

DECEMBER, 1916.

CIRCULAR No. 27 (Revised).

AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION.  
KANSAS STATE AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE.

---

DEPARTMENT OF POULTRY HUSBANDRY.

---

**CAPONS FOR KANSAS.**

By WM. A. LIPPINCOTT.

Kansas has many steers, barrows, wethers, and geldings. She has very few capons. From the standpoint of meat production it is just as important to make a capon out of the



FIG. 1. A flock of Capons.

cockerel as it is to make a steer out of a bull calf, or a barrow from a young boar. It is pure waste to allow the young rooster to become staggy, just as truly as it is to allow the young boar, not needed for breeding purposes, to grow into a stag.

Caponizing has the same effect upon the disposition of the male chicken that castration has upon the stallion. It renders him more tractable, less nervous and excitable, and so easier

to handle from every standpoint. The true capon will seldom crow or fight, takes kindly to confinement, and will even brood chicks.

The performing of this simple operation also affects the amount and quality of the meat. As a result of its quieter disposition the capon is an easier keeper than the rooster. He makes greater gains than his active brother and makes them more economically. At the same time, his flesh remains as soft and palatable as when he was a two-pound "spring."

There are a great many places in Kansas where there are no quotations made on capons. In some cases there is good reason for this. It may be that the local buyer has a big outlet for broilers and would rather buy two-pound broilers in the summer than eight- to ten-pound capons in December. It may also be that there are not capons enough offered to make it worth while for him to handle them separately. The result is that the few that are offered are shipped right along with other classes of stock. The local buyer should be interviewed. If he does not want capons, it would be foolish to produce them. If he does want them, is willing to pay for them, and can not get them; it would be foolish not to produce them.

A ten-pound capon can be grown on about the same amount of feed that an eight-pound rooster requires. An eight-pound rooster will bring sixty-four cents if the market is that high. Where capons are in demand, a ten-pound capon will bring twice as much per pound, or \$1.60. His food cost is about the same as that of the sixty-four-cent rooster.

There are probably very few dealers in Kansas who would not be glad to handle capons at a considerably higher price than they pay for old roosters, if they could buy them in any numbers. Local dealers will gladly inform producers as to their demands.

Caponizing is a simple operation. Any careful person can soon learn to do it successfully. The fact that a bird's testicles are hidden away inside the body has caused most people to suppose that the operation of removing them is at once difficult and dangerous. While the percentage of loss is somewhat larger than results from the castration of the larger animals, it need not run much, if any, above 5 per cent for the beginner. One reason why the number is so large is that the bird must be older, comparatively, than other farm animals before the

operation can be undertaken. The birds that are killed die a quick and painless death by bleeding. They are not a total loss, as they are perfectly wholesome for food.

It is difficult to state the exact size or age at which a cockerel may be most successfully operated upon, as different birds develop differently. As a starting point, however, the beginner will be safe in using birds weighing between one and a half and two pounds if they are of the Plymouth Rock, Rhode Island Red, Wyandotte, or Orpington breeds. Leghorns weighing a pound may be used also. Later, as one becomes more familiar with the matter, the birds will be selected by their appearance rather than by weight or age. The proper time is

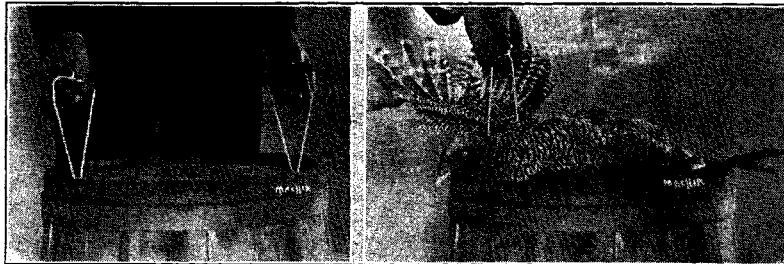


FIG. 2. Caponizing on Barrel.

just before he begins to make comb, when the organs are about the size of a small navy bean.

