

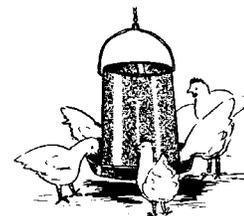


*The University of Georgia*

**Cooperative Extension Service**

*College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences / Athens, Georgia 30602-4356*

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## ***BACKYARD FLOCK TIP . . .***

### **MY FLOCK'S HEALTH IS IN QUESTION: WHAT SHOULD I DO?**

From time to time every small flock owner has a flock that does not do well. The flock may have increased mortality, reduced egg production or exhibit symptoms of disease. When these cases can not be attributed obvious causes, such as predation, it becomes difficult for some people to pinpoint the problem. When this happens some flock owners may not now know where to go to get help and advice on treatment or how to protect the flock from further harm.

Poultry production accounts for approximately 50% of the farm gate receipts in Georgia. It is crucial that commercial and backyard flocks remain disease free. If Georgia were to experience a situation similar to that of California in 2003 (Exotic Newcastle Disease) or Virginia in 2002 (Avian Influenza), the economic impact would be devastating on the agriculture community.

When a flock of birds begins to perform poorly (reduced body weight, reduced egg production, poor feathering, high mortality) but otherwise appears normal, it could be related to the nutritional status of the flock. One of the simplest things back yard flock owners can do is to check to make sure they are feeding a diet that is formulated for their birds. For example if the purpose of the flock is to lay eggs, an owner would want to make sure they are feeding a layer diet. Sometimes owners will tend to provide scratch feed birds that are grown for pleasure or meat. Scratch feed will not provide the bird with all of the nutrients it needs. Backyard birds enjoy scratch feed but it is severely lacking in important nutrients such as protein, vitamins and minerals. In cases such as this they are making an assumption that the birds will be able to roam and locate nutrients from sources such as insects, grasses and seeds. It is best to eliminate scratch feed from the flock's diet. The performance, appearance and health of the flock will be optimized by feeding appropriate formulated chicken diets that can be obtained at any local feed and seed store.



If flock owners have a problem and have ensured that the birds are getting the proper nutrition but still have a problem, then where do they go and what do they do? In these cases it will save owners a lot of time, frustration and grief if they call their county agent. The county agent can then help the owner get in touch with a poultry veterinarian who will be able to examine any sick birds or recent mortality and recommend a course of treatment. When contacting the county agent or the poultry veterinarian there is some information the owner will need to have in hand to ensure an accurate and timely diagnosis. This would include but is not limited to:

### **PUTTING KNOWLEDGE TO WORK**

The University of Georgia and Ft. Valley State College, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and counties of the state cooperating.  
The Cooperative Extension service officers educational programs, assistance and materials to all people without regard to race, color, national origin, age, sex or disability  
An equal opportunity/affirmative action organization committed to a diverse work force..

- C How many birds have died?
- C How long have the birds been ill?
- C How many birds do you have?
- C What is the age of the birds?
- C Are they birds exhibiting any symptoms?
- C Breed?
- C Have the birds been vaccinated and if so, against what diseases?
- C Have any medications been used?
- C Have any new birds been introduced into the flock recently?
- C Have any recent visitors to your facilities had birds with similar problems?
- C What feed has been provided to the birds?
- C Have any changes in management been made recently or around the time the birds became ill?

The county agent can also help an owner locate the closest lab to examine the sick or dead birds if needed. In Georgia the birds can be taken to a lab in the Georgia Poultry Laboratory Network or to the University of Georgia Poultry Diagnostic Research Center.

The Georgia Poultry Laboratory Network is a series of state laboratories whose purpose is to identify and help prevent the outbreak of poultry diseases in the state. The main facility is located in Oakwood, GA, but there are branch laboratories located throughout the state. The branch laboratories are located in:

- C Bowdon – Carroll County
- C Camilla – Mitchell County
- C Canton – Cherokee County
- C Carnesville – Franklin County
- C Dalton – Whitfield County
- C Douglas – Coffee County
- C Forsyth – Monroe County
- C Montezuma – Macon County
- C Glennville – Tattnall County

Your county agent can help you locate the contact information for the GA Poultry Laboratory location that is closest to you. The contact information can also be found on the internet at [http://www.agr.state.ga.us/html/georgia\\_poultry\\_diagnostic.html](http://www.agr.state.ga.us/html/georgia_poultry_diagnostic.html).

Veterinarians in the Department of Avian Medicine at the University of Georgia are located at the Poultry Diagnostic Research Center and are available to examine sick or dead birds. Again, your county agent can help you get in touch with these veterinarians and more information can be found at <http://hospital.vet.uga.edu/avian>. Examination of sick or dead birds is free. If additional testing is needed to determine the cause of the problem, some fees will be applied.

It is important to remember that these labs are not like a normal veterinarian's office and therefore the birds will not be treated. Instead the sick birds taken to these facilities will be humanely euthanized and the veterinarian will conduct a post-mortem examination. It is possible to take birds that have recently died, but these birds need to be bagged and placed in a refrigerator or cooler, otherwise post-mortem examination will not be possible. When dead birds are used for examination, it is best to use birds that have been dead 24 hours or less and **not frozen**. Birds that have been dead longer and frozen make it more difficult to diagnose the problem. It is important to talk to the veterinarian first because in some cases it may be necessary for the veterinarian to visit your farm to make an accurate diagnosis.

It is important to both the poultry industry and back yard flock owners to keep avian diseases under control in Georgia. During the recent Exotic Newcastle Disease outbreak in California both commercial and back yard flocks were destroyed to get the disease under control. This is something that neither poultry companies nor back yard flock owners in Georgia would care to experience.



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“Your local County Extension Agent is a source of more information on this subject.”