

The Turkey Times

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We're looking at an unanticipated future

By Bob Neal

Plans were already in the works to scale back our farm in 2010, but cutbacks became mandatory on Feb. 7.

That afternoon, I suffered a heart attack, and everything changed. Permanently.

For the farm, this means a reduction by 40 percent in the number of Turkeys we raise each year. For my wife, Marilyn, and me it means significant changes in how we live.

The biggest change

To reduce the farm's activities, we eliminated wholesaling. Last year, we cut up 700 Turkeys for wholesale and raised another 600 for Thanksgiving sales to stores. Dropping those 1,300 birds will reduce our flocks to about 1,900 birds.

On March 16, Marilyn, and I visited each of our nine wholesale accounts to let them know we had to stop selling to them.

It was not a pleasure trip.

We had sold to some accounts for 21 years. Our longest-standing accounts had been the Good Tern Co-op in Rockland, the Rising Tide Co-op in Damariscotta and the Natural Living Center in Bangor.

The Blue Hill Coop and John Edward's Market in Ellsworth had signed on in 2001, when we converted to feed free of genetically modified grains.

In Bar Harbor we had sold to the College of the Atlantic kitchen, to the food-service (Roscoe's) at the Jackson Laboratory and to A & B Naturals.

The Belfast Co-op was a customer from 1988 to 1994 and again from 2004.

We peaked at 29 wholesale accounts in 2004. We dropped our Western Maine circuit in 2005 because the six accounts were not buying enough to justify monthly delivery.

In 2008, after Marilyn had begun treatment for ovarian cancer, we discontinued



service to our five remaining Southern Maine accounts to reduce the workload on Marilyn, who handles accounts payable and other chores, and myself.

This change means much less meat cutting, our most labor-intensive activity, and much lower gross sales. We had sold between \$46,000 and \$62,000 a year in frozen, processed items to these accounts in the past five years.

Although it generated useful cash flow, wholesaling was our least profitable activity. A 16-pound Turkey processed and delivered to an account netted 34 cents. Not per pound. Per bird.

Of course, the net on larger birds was higher, up to \$5 a bird and even a bit more for the giant toms, but the margins were scarily thin and a slow sales month could mean a net deficit for the month.

Instead of lumps of cash every month from wholesaling, we depend now on weekly sales at the farmers markets in Brunswick and on our CSA share sales.

Although no longer offering wholesale prices, we offer quantity discounts to private customers. On any order of more than \$250, we will deduct \$1 a pound.

An order, then, for 60 pounds of ground Turkey (\$300) would be discounted \$60, for a net price of \$240.

Our Fryeburg Fair concession stand will have to change, as well. I can no longer be involved in the entire setup, work both shifts during the show and then oversee the entire teardown.

With the permission of the midway superintendent, we have taken on a partner who can do a great deal of my work.

Already, the rhythms around the farm have changed. We no longer have the monthly push to get 1,000 pounds of meat cut, processed and packed for delivery. In its place is a steadier drum beat of weekly small processings to get ready for market in Brunswick.

Friday is still crunch day as we smoke Turkey breast, make salads and sometimes Turkeyaki and/or other items. But the pace is noticeably more manageable.

We will continue to sell every Saturday at a farmers market in Brunswick (see page three), Crystal Spring in the summer and Fort Andross in the winter.

We have also joined a new winter

(Continued on page 2)

CSA signup season is upon us

Community Supported Agriculture has been the bright spot in the two previous down years, as more and more customers bought shares in our production.

In 2010, we need to do no worse than repeat our 2009 CSA subscription sales of \$21,250. Last year, May and June were the months with the most CSA share purchases.

So far this year, 34 sharers have bought 36 shares for a value of \$6,450.

The idea of CSA is that a person buys a share in a farm's production before the farm produces the crop. As the crop comes in, the sharer picks up proceeds until the share is used up. In our case, the customer buys in at any time and draws Turkey in whatever form she wants. We offer shares from \$100 to \$300, in increments of \$50. We add interest to the shares, so the sharer can draw in Turkey her investment plus the amount of interest we add.

Sharers may buy in or renew at any time, since all of our products are always available.

CSA lets the sharer participate in farm decisions. Some of our best ideas, including recipes and expertise on genetically modified feed, has come from sharers. It also gives the sharer a guaranteed supply of the highest-quality protein and the

The payout		
Share	Interest	Yield
\$100	6 %	\$106
150	8 %	162
200	10 %	220
250	12 %	280
300	14 %	342

good feeling of helping shore up Maine's fragile farm economy.

To buy in, fill out the form below and send it to us with your check.

Obviously, CSA gives us cash up front, plus a guaranteed market and the good feeling of knowing our customers support us materially.

We also offer work shares, in which a sharer buys in by working at the farm. The work share is for \$162 and is earned by two eight-hour workdays at the farm.

Last year, six people worked 16 days for eight shares.

We have workdays on June 23 and 24. We may be able to arrange individually for workdays on Saturdays or Sundays.