The tools needed are four in number and may be purchased from any poultry supply house or veterinary instrument company, at from \$2 to \$5 per set. A sharp knife is necessary for making the incision; a common pocket knife will do if it is sharp. A spreader is needed to keep the incision open while working. A probe blunt at one end with a sharp bent point at the other is used in pushing the intestines aside to expose the organs and in tearing the thin membranes that surround the body cavity. The fourth instrument is used for removing the testicles. There are several different instruments made for this purpose and it is largely a matter of preference which is used. The one shown in these illustrations is called the spoon forceps.

Where one is making a business of operating it is a good plan to have a special table that can be tipped toward the light. For home use a barrel will do nearly as well, as shown

in figure 2. In either case what is wanted is something that will hold the bird firmly and well stretched out, at a convenient height. The bird is usually pinioned by looping weighted cords over the legs and wings as shown in the illustrations. Previous to the operation the birds should be kept from feed and water for at least twenty-four hours. This will allow the intestines to empty and subside, making the operation much easier and less dangerous. The withholding of water makes excessive bleeding less likely. This must not be overlooked.

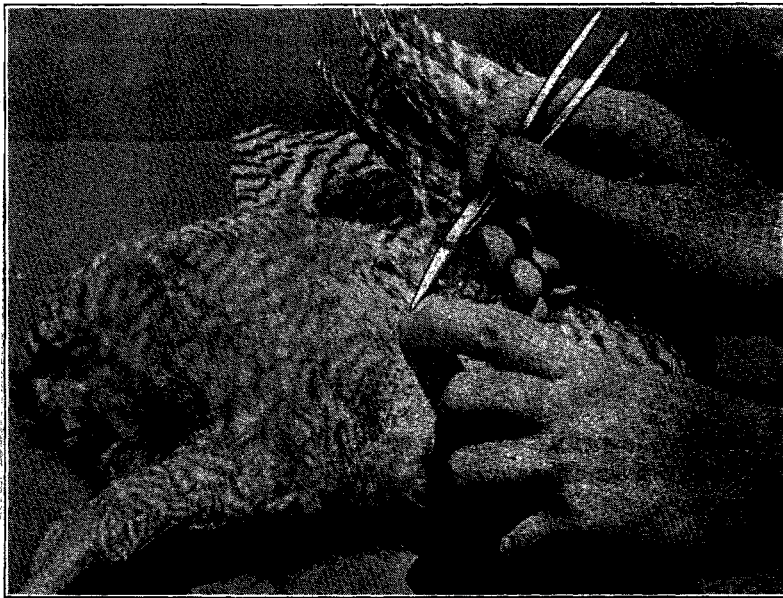


FIG. 3. Locating the last two ribs and making the incision.

The operation may be performed from either side. A few feathers should be plucked just in front of the thigh, thus laying bare a small space just over the last rib. The surrounding feathers should be moistened to make them lie down and not interfere during the operation. The last two ribs should now be located by the forefinger of the left hand, as shown in figure 3. Having located the ribs, pull the skin as far toward the thigh or hip as possible. (This is done so that when the operation is done the incision in the skin will not be over the incision between the ribs. The skin slips back, covering the incision in the flesh, as shown in figure 7.) Then pinch the

skin with the thumb and fore finger to drive out as much blood as possible. Now make the incision, being careful to follow the space between the ribs. If the bird has been properly starved, there will be no danger of cutting the intestines. The first incision need not be over a half inch long. Then take the spreaders and insert as is being done in figure 4. Be sure to

