



Chicken Showmanship

Chicken showmanship evaluates the knowledge and skills the exhibitor demonstrates on handling and posing the bird, as well as the attitude and appearance of the showman. First, you will handle the chicken and then pose the bird for examination. You will also take a quiz testing your general knowledge on chickens and the poultry industry. You should seek out other poultry exhibitors to help you and consult the Michigan State University Extension 4-H Poultry Fitting and Showmanship Member's Guide that can be found at https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/4_h_poultry_fitting_showmanship_members_guide_4h1520.

Handling Chickens

When showing chickens it is proper to wear a white coat or jacket with long sleeves. Usually in Showmanship Sweepstakes you will see such a coat nearby in the area of the judge. Put it on before you begin. Another item you need to show a chicken is a stick. It is about 2 feet long and should be provided to you by the judge.

Hold the chicken with its head facing you and your right hand under its breast. Your left hand goes on its back to steady it.

Posing Chickens

You may be asked to pose the chicken on a table. In this case the chicken stands on the table facing the judge and you are behind the chicken. Use your stick to soothe it by stroking the throat and then step back when the chicken is well posed. If it moves its feet, step back to the chicken and reset it and begin soothing it again with the stick.

In Showmanship Sweepstakes you are sometimes asked to put the chicken in the cage and to then pose it before removing it. Always place the chicken in the cage by turning it around to face the cage before you put it in. After it is in the cage, turn it around to face you again and pose it. Pose the chicken by using your stick to stroke it under the beak and along the throat. A trained chicken will stand quietly and will raise its head up when you do this. Remove the chicken by putting your right hand under its breast and left hand on its back. Close the door to the cage when you are done.

Examining Chickens

Present the chicken to the judge by holding it in your right hand and standing at attention in front of the judge. Your left hand should rest at your side.

Chickens are 'examined' by the showman in a fashion similar to rabbits, except you verbally explain each step to the judge as you are performing that step. Follow the steps below in order:

Step 1: Examine the head area. Let the bird rest in your hand while you use your free hand to examine the bird.

- Look at both eyes to make sure they are not blind. Point your index finger at the eyes. (The bird should blink or move when pointed at.) Notice the pigment around the eye-ring.

To contact an expert in your area, visit msue.anr.msu.edu/experts or call 888-MSUE4MI (888-678-3464)

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- Look for defects on the comb. Point your index finger at the comb. Also, feel the condition (texture) of the comb by holding the comb between your thumb and index finger.
- Feel the texture of the wattles and look for any apparent abnormalities.
- Examine the condition of the feathers on the head area for any sign of molting.
- Look at the beak for any defects such as crookedness. Point your index finger at the beak. Also, examine the pigmentation of the beak.
- Examine the color of the earlobes to see if they are true to the breed. Point your index finger at the earlobes. Then locate the ear and point your index finger at it.

Step 2: Run your fingers over the neck area to feel for smoothness. Also, notice the condition for any sign of molting.

Step 3: Examine the back area. Run your hand over the back area to feel for any abnormalities. Use your hand to measure the length and breadth of the back area to check the conformation of the bird. Look at the under-color of the feathers on the back and check for any sign of molting.

Step 4: Run your hand down the bird's tail. Press the tail feathers toward you and examine the condition of the feathers. You may want to count the tail feathers to determine any sign of molting.

Step 5: Examine the vent area. As the bird rests on your hand, tilt the bird downward so that the bird's head is facing the ground and the vent area is toward you. Look for lice and mites. If your bird is a hen, examine the condition of the vent to see if the hen is in laying condition. Also, look for pigmentation loss. With the bird in the same position, check the "handling quality" of the bird. This is one way used to determine past egg production. Determine by feeling the skin of the abdominal area for thickness or thinness. Pinch the skin below the vent area and roll it between your fingers to examine this. Also, at this time, feel the tip of the pubic bones for thickness and flexibility.

Step 6: If your bird is a hen, measure the abdominal capacity. (Abdominal capacity is another way to determine the hens past egg production.) Use your fingers to estimate the distance between the two pubic bones and the distance between the end of the keel bone and the top of the pubic bones. These measurements will indicate the past egg production. In a standard large fowl hen, if the distance is approximately 1.5 inches or less, the bird is not laying at present and has probably not laid many eggs in the past. A distance over 1.5 inches indicates that the bird has laid eggs in the past and may be laying now. A distance of 2 inches or more indicates that the chicken has laid many eggs in the past.

Step 7: Check the abdomen. If your bird is a hen, use your fingers to grasp the abdomen to determine its hardness or softness. This will further indicate the bird's condition of egg production. A soft, pliable abdomen indicates the bird is currently producing eggs. A hard abdomen indicates that the bird is not producing at present or that the bird is a poor producer. Also, check the abdomen for any sign of molting and the condition of the feathers in this area.

Step 8: Examine the thighs to determine the amount of meat present. The thigh area is especially important in meat-type chickens.

Step 9: Examine the shanks to see if they are clean and whether there are mites present. A crusty condition or upturned scales indicate that mites are present. Look at the pigment condition of the front and back of the shanks.

Step 10: Examine the toes. Check the number of toes present. Remember that certain breeds have five toes. Look for defects on the toes and examine the pigmentation and the condition of the toenails.

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Step 11: Examine the feet. Look at the feet of a hen for pigment loss and correct color. Also, examine the feet for any defects.

Step 12: Examine the breast. In meat-type chickens, the breast is the most important meat area. Use your palm to feel the length of the keel bone and the meat on it. Check the straightness of the keel bone and look for any abnormalities such as indentations. Feel and look at the breast area to determine if there are any breast blisters or other defects on it.

Step 13: Examine the wings. Open and stretch the left wing of the bird with your free hand. Tilt the bird slightly away from you. Check the primary and secondary feathers for signs of molting. Take a closer look at the skin on the inside of the wing for lice and mites. Transfer the bird to your other hand. Follow the above directions using your free hand to examine the right wing.

Step 14: Examine the crop area. Feel it with your hands for any abnormalities.

Step 15: Return the bird to the upright position resting on your hand. Give support on top with your other hand if necessary.

Showmanship Questions and Answers

Questions:

1. How long does it take a chicken egg to hatch?
2. What do you do to prepare a chicken for the show?
3. What are the two basic types of chickens?
4. How often does a chicken lay an egg?

Answers:

1. Approximately 21 days
2. Give the chicken a bath in warm water and dry it with a towel, then blow-dry it. Work with the chicken to train it to pose.
3. Meat and eggs
4. About once per day

Additional Things to Study

- Breeds
- Diseases
- Different Types of Feed
- Parts
- Parasites
- Egg Production
- Body Parts

