Recycling (force molting) of commercial laying flocks has been practiced since the turn of the century. Wholesale application of the principle didn't arrive, though, until the early sixties. Since then, its use has steadily increased almost every year.

With the increased use of the practice and its impact upon the egg industry, the California Crop and Livestock Reporting Service began to collect molt statistics in 1967. The U.S.D.A. followed in 1970 with a 17-state sampling.

Monthly reports to egg producers ask the questions: How many hens are currently being force molted? How many hens have completed a force molt? Both of these questions are subject to interpretation as they do not define what "being force molted" means. We would guess that various producers might interpret this question to include flocks, anywhere from four to eight weeks into the molt.

We also see a misunderstanding of what the reports mean. For example, the March 23, 1983 "Eggs, Chickens and Turkeys" report states that on the first of March, 4.3% of the hens and pullets of laying age are being molted and 18.7% have completed a molt. This is commonly misinterpreted that only 23% (4.3% + 18.7%) of the hens in the U.S. are molted. The remaining birds are either too young to molt or will never be molted.

If all layers were molted at 65 weeks of age and sold at 105 weeks, the average number of layers in a molt plus layers completing a molt would only be about 44.5% of the total. Recycling for a third cycle would increase this percentage.

If we assume that 44.5% of the hens in a "typical" molt program are post-molt and 55.5% are non-molted pullets, we would estimate that 94% of the hens in California and 53% of the hens in the U.S. are molted sometime during their life. This, of course, is only an educated guess since there are no statistics to prove this.

The use of molting in California is a routine practice used on practically all flocks. The only variations we see in its use are associated with the age at molt relative to the egg market and some increase in double molting during extended periods of depressed prices.

On the other hand, molting in the U.S. is still looked upon by many producers as an "emergency" answer to their inability to afford new pullets. This is why we see more fluctuation in the U.S. year-to-year use and in its use throughout the year. The graph below illustrates the relative amount of hens in a molt by month for California and the U.S. for 1970-81.

![CALIFORNIA & U.S. HENS IN A MOLT 1970-81](image)

Even though both curves appear to be similar, the peak in California's molting rate in June reflects a 23% increase in the number of birds in a molt compared to the annual average as opposed to a 35% increase in June for the U.S. as a whole.

In both cases, though, the intent is to get flocks out of production during the usual low egg price months. The lowest prices for 1978-82 are in the months of:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>% of Average Price (Calif.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the past three years, we've had what many consider to be one of the most depressed periods the industry has ever seen. During this time many poultrymen have been forced into skipping broods and into multiple molting. The age of the flock has gotten older, representing loss in equity.

We feel that the maintenance of a strong, well-planned replacement policy is one of the best ways of assuring the long-term success of a company. Every effort must be made to maintain your basic replacement program.

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cc/6-15-83