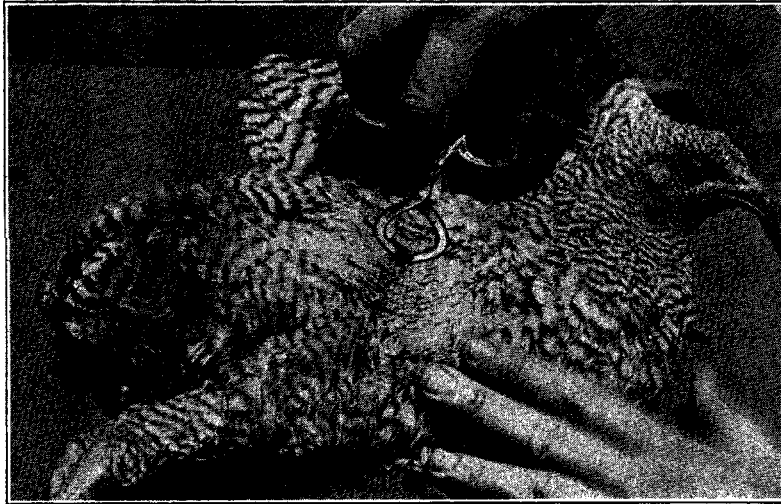


FIG. 4. Inserting the spreaders.

see that each hook of the spreader is against a rib. Spread the incision as far as possible without tearing the flesh. Then follow up between the ribs with the knife, lengthening the incision until the spreaders may be opened to their limit, as shown in figure 5. Then with the hooked end of the probe tear away the thin papery membranes that cover the intestines, as shown in figure 5.

When this has been done and the intestines pushed aside, the testicles will be in plain sight. In a bird of the proper age it will be a rich creamy yellow and about the size and shape of a small bean. In very young chicks whose sex can just be told it is scarcely larger than a grain of wheat.

Just above it the kidneys are located, but cannot be seen in the picture. Passing over the kidneys is a large blood vessel, which constitutes practically the only source of danger during the operation. If this vessel is ruptured, the bird will bleed to death almost before it can be taken from the table.

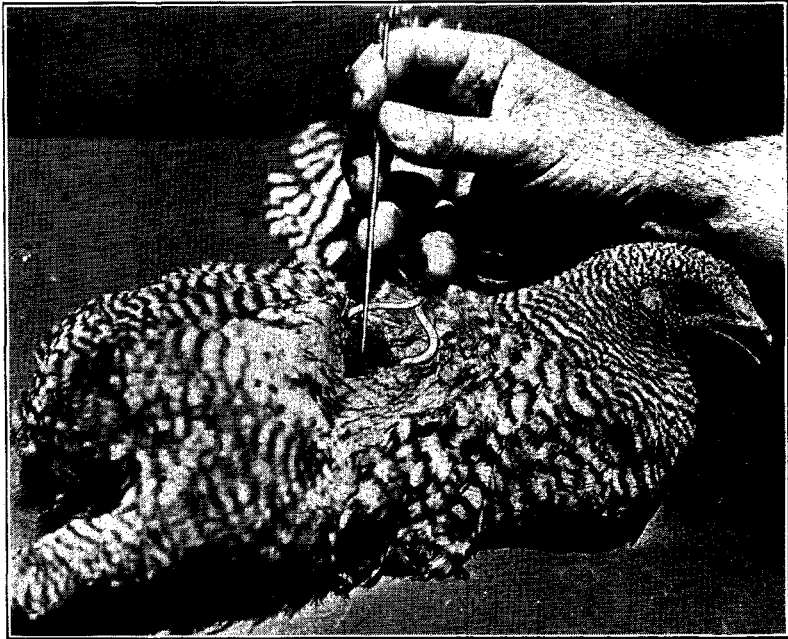


FIG. 5. Tearing away the membrane.

