The Importance of a Complete Layer Feed for Laying Hens

WRITTEN BY: *MIKAYLA BURATO, PHD*

If you are like me, you couldn't resist the fluffy little chicks this past spring, and now time has flown by and you have laying hens! If you are enjoying some farm fresh eggs, or if your hens are around 18 weeks of age, it is imperative that you provide them with a complete layer feed. A complete layer feed has balanced amounts of nutrients and calcium that are needed to support bird health and consistent egg production, without additional supplementation.

To ensure that your hens can consume all the essential nutrients that a complete layer feed offers, the feed must make up at least 90% of the hen's diet. Therefore, if your hens are free ranging, offer their complete layer feed in the morning before they are able to scratch and peck for goodies around the yard. If you again are like me, you also like to give your hens treats, such as mealworms, pumpkins, or cabbage, but these treats should never replace a complete feed.

As the days shorten, your hens will seasonally slow down their egg production. In fact, chickens require 14-16 hours of light per day to maintain egg production. You do not need to make any changes or offer any additional supplements to your flock in the fall or winter, if you are already offering a complete layer feed to your laying hens. Your bird's feed intake will slightly increase as we go into the winter, so that they can generate more body heat. Therefore, it is best to have plenty of feed available so that there are no pecking order problems. If your flock feels as if there is a limited supply of feed, dominant birds will act like they are eating Thanksgiving dinner every day and gorge to ensure they have plenty to eat. This can leave other birds without adequate access to feed and the proper nutrition they need.

Another important step to keep your chickens comfortable in the cold weather is to check for wet bedding, cover areas where strong winds may enter the coop, and ensure their drinking water stays clean and unfrozen.

Below are options of complete layer pelleted feeds that we have available:

- Co-op 16% Complete Layer Pellets: $16.29 / 50 lb bag
- Purina Layena 16% Pellet: $21.99 / 50 lb bag
- Tucker Milling 16% Layer Mini Pellet: $12.99 / 50 lb bag

Come visit one of our AgCentral locations to get your flock the right nutrition they need to produce some farm fresh eggs (availability may vary by location)!