B-910 MARKET DEMANDS ON BROILERS
- L-123 MARKET ONLY WELL-FLESHED AND WELL-FINISHED TURKEYS
- 4H-46 MARKET ONLY WELL-FLESHED AND WELL-FINISHED TURKEYS