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by LOHMANN

THE HIDDEN ART OF REARING:

HOW WE IMPRINT THE IMMUNE SYSTEM OF LAYING HENS



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 When we think about managing the performance of laying hens, we often focus on the production house - feed formulation, lighting schedules, egg curves.

But in reality, the true foundation for a successful laying cycle is laid much earlier, and in a much quieter way.

It starts on day one, in the rearing house, often unnoticed, but absolutely crucial: **this is the time when we imprint the immune system.**



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Yes, we feed chicks to help them grow. Yes, we monitor bodyweights and uniformity. But what we're really doing—if we look a little deeper—is programming their bodies for a life of resilience.



We are building the immune system through feeding, gut development, and management.



And if we get that right, we unlock the potential for high performance, low mortality, and longer laying cycles, even in today's challenging cage-free environments.



Why the First Six Weeks Matter So Much



6 weeks

Chicks start life with minimal immunity, relying briefly on maternal antibodies. **The first six weeks are crucial for rapid digestive and immune development.** Proper feeding and hydration stimulate gut growth; failure here can cause lifelong health issues.

Feed as a Tool for Training, Not Just Growth



Early feeding is more than achieving target weights—it's about proper organ and system development. **Feed should promote stomach and gizzard growth and gut motility. We train birds to process nutrients efficiently, which strengthens the immune system.**

From Week 6 to 15: Storage Training and Intake Control

As birds mature, they learn to regulate intake. Developing crop capacity and a strong gizzard prepares them for future energy needs. **Feed during this period should balance energy, protein, and fibre to support steady growth and digestive health.**



Managing the Invisible: Transitions, Stress, and Environmental Triggers

During rearing transitions, unseen changes like hormone shifts and new environments can affect performance. **Keeping feeding routines consistent eases adaptation and maintains immune function.**



The Long Game: Peak Lay and Beyond

At peak production, all early investments pay off. Continued attention to diet, environment, and **bird uniformity keeps the digestive and immune systems strong, ensuring ongoing egg quality and bird resilience.**





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Final Thoughts

Invisible management, early gut stimulation, and strategic feeding aren't just buzzwords.



They're our best tools for giving hens a healthy, productive, and long life—especially in cage-free systems, where the margin for error is small, and the expectations are high.

If we want layers that go the distance—90, 100 even 120 weeks—we need to start thinking like trainers, not just caretakers. We're not just raising birds. We're training athletes. It's a marathon not a sprint!

