

The Turkey Times

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When is a farm not a farm? When it's a factory

By Bob Neal

Perhaps nothing distinguishes small farms from factory farms more than the way animals are treated.

Everyone who raises animals for a living insists that the welfare of the animals is a high priority, but every now and again complaints arise about how factory-farm animals are treated.

The truth may be simply that it's impossible to treat animals humanely on a factory farm.

It isn't that factory farmers don't care about their animals. It is they have bought into a system, created by government and large corporations, that forces them to put virtually every other factor ahead of the welfare of their animals.

The system, in a nutshell, seeks to put food onto consumers' tables at the lowest possible supermarket price, pushing aside many costs, such as food inspection and environmental safety, for others to pay.

In animal agriculture, the past century has been a drumroll of ever less space and time for farm animals and, consequently, ever less work per animal by their human keepers.

For example, indoor Turkeys a decade ago were allotted up to 4 square feet a bird. For life. Then, growers found they could reduce that space to 2 square feet by goosing up the antibiotics fed to Turkeys and by accepting slightly higher mortality (from stress due to crowding).

The pattern applies throughout animal agriculture. To make it possible to sell beef for less than \$5 a pound, factory farms pack cattle onto feed lots on which the manure builds up — and eventually

over downed animals whose carcasses aren't always removed — until the stench permeates everything nearby. We first encountered this stench in 1985 riding into Denver on a train (with sealed windows). Factories finish beef critters several months earlier than is best for flavor and nutrition, also keeping down price at the supermarket.

To hold bacon — America's newest fave

food, according to CBS News — at less than \$4 a pound, pork producers have put their animals into confinement. Sows birth their litters in crates so small the sows cannot turn around. They never see the light of day. They are fin-

ished for slaughter several weeks earlier than the 5 1/2 months required to bring an outdoor hog to market.

We first visited a confinement hog farm in 1978 in Indiana. Even though the farm was small and clean and the farmer conscientious, the animals had no room to move about and saw light only from the fluorescents overhead.

To make it possible to sell eggs for less than \$2 a dozen, factory farms pack laying hens into batteries of cages in which the hens have no room to fully spread their wings — a cage usually

houses five hens, about 66 square inches per hen — and through which the manure drops from cages above. This system is the industry standard for egg production. When you walk into a laying barn, the ammonia from thousands of hens burns your eyes and stings your nostrils.

Most broiler chickens, even those raised in Maine, are never outdoors. Their growers proudly proclaim that their birds are "cage-free," but so are the broilers raised by Perdue and Tyson. The point is that the birds are confined inside with little freedom of movement (as little as 100 square inches of floor space per broiler) and no access to natural light or forage.

Frequently, factory-farmed broilers are killed at 35 days of age, before their feathers have fully grown in and, certainly, before their meat has developed taste or texture.

No wonder so much conventional poultry has to be augmented with "flavor enhancers" and that the trade press publishes articles about the problem of "pale, soft meat." But you can buy factory-grown chicken for less than \$2 a pound.

Most animal farmers today don't feed their animals. They throw a switch to turn on lights in the houses, then throw another switch to turn on the automatic feeding equipment.

They check the barns, looking more for equipment problems than for down or distressed animals.

They clean the barns less for the animals' (Continued on Page 4)

THIS?



OR THIS?



When times get hard, it's time to make improvements

In hard times, we look always for opportunity. So it is, with the economy down, that The Turkey Farm is looking to improve itself for the near future.

To that end, we have seven goals for 2009, some carried over from 2008 (see article below), others developed from constant reappraisal of our needs.

Goal No. 1. For 2009, our major goal will be to **replace the roof and insulation in our brooder house**. Built in 1992 with a loan from Coastal Enterprises Inc., the brooder is where Turkeys spend at least the first five weeks of their lives. At five weeks, they have feathers and size enough to enable them to live outdoors, although they still need access to dry and calm shelter for several more weeks.

Temperature in the brooder begins at 99 degrees when the Turkeys are a day old. We lower the heat weekly until it hits a high of 70. When the stoves aren't fired, the brooder is at ambient temperature.

The combination of these temperature swings and normal wear and tear, along with some help from grackles, has made the roof porous and the insulation uneven.

We plan to undertake this repair in late August and have lined up a builder. We expect it to cost \$3,000 to \$5,000.

Goal No. 2. A similar but not so urgent project is to finish **replacing a shingle roof on our plant and farmstore** with a metal roof. This job can be done in a week or

Goals 2009

so, and we expect it to cost about \$2,500. The builder who is replacing the brooder roof will put down the roof on the plant.

Goal No. 3. Build a **new floor for our booth at the Fryeburg Fair**. This will be our 20th year at Fryeburg, and we want to make a better (and safer) floor by building 41 four-by-four raised floor pieces. We'll frame each piece with 2-by-4s on edge and then cover each frame with a four-foot-square sheet of plywood.

This will make a more stable floor and get us away from screwing plywood onto pallets each year as we set up at the fair. It also will let us "bury" all gas and electrical lines under the floor.