The work is farm maintenance and repair, but in wet weather, sharers work inside preparing for market or packing meat.

If you're interested in a work share, fill out the form below and send it in. For more information, call Bob at 778-2889.

Maybe it's not for everyone!

More than 80 percent of our CSA sharers renew their shares. In fact, we have never talked with anyone in Maine who bought a share in any CSA who was dissatisfied.

Maybe it's different, though, in New Hampshire. A friend there was a bit chagrined when his draw from a farm in Portsmouth one week was 15 pounds of kale. "What am I gonna do with 15 pounds of kale?" he pleaded.

Won't happen here. We don't grow kale for our sharers, and you always have the choice of what Turkey items to take.

The heart of the matter

(Continued from page 1)

market, to be held at the Topsham Grange, and will have to figure out whether or how to sell at both winter markets in the Brunswick-Topsham area.

The near future

Though cutting back and leveling out the workload is our watchword this season, we won't stand still.

We are also adding a farmers market. We will begin selling on May 29 (Memorial weekend) at the Farmington Farmers Market on the parking lot of the District Court building on Main Street. We hope to strengthen the local base of the farm.

Back at the farm, we are going to add seasonal items, starting with sausages.

We are making two potato sausages, one a traditional Swedish Korv, made with our Turkey instead of beef, the other a Midwestern variation of Korv. Customers have responded very favorably, so we will offer Korv each spring, the time in Sweden for making it, before the storage potatoes go soft.

In June, we will add a couple of summer sausages, including one from the Southwest, and in the fall we will make a Turkey and apple sausage along with our cranberry sausage.

We are adding a couple of year-round sausages, too. We are testing recipes for chorizo, a Mexican hot sausage, and have introduced andouille, a Cajun garlic sausage that we offer smoked.

We will also try other seasonal items, such as chili and shepherd's pie.

And, we need to resume making the breaded tenderloins that our son Chris developed last summer during his all-too-brief time of working for the farm.

Expanding and seasonalizing the sausage line was the idea of Kate Wood, who worked for the farm after my heart attack (see page four).

Personal

For me, almost everything about daily life changes. The physicians at Cardiovascular Consultants, who staff the cardiology programs at the Maine Medical Center in Portland, where two stents were placed in my arteries, and at Frank-

(Concluded on page 3)

CSA Order Form

203

Fill out and send to The Turkey Farm, 219 Mile Hill Road, New Sharon, Maine 4955.

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

(circle) \$100 \$150 \$200 \$250 \$300

Please sign me up for a work day(s) on (circle) June 23 or June 24

Name _____

Address _____

Town _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____ E-mail _____

Even in a down year, we met most goals

As part of scaling back the farm, we are reducing the goals list for the 2010 season, our 25th, to the barest minimum.

The goals for 2010 will simply be those we did not complete in 2009. So, here is the checklist on last season's goals.

No. 1. **Replace the roof and insulation in our brooder.** Built in 1992, 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 live outdoors.

Temperature in the brooder range from 99 degrees to minus 20. 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 **PARTLY MET** this goal by buying the metal roofing. Completing it will be the first project for 2010, beginning in late April. It will cost \$3,000 to \$5,000.

No. 2. **Cover the shingle roof on our plant and farmstore** with a metal roof. This goal was **MET** and the job was done by Marvin Storer, who has worked on our farm since 1990, at a cost of about \$1,800. Marv will install the new roof on our brooder, too.

No. 3. Build a **new floor for our booth at the Fryeburg Fair.** For our 20th year at Fryeburg, we made a better (and safer) floor by building 37 four-by-four raised floor panels. It made a more stable floor and got us away from screwing plywood onto pallets as we set up at the fair. The time saved in building and taking apart the booth at the fairgrounds came to nearly three days' labor. So, count this a goal **MET**. It cost about \$800.

No. 4. Our 28-year-old barn isn't large enough to store all our equipment, so we need a **sideless shed for some equipment** we use at Fryeburg. We have the posts and lumber for the job and expect it to cost an additional \$800 to \$1,200. We **MISSED** this goal when the autumn weather was too wet for drilling post holes and building the shelter. This will be our second goal for 2010.

No. 5. We also needed to **rebuild at least one shelter** on range. We not only rebuilt the shelter, we moved it to higher

Goals 2010

ground so rain drains away from it. This **MET** goal cost just the labor by our crew as we had virtually all the material still available from the previous shelter.

No. 6. Two of our ranges still had limited shelter for the Turkeys, so we wanted to **build shelter for those birds.** We used hoop-house frames and **MET** the goal, building two temporary shelters by stabilizing the hoops and stretching plastic and tarps over the hoops. We took them down for the winter and will be able to rebuild them on any range we want.

No. 7. This goal was to **expand our cooler-freezer capacity** by installing a free-standing unit next to our plant. When we found a refrigerator truck for sale in Winslow, we bought it, planning to move its box onto permanent footings in our dooryard. In the meantime we used the truck to run a couple of errands and — wouldn't you know it? — burned out the motor by running out of oil! No one to blame but ourselves, as we had learned by age 10 when and how to read an oil dipstick. Still, this is a goal **PARTLY MET** as our refrigeration guru, Mike Rivera, of Bowdoin, will undertake to set up added cooling capacity at the farm, using the reefers from two trucks we no longer put onto the road. Getting the cooling set up is our final goal for 2010.

