

The Case for Lavender

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Self blue has been around for a long time in certain breeds of bantams in the U.S., breeds like Old English Game and D'Anvers for example. In recent years this color has become very popular in other breeds such as Silkies, Orpingtons, Ameraucanas, Araucanas, Faverolles, and probably others I'm not aware of. Bantams have been used to develop self blue large fowl in some of these breeds as well. Nearly all of these project breeders are using the term "lavender" interchangeably with self blue, in fact the vast majority prefer the genetically more precise term lavender. The Silkie breeders recently applied for and were granted standard recognition for this variety, but they were told they must use the term self blue instead of lavender. They acquiesced in order to get their new variety into the Standard, but reportedly would like to have the variety name changed to lavender for their breed at some point in the future, which would of course create a dual nomenclature for the variety within the Standard.

Many have already lined up for and against the idea of two names for one variety, with strong opinions on both sides. Since the idea is controversial, the Ameraucana Breeders Club conducted an unofficial poll on their internet discussion forum. Only Ameraucana Club members were allowed to vote. The choices were, 1) Lavender only, 2) Self Blue only, 3) Lavender/Self Blue only, 4) Self Blue/Lavender only, 5) Lavender or either compromise, 6) Don't Care, or 7) Other. As of this writing date the results have been rather astonishing. Choice number 1, Lavender only, has received 27 of the 31 votes cast. Choice number 5, Lavender or a compromise using the term lavender, has received 3 votes. Only one vote has been cast for self blue only, and nobody cast a vote for "don't care" or "other." Landslide? So what are the arguments for and against?

Traditionalists have said two names for one variety is just too confusing. Show secretaries, judges, newer fanciers, and others would have to deal with yet another communication problem. Another argument in favor of retaining self blue only is that we already have a perfectly good name, so why change it? Why muddy the waters? Self blue is the name we have always used so why change anything?

On the other side of the issue, advocates for using the term lavender say they do not wish to change what is already in the standard. Nothing would change for breeds that already have a self blue variety and wish to keep that name for it. But breed clubs who develop new varieties should be able to designate their preference for terminology so long as it is reasonable. Another point: There is plenty of precedent for dual terminology in the Standard already, so what's the harm? For example, all the three major Brahma varieties are called something other than the recognized name for their colors. Gray Japanese are modified birchens. Black Tailed Red is described differently for at least four different breeds. It makes little sense to say we can't figure out that self blue and lavender are one and the same, especially when most novice poultry keepers, according to many internet message boards, are more familiar with the term lavender than they are with self blue already. In fact, there is probably more confusion between "blue" and "self blue" than there is between lavender and self blue. Blue and lavender/self blue are different genetically – so why is it necessary they have a confusingly similar name?

Making decisions on the basis of "that's the way we have always done it before" is neither wise nor inclusive. If we truly wish to expand membership, it is time we gave member organizations a say in what amounts to rather trivial and simple requests like this one. In this case, the request hurts no one, changes nothing important, and leaves members with the idea that they actually do have a say in the workings of the organization. And what could be wrong with that?