Total cost is expected to be about \$800.

Goal No. 4. Our 27-year-old barn isn't large enough to store all our equipment, so we want to make a **sideless shelter for the ovens and other large pieces** we use at Fryeburg. We have the posts and lumber for the job and expect it to cost an additional \$800 to \$1,200.

Goal No. 5. We also need to **rebuild at least one shelter** on range. Last fall, our crew carefully took apart the shelter, leaving the posts and some frame in place. We just need to reframe the roof and reattach the roofing to complete this job, at a probable cost of \$500.

Goal No. 6. One of our ranges still has very limited shelter for the Turkeys, so we want to **build a new shelter** of about 400 square feet on that range.

Completing this shelter would let us use that range for a longer part of the year, easing by a bit the burden on the other seven ranges. As it is, we can't put birds on that range until they are fully mature because the natural shelter is inadequate to protect them from the worst weather. This project is likely to cost \$1,500.

Goal No. 7. This is a contingent goal, one that we will undertake only if three key factors come together. The goal is to **expand our cooler-freezer capacity** by installing a free-standing unit next to our plant.

We have adequate, but only just, cooling capacity, but if we were hit as we were in 2007 with more than one equipment failure during the Thanksgiving rush, we could be in a very tough spot.

The contingencies that must come together for this to happen are, first, the availability of a used unit large enough for our needs, second, the lowering of feed prices so we can return to our historic operating margins, and, third, the ability to pay for the unit and its installation without incurring debt beyond this season.

This project would cost a minimum of \$7,000 and could easily hit \$10,000.

Goals for 2008 were largely unmet but show up in new form on the 2009 list

Our goals process was interrupted last season by two events: Feed prices continued to climb so we had to divert more and more resources to paying an \$84,000 feed bill (up from \$36,000 in 2006) and, we had to hire and train all new crew because we had no experienced hands on the farm to work on the goals.

So, we suspended the larger goals and decided to look at them again this year. To refresh your memory, we had last year hoped to expand cooler-freezer capacity and work space, to make a bit more room outside for our birds, to build

two new shelters on range, to narrow our markets so we don't have to increase the number of Turkeys we raise, to hire more help and to reroof our primary brooder house and try to catch up on other deferred maintenance.

Because we lost our key employee last year, we suspended the freezer-cooler and work space, new shelters, brooder roof and other maintenance.

But we did expand four of our pens, about as far as they can be expanded, by adding 9,000 square feet, enough for 90 birds. We also hired added help, includ-

ing someone to perform the labor (but not the management tasks) of our farm manager, who quit on July 30.

Early in 2008, we reluctantly discontinued wholesaling to five accounts in Southern Maine, where sales had been flat or falling for a couple of years. Having decided to limit our flocks to 3,300 birds a year, we had to give up sales somewhere. We define our new market area as New Sharon to Brunswick to Bar Harbor.

Some of last year's goals are included on the list of projects for 2009.

Community Supported Agriculture signups running at record pace

Early subscriptions to Community Supported Agriculture are running ahead of previous years.

In the second week of April, we had sold 43 shares to 42 people, raising a total of \$7,550 for the farm.

At this point last year, we had sold 27 shares for \$5,050.

And, in 2007, when the upward trend got into earnest

gear, we had sold 24 shares for \$3,900.

We take this as evidence of support for

The payout		
Share	Interest	Yield
\$100	6 %	\$106
150	8 %	162
200	10 %	220
250	12 %	280
300	14 %	342
350	16 %	406
400	18 %	472

the ideas that underlie CSA. We also take it as support for what we're doing with our farm.

Community Supported Agriculture brings the farmer and eater closer by giving each a direct stake in the other's life.

By paying ahead for some of your food, you support the farm with your money and your confidence in its ability to produce. That confidence gives us tremendous emotional support when, as now, we are wading about in the mud taking care of their animals or, as later, when the days morph into evenings and the evenings into nights before the "day's" work is done.

And, the investments obviate some bank financing. The more CSA shares we receive early in the year, the longer we can operate before tapping our line of credit.

Not to mention, it lets us plan because it gives us a good idea ahead of time about demand will be for retail items. We hope that sharers draw satisfaction from their investment, knowing they can influence the decisions and perspective of the people growing their food and getting a reduced price on their food.

By way of appreciation, we add a bit of interest to your investment, and the interest rate also rises with the size of your investment (see chart).

We will use the money from CSA to undertake the first six projects — and the seventh if share purchases are wildly beyond our expectations — for the projects listed in the lead article on Page 2.

To join, just fill out the form below and send it in, with your check. You may begin drawing right away on your share.

Work for Turkey

The Turkey Farm is offering four work shares in 2009.

We had suspended work shares for a while because the program wasn't working well for us. Now, we're ready to give it another try.

For two days' work on the farm, sharers receive \$162 in products from the farm. That is the yield from a \$150 share.