So, for 2009, four of seven goals met, two partly met and one just plain missed.

For 2010, three goals: Reroof and insulate the primary brooder house, build the sideless shed and add to our cooling capacity at the farm.

Back to the market

Following a mostly successful winter of selling at the Fort Andross Winter Market, we have begun the summer farmers market season at the Crystal Spring Farm in Brunswick.

The market opened on May 1, and will run every Saturday through October, from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

It was clear last year that the market didn't have enough space, so the Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust, which owns Crystal Spring, is looking at expanding the market area. We hope that can happen before high season begins in July.

See you at market on May 1.

The whole drill changes after heart attack

(Concluded from page 2)

lin Memorial Hospital in Farmington, say my heart attack was caused by stress.

The only indicator of a pending heart attack was my weight. Cholesterol and blood pressure numbers were normal and low, respectively. And we had no family history of heart problems.

Now, though, my sisters and my sons need to be more aware of heart health.

And, I must lose a great deal of weight. To that end, I am pushing myself away from the table sooner, eating slower, shunning snacks (not easy at market where hundreds of temptations are on display) and working out again three days a week in the cardiac rehab program at Franklin Memorial.

For the first time in my 70 years, I am on medications, and can expect to be on the full dose of five daily medications for at least a year. Costly medications.

My work routine is changed. I no longer start at 4 or 5 a.m. and work at the farm or in the plant until supper time. I no longer spend 13-hour days on the road delivering to stores and kitchens, after several hours of filling picnic chests and loading them onto my truck. I no longer stay on my feet on a cold, hard concrete floor for 12 to 14 hours a day. And I will no longer be able to work the habitual days at the Fryeburg Fair of 5:30 a.m. to 11 p.m. Not even for one day of the fair, let alone the 14 days each of the past few years.

I will be able to continue going to market every week, the docs say, so long as I don't overdo the physical work and stress that appear to be in my nature, and to run the Fryeburg operation, so long as I work more normal days, say, 12 hours.

To four who helped, thank you

We learned when Marilyn was diagnosed in 2007 with ovarian cancer that many people respond to other people's crises with energy, time, work and love.

So it has been since Feb. 7, when I had a heart attack.

Four people, in particular, made it possible for our farm to keep operating through the winter, two of them from our farm crews of the past couple of years and two of them new friends who saw an opportunity to help and accepted it.

From our farm crew, Linda Chapman and Tyler Paine jumped in to finish the meat cutting that had begun just before the heart attack.

Since I couldn't lift more than 10 pounds and couldn't stay on my feet more than a couple of hours at a time, Tyler started working during the week, fitting his work here around his classes at Central Maine Community College and his responsibilities as a father. He has done most of the meat cutting and preparation for market, not to mention all the heavy lifting at the farm.

Two new friends are Bethany Allen and Kate Wood, who interned last season at the Crystal Spring Farm in Brunswick, where we set up for the summer farmers market.

Bethany came to our farm several times after my heart attack to help cut and pack meat. Kate helped me every Saturday at the Fort Andross winter market, including all the heavy lifting, and also helped me drive baby Turkeys back from West Virginia at the end of March.

Bethany has returned to Crystal Spring, where she succeeded Kate as field manager. Kate's work for us ended with the Fort Andross winter market, and she resumed having a life.

We are forever grateful to all four, and forever regretful that it took a heart attack to make friends of such wonderful people as Beth and Kate.

Thank you, all.

—Bob Neal

Recipe

Turkey Cordon Bleu Casserole

CASSEROLE:

4 cups	cubed cooked Turkey (see note)
2 cups	cubed cooked ham
1 cup	shredded Swiss cheese
1	large onion, chopped
1/3 cup	butter
1/3 cup	unbleached flour
1/8 tsp.	ground mustard
1/8 tsp.	ground nutmeg
1 3/4 cup	milk

TOPPING:

1 1/2 cups	soft bread crumbs
1/2 cup	shredded Swiss cheese
1/4 cup	butter, melted

In a skillet, sauté ham for 4-5 minutes until browned. Drain and pat dry. In a greased, two-quart baking dish, layer the Turkey, cheese and ham. Set aside.

In a saucepan, saute the onion in butter until tender. Stir in the flour, mustard and nutmeg until blended. Gradually stir in the milk. Bring to a boil and cook, stirring, for two minutes or until thickened. Pour over the ham.

Combine topping ingredients and sprinkle over top of casserole. Bake, uncovered, at 350 degrees for 25-30 minutes until golden brown and bubbly.

Six servings.

Note: The cooked Turkey may be roasted breast or thigh meat or sautéed, broiled or grilled breast or thigh.

—Adapted from *Family Favorite Casseroles*.

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please forward