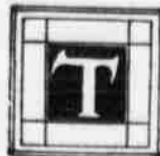


# HENS THAT CUT The COST OF LIVING

By Edward I. Farrington  
Illustrations from Photographs



**T**O BEGIN WITH, some hens don't. Some eggs, be it known, cost about as much to produce as Horace Greeley's proverbial potatoes, and that was one dollar each. There are fancy fowls domiciled in luxurious houses that lay hardly enough eggs to pay for the grain they eat. Neither fine houses nor fine feathers necessarily make fine birds. Hens are as democratic as Yankees. If left to their own devices, they will sleep in the trees. Make them hustle for a living, and they will lay like machines. Coddle them, and they will grow fat, lazy and shiftless.

The hens that lay are the hens that pay, of course. You will find such hens in modest little flocks all over the country, busily cutting the cost of living for their owners. When, in cackling self-complacency, they emerge from their mid-winter nests, each leaves the equivalent of a nickel behind her. Whether eaten or sold, eggs at a nickel apiece help to cut the grocer's bill and to reduce the profits of the meat trust.

Over ninety per cent of all the eggs produced in this country come from the farms and the back yards.

Only here and there is there a successful specialized egg plant. And between an undeveloped Montana gold mine and a commercial poultry proposition, why, you can lose your money in one as quickly as in the other. On the other hand, a small flock well cared for will pay substantial dividends. Bidly of the back yard holds the key to the situation. She is doing nobly now; but she ought to do better. The number of eggs annually produced should be half as large again, without increasing the number of birds. The bigger yield will come with more intelligent management. This, in itself, will help to make table supplies cheaper; for eggs and poultry will, more and more, be substituted for other food products.

Few people realize that the poultry business, as it stands, is one of the most important industries in the country. The value of the poultry and egg crop each year is several hundred million dollars. Some sixteen billion eggs are laid each year by the great American hen, which number placed end to end would make a belt across the continent. Some years, the country's poultry products have been worth more than its combined output of gold and silver. The business is so big that the great western packing houses have taken it under their wings, picking up the eggs from the farmers and putting them safely into cold storage until they can be shipped to market — just when the price is right, no doubt. It is a fact, though, that eggs so handled reach the consumer in better shape than those that pass through the hands of the country grocer. The latter, taking them in exchange for sugar and calico, imposes no age limits, providing they do not speak for themselves like the chicken that peeped as Mike broke a raw egg into his mouth. You know the story? — Mike, a bit startled, gulped, choked and promptly ejaculated: "Begorra, ye spoke too late!"



Incubator house of terra cotta hollow tile

In the Petaluma district of California, some two million fowls are distributed over an area of twenty square miles. Several million dozen eggs are sent out every year from this city alone. Petaluma is a city that was practically built by hens — a city where raw materials are converted into eggs at the rate of \$457 worth an hour for ten hours a day, Sundays and holidays included; for the Sabbatical system is not recognized by the hen.

But to get back to our little flock in the back yard. When hens are kept in large numbers, they are expected to pay a profit of a dollar a head. The back-yard flock should pay twice as much. Here are two actual experiences: A suburban family kept fifteen pullets in a home-made poultry house, fed the table scraps supplemented with grain, and made a net profit of fifty dollars. Another family housed eight Aneona pullets in a ten-dollar coop, and had all the eggs needed for household use and some to sell during a winter that was unusually severe. Thousands of families are having experiences of this sort. It is a practical way to beat the middleman, or whoever is responsible for things as they are.

Along with simplified spelling and simplified brick laying, we have simplified poultry keeping, which is a fine thing for the amateur with a little land and less knowledge. No longer is it necessary to mix a wet mash every morning. Nowadays, a dry mash — which is another term for dry ground grains mixed and with beef scraps added — is dumped into a hopper and placed where the hens can consult their own sweet will about eating it.

No longer is it necessary to puzzle over balanced rations. All dealers now sell prepared combinations of cracked grains, scientifically blended. Most hens will speedily unbalance any sort of ration; for they pick out the kinds of food they relish in a way that is almost human. But it is reassuring to the poultry keeper to start right, especially after he has read some learned bulletin on the subject.

It is no longer necessary to pore over poultry house plans and to hire a carpenter to execute them, nor even to hammer one's thumb in an effort to metamorphose a piano box into a hen coop. Ready-made, portable poultry houses are especially well adapted to the needs of small flocks. They are found very convenient by the man who rents his home, for the reason that they can be knocked down and loaded into a wagon whenever it becomes desirable to change one's domicile.

And, be it remembered, it is not now necessary even to have a yard for the hens. This reduces the problem of keeping poultry to its lowest terms. It is quite possible to confine a flock for months at a time, if the house is so arranged that fresh air may be admitted freely and if a deep litter is used to cover the floor, so that the birds will be compelled to work for what they eat just as if they were hunting bugs in the fields. It is true that this method of

keeping poultry has limitations. No one is advised to breed from hens housed so closely. The wise plan is to sell all the hens in the summer as they cease to lay, and to start afresh with well-matured pullets in the fall. Then, all the work and bother incidental to the raising of chickens is done away with, and there is no need to maintain a rooster with the flock — a feature of the plan that will appeal to non-poultry-keeping neighbors.

Although this close-housing system is the only one that is practicable under some conditions, it has one serious dis-



Buff Orpingtons — equally good as layers and table fowl

advantage, in that the poultry keeper cannot develop a heavy-laying strain of his own, as is possible when he can select his most prolific hens for breeders and raise his own chicks. The incubator and the brooder have simplified this part of the business of poultry keeping, too. Hens like Leghorns, which never sit on their eggs, are reared almost exclusively in many sections of the country. They compel one to use machines, or to comb the countryside for broody old Plymouth Rocks and Wyandottes.

One remarkable feature of the modern incubator is the elasticity of its usefulness. The man with a few hens invests in a fifty-egg machine and runs it in his living-room, while the man with a big plant installs a mammoth incubator capable of hatching thousands of eggs at a time. The big man burns coal. The little man uses kerosene, gas or electricity. Gas and electricity economize labor, and may be used where the insurance regulations bar oil.

Egypt had mammoth hatching machines thousands of years ago. If Cleopatra fed Anthony on anything so commonplace as chicken, probably the choice young birds pipped their shells in a big oven-shaped, clay incubator. We, in America, have caught up with Egypt at last; and coincident with the development of the mammoth hatching machine, have come two new lines of industry — custom hatching and the sale of baby chicks. The back-yard poultry keeper finds something in both to interest him. Both help to make amateur poultry keeping easy.

Suppose you have a strain of Columbian Wyandottes that you want to perpetuate. You select your hatching eggs with due care from your best pens, and express them to the custom hatcher. Twenty-two or twenty-three days later, the expressman delivers the baby chicks to you. Simple, isn't it? And yet, revolutionary! Who knows to what end this plan will lead? In the course of a few years, every well-populated county may have several mammoth machines, where the hatching for all the small poultry keepers will be done. Such an arrangement would come very near to duplicating the Egyptian custom; for there, one or two men do the hatching for a whole community. With a little imagination, one can picture hatching stations alongside the creameries all over the country. This branch of the poultry industry is still in swaddling clothes; but a rapid growth is promised.

Every device or practice that helps to increase the amount of the country's poultry products will be an aid in cutting the cost of living; and, as the supply is far behind the demand, it can be done without affecting the returns of the poultry keeper. Remember that eggs are being imported from countries so far away as China.

The sale of day-old chicks is another interesting development. Baby chicks require no food for forty-

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White Leghorns — the best breed for eggs



A type of fresh-air house now growing in favor