The dates and the work available are:

June 22/23, work and repair around farm

Aug. 3/4, work and repair around farm

Oct. 12/13, tear down from Fryeburg Fair

Nov. 21/ 22, pack Thanksgiving orders

Nov. 30, restore order after Thanksgiving rush

You may sign up for any two of those days. To sign up, contact us at 778-2889 or at turkeyfarm@gwi.net. We can tell you then about dress, tools, etc.

You may start drawing on your share after one day of work. Interest of \$12 is added to the share after the second day.

Market note

The winter farmers market season at Fort Andross in Brunswick ends on April 25.

The following Saturday, May 2, we return to the Crystal Spring Farmers Market on the Pleasant Hill Road in Brunswick.

That market is open 8:30 am. to 12:20 p.m. every Saturday through Oct. 31. We will be there every week except Oct. 3 and 10, when we'll be at the Fryeburg Fair.

See you at market.

Shares can work even in absentia

Every season, a few sharers disappear from view (ours, at least), leaving proceeds coming from their shares.

In the past, we have kept those shares open for a year after they expired, in case the sharer wanted to return and renew. If she didn't, the share simply vanished.

Now, we have figured out a better way to handle those few shares left hanging.

We'll hold them for three months, after expiry, in case the sharer wants to renew, but after that, we'll donate in Turkey any unused principal on the share. We will take Turkey or other items from our inventory to the Good Shepherd Food Bank in Auburn.

This idea comes from long-time sharer

Neil Brown of Norway, who asked us several years ago to pick a charity at the end of the season to receive the undrawn part of his share. With his approval, we chose Good Shepherd, and we have taken not only his unused proceeds but other items from our supply to Auburn.

The folks at Good Shepherd are always appreciative, and there is no question about the need for what they do.

Sharers may even want to designate part of their share proceeds for Good Shepherd, and that's OK with us. We'll carry the items to Good Shepherd, and Good Shepherd's bean counters will send you a receipt so you know that we carried out our end of the bargain.

CSA Order Form

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Fill out and send to The Turkey Farm, 219 Mile Hill Road, New Sharon, Maine 04955.

Please sign me up for the following share in Community Supported Agriculture:

(circle) \$100 \$150 \$200 \$250 \$300 \$350 \$400
(I have enclosed a check for that amount)

Name _____

Address _____

Town _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____ E-mail _____

Low price of meat can mean low everything else for farm animals

(Continued from page 1)

sake than for the sake of humans who can no longer stand up in the barn because of the height of the manure buildup.

All of this has created a very efficient system. Human time per animal is low. Space per animal is low. Cost at the supermarket is low.

But to keep supermarket prices low, factory farms engage in practices that grandma would never have thought of, let alone permitted on her farm. In this gigantic sys-

tem there is very little accountability.

You may recall that a decade ago, Hannaford stores announced it would no longer sell eggs from the world's largest brown-egg farm, DeCoster's, in Turner, because of issues of labor relations.

But last month, when that same farm, under a bunch of new names, was accused of cruelty to animals, who should show up on the list of customers of the farm but Hannaford itself? And Egglund's Best, the supposedly "better" egg from better fed and better treated hens than most.

Can you say "egg on their face?"

There is an alternative, and it won't surprise you that we believe our traditional farm is square in the middle of that alternative.

We traditional farmers raise the

modern Turkey (selectively bred for large thighs and breasts) pretty much as grandma raised hers.

Our method involves more space, hence an expense for fencing and shelters but no expense for a huge barn.

Our method involves more time, which means we spend more minutes with each Turkey than does a factory farmer and also means that we spend more money (because the birds live longer) on feed than does a factory farmer.

Our method also involves a different attitude toward our animals. They come here because humans need them for food. They give everything for us, and we can do no less while they are here.

Turkeys live on average twice longer on our farm than they would in the wild.

If you're looking for meat from well-treated animals, check out the chart below. It could open your eyes to the differences between factory farms and the rest of us.

ANIMAL FARMING COMPARISONS

	<u>ANIMAL</u>	<u>TRADITIONAL</u>	<u>CONFINEMENT</u>
WHERE IS EACH ANIMAL RAISED?	Turkeys Broilers Pigs Cattle	Outdoors full time Outdoors full time Outdoors full time Outdoors, grazing	Indoors, maybe with door open Indoors, maybe with door open Crates in a barn Feed-lots, fed grain rations
HOW MUCH SPACE DOES IT HAVE?	Turkeys Broilers Pigs Cattle	100+ square feet 30 square feet 200+ square feet about one acre	2 square feet 100 square inches 8 square feet one-twentieth acre
AT WHAT AGE IS IT SLAUGHTERED?	Turkeys Broilers Pigs Cattle	17-28 weeks 7-10 weeks 5 1/2 months 21-24 months	10-17 weeks 5-7 weeks 4 months or less 14-16 months
HOW IS IT TREATED?	Turkeys Broilers Pigs Cattle	Respectfully Respectfully Respectfully, often named Respectfully, often named	As commodities, sometimes roughly As commodities, sometimes roughly Largely ignored Largely ignored

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please forward