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Be conservative for feeding success

A conservative feeding approach to breeder flocks offers benefits, says Cobb's *Philippe Gouault*

One of the most critical periods in the life of a breeder flock is from the point of light stimulation to peak production. Achieving good peak production sets you on the right path to an outstanding breeder performance.

When maximising peak production there are three critical periods to concentrate on: Before the onset of production, from production at 5% to 35% and from 35% to peak.

Before onset of production

From light stimulation to onset of production, birds should be fed according to bodyweight. By the time 5% daily total egg production is reached, daily feed allocation should be between 125g and 130g, to produce the right body composition.

Body condition should also be considered and at the onset of production there should be sufficient fat reserves for good peak production and to sustain persistency.

Opting for a conservative feeding programme from light stimulation to onset of production will help with female bodyweight control, especially with unconditioned birds.

A conservative approach also helps with egg weight control, cuts mortality at onset of production (see graph), prevents the reproductive system from being over-stimulated and controls male weights. This is because males will steal feed from



Sudden changes in the time taken to eat feed may be an indication of a problem.

the females until 26-27 weeks.

By allocating about 125g of feed a bird a day at this point, it is then possible to distribute an extra 43g of feed from the onset of production until the point of peak feed intake (about 70% egg production).

From 5% to 35% daily production

Once the birds reach 5% production feed increases should be according to egg production. This period requires small feed increases, as a conservative feeding programme helps to control bodyweight and mortality from conditions such as egg peritonitis.

The feed programme can be calculated by deducting actual feed at 5% from peak feed. Calculating an amount to increase for each 5% increase in egg production allows

you to follow the performance of the birds closely.

Increasing feed by 2g/5% in the early stages up to 20% daily egg production and following this with 3g increments up to 35% daily production is usually effective (table 1). This provides control over bodyweight and body composition to allow all birds time to mature and come into lay.

The females should increase weight by about 20% from onset of production until peak production. Without consistent growth during this period they will draw energy from their reserves and production persistency will be hit.

From 35% to peak production

Once the flock has reached 35% production most birds will be in

TABLE 1: SUGGESTED FEED INCREASES		
DAILY PROD (%)	FEED INCREMENT (G)	FEED CUMULATIVE (G)
10	2	2
15	2	4
20	2	6
25	3	9
30	3	12
35	3	15
40	4	19
45	4	23
50	4	27
55	4	31
60	4	35
65	4	39
70	4	43

lay. To support this egg production, birds require larger feed increases, so it is crucial that the daily egg production is monitored closely.

Therefore, from 50% production until 70% production, the increases for every 5% will be of 4g (table 1).

This programme will provide the birds with about 43g of extra feed between 5% and 70% of daily production.

It is important that you reach the peak feed intake well before peak production because large amounts of feed given 10 days before peak are more likely to be partitioned into bodyweight rather than into egg production.

The trend of weekly production should be a guide as to when peak may occur; good flocks tend to have larger weekly increases (table 2).

A second indicator of performance is the time taken for the birds to consume the whole feed allowance. Normally, a flock will take 2.5-3 hours in peak production and no longer than four hours with mashed feed. If the time taken to eat the feed changes suddenly, this may indicate a problem.

The best indicator of flock potential is bodyweight. Birds should be weighed weekly to give a clear picture of their progression. The bodyweight of the females in good performing flocks increases from the onset of lay to peak production by 18%. In the first four weeks of production 100g a week is ideal, reducing to 40g in peak production.

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TABLE 2: WEEKLY PRODUCTION	
Age (weeks)	Weekly increase
24 to 25	15%
25 to 26	30%
26 to 27	20%
27 to 28	10%
28 to 29	5%
29 to 30	1%

