Won in Spring, Earned in Autumn

Racing Pigeon Autumn Loft Maintenance & Health Care Protocol

> *"Races are won in the spring, but they are earned in the autumn. Quality plumage and health built during the main molt dictate race day performance."*

1. NUTRITION & FEATHER PRODUCTION

- [ ] **High-Protein Molting Mix:** Transition grain blend to 16%–18% crude protein (rich in legumes, peas, tares, and lentils) to supply raw building blocks for keratin.
- [ ] **Essential Oil Seeds:** Add 10%–15% linseed (flax), safflower, hemp, and sunflower seeds daily to produce sleek, water-repellent, and flexible flight shafts.
- [ ] **Sulfur Amino Acid Fortification:** Top-dress feed 2–3 times weekly with brewer's yeast or methionine/cystine supplements bound with garlic or wheat germ oil.
- [ ] **Daily Fresh Grit & Minerals:** Provide fresh red stone grit, mineral blocks, and crushed oyster shells in clean, dedicated containers to feed blood quill development.
- [ ] **Grit Hygiene Maintenance:** Empty and replace grit dishes every 2–3 days to prevent atmospheric dust contamination and moisture absorption.

2. LOFT ENVIRONMENT & MICROCLIMATE MANAGEMENT

- [ ] **Control Loft Humidity:** Keep relative loft humidity strictly below 75% to prevent outbreak of *coccidiosis* oocysts and respiratory *aspergillosis* fungal spores.
- [ ] **Floor & Perch Hygiene:** Scrape roosting perches daily or maintain dry, clean floor dressing to prevent damp droppings from adhering to molting feet and tail rectrices.
- [ ] **Draft-Free Airflow:** Maintain high-level ceiling exhaust to remove moist air while ensuring roosting perches are shielded from direct cold air currents.
- [ ] **Weekly Morning Bathing:** Offer a bath once weekly strictly on sunny mornings using bath salts or apple cider vinegar so feathers dry completely prior to nightfall.
- [ ] **Prompt Bath Removal:** Discard bath water after 2–3 hours to stop molting birds from drinking fouled bath water and spreading intestinal parasites.
- [ ] **Weatherproofing Inspection:** Check roof panels, vents, and wall seams for rain leaks and drafts ahead of heavy autumn precipitation.

3. HEALTH CHECKS & DISEASE PREVENTION

- [ ] **Pre-Molt Diagnostic Screening:** Submit pooled 3-day fecal samples and crop swabs for lab analysis (worms, coccidia, canker, and salmonella) before heavy wing molt.
- [ ] **Avoid Harsh Chemical Treatments:** Refrain from strong, non-essential medication during active quill growth to prevent structural *fret marks* or quill deformities.
- [ ] **Gut Flora Optimization:** Add raw apple cider vinegar (5–10 mL per liter) or organic acidifiers to water 2 days weekly to maintain a healthy gut pH.
- [ ] **Natural Antimicrobials:** Apply garlic oil or oregano extract to grains to support natural immunity against opportunistic intestinal bacteria.

4. REST & BEHAVIORAL MANAGEMENT

- [ ] **Suspend Compulsory Flying:** Halt forced exercise flights; permit open-door free loft access on fair days so birds avoid wing muscle strain during flight regrowth.
- [ ] **Gentle Handling Protocol:** Minimize handling to prevent pain, damage, or accidental bleeding from sensitive growing blood feathers.
- [ ] **Separate Cocks & Hens:** Separate sexes immediately post-season to stop late breeding/nesting and channel body energy into molting.