
EDITORIAL

Poultry Development

PROGRESS recorded in recent years in the domestic production of eggs is a matter for considerable satisfaction and the Agriculture Department can claim justifiable credit for paving the way for self-sufficiency in eggs. The success of the "day-old chick supply scheme" initiated by the Department in 1957, the wide dissemination of information regarding the deep-litter system of poultry raising and the large-scale immunisation of birds against the lethal Ranikhet disease stand out as the three major factors that have contributed towards the success of poultry development in the island.

Although attempts were made to distribute day-old chicks even prior to 1957, there was considerable prejudice due to the fear of heavy casualties. However, the extension staff was eventually successful in teaching the art of raising day-old chicks and today the demand for day-olds remains unsaturated. With the expanding demand for day-old chicks the hatching capacity of the Department's hatcheries was increased to 143,000 in 1959 while a number of private hatcheries that sprang up in the meantime also contributed in no small measure to the rapid growth of the island's poultry population.

The deep-litter system of poultry raising that was gaining popularity at about the same time proved particularly attractive to city dwellers due to its space and labour saving virtues and the large number of small home-garden poultry units established on this system have become a special feature of poultry development in recent times.

It is well known that Ranikhet disease was the major hazard of poultry farming even as late as the 1950's. Instances were not uncommon where entire flocks were wiped out resulting in heavy financial losses and frustration among poultry farmers. However, the Veterinary Branch of the Agriculture Department has been able to reduce the incidence of this disease to the barest minimum by extending its free immunisation services to all parts of the island.

Scarcity of grain which forms the major component of poultry food and the consequent high price of feed and unattractive price of eggs during glut seasons are perhaps the only obstacles to the further development of Ceylon's poultry industry. A well organised scheme of grain production and the development of better marketing facilities are therefore urgently necessary to safeguard the poultry industry.

With the attainment of self-sufficiency in eggs, our next goal should be the development of a broiler industry as it will open new avenues of employment and possibly reduce the imports of meat. The organisation of a broiler industry should not present any serious difficulties as day-old cockerels are available in large numbers with the expansion of chick-sexing. The establishment of a broiler industry is also likely to have a favourable impact on the price of beef and mutton.