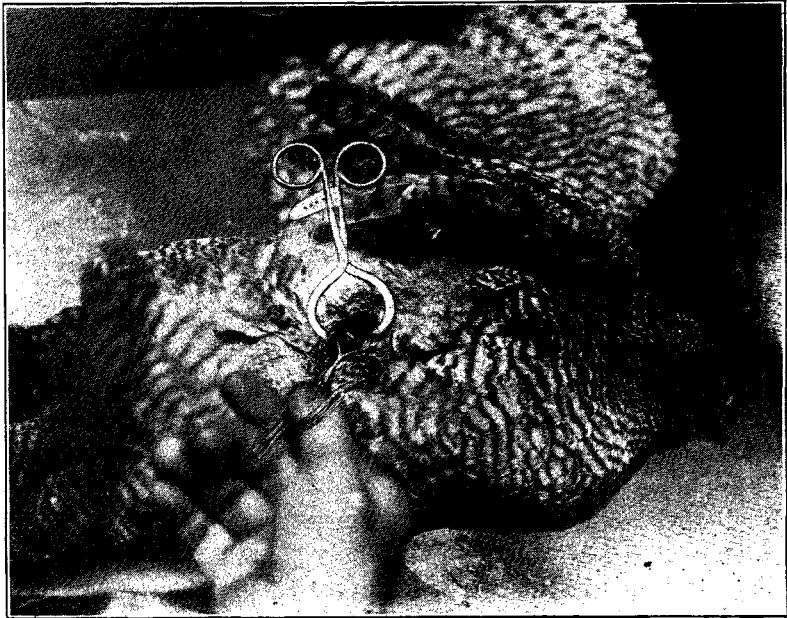


FIG. 6. Removing the testicle.

In figure 6 the spoon forceps are grasping the testicle, which is still in place. The care with which the operator grasps the organ without also grasping the blood vessel, or the tissues surrounding it, constitutes the whole trick of the operation. Having grasped the testicle, twist the forceps around a couple of times and pull them out quickly. Remove the spreaders and allow the skin to cover the opening between the ribs. In ten days there will be nothing left but a shiny scar.

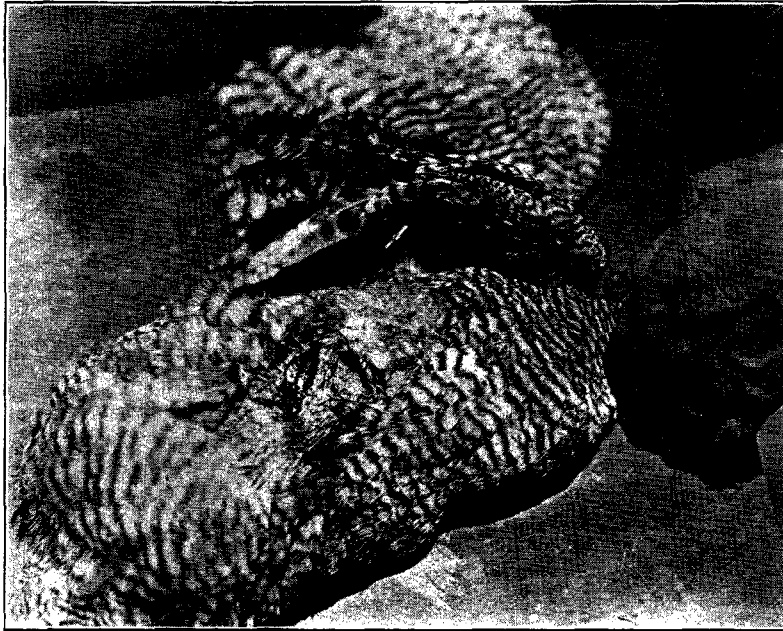


FIG. 7. After the operation.

It is customary to remove both testicles from one side. In that case it is better to remove the lower one first. Sometimes there is a little bleeding which would hide the lower one if the upper one was removed first. Beginners, however, will do well to make two incisions, one on each side, operating at first on a dead bird. After doing this successfully several times, one may tear away the membranes enough to see the second testicle and remove both testicles through the same incision. In fact, one may become so proficient that he can grasp both organs at once and remove them together.

After the operation the birds should be placed in a yard by themselves and fed on soft food for three or four days. After that time give them their regular rations. At the end of a week they may be turned in with the other chickens. A few of them will bloat during the first week. This is not serious, and is remedied by pricking the skin with a coarse needle or with the little blade of a pocket knife.

If the organs have been removed cleanly, the bird will become comparatively quiet and docile. Their combs will stop growing, and they will seldom if ever crow. The hackle, saddle feathers and tail feathers will grow very long and silky.

