

The Turkey Times

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Published by THE TURKEY FARM, New Sharon, Maine

And, the winnah is . . . 2006!

By Bob Neal

No matter how you look at it, 2006 was a banner year for The Turkey Farm.

It was our second year with no recurrence of fowl cholera, two flocks had the best starts ever, and sales rose in five of our six areas of economic activity.

There were downers, of course, which included having to switch feed mills and coping with a second successive season of heavy rain.

We'll report on bird health in the next issue, but suffice for now to report that we saw no signs of diseases in live or slaughtered birds.

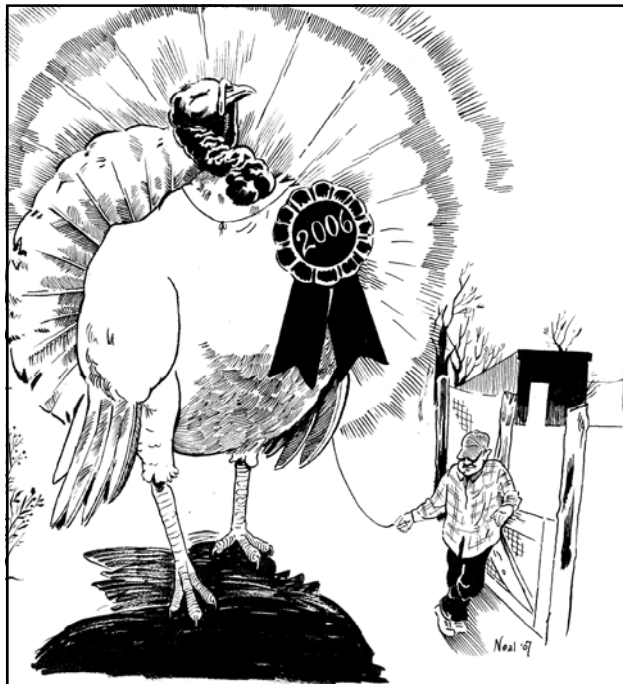
We credit our vaccination program and our vigilance.

And vigilance accounts for our improved performance with baby Turkeys.

The standard in the Turkey business is to raise 80 to 92 percent of the birds in a flock to market age. In 2006, two of our flocks set records for what is called livability.

Of the 1,100 birds in the flock hatched on May 10, we dressed 1,021. That's a livability rate of nearly 93 percent.

The flock that we started on Aug. 3 performed even better. Most of those birds went to slaughter at Christmas, but some were dressed at Thanks-



giving. Of the 900 birds in that beginning flock, we dressed 856, a livability performance of 95 percent.

One area in which we differ most from conventional growers is in the handling of baby Turkeys.

Our birds begin in a heated house on a concrete floor covered with pine shavings.

Conventional growers do the same except that their house floors are usually dirt.

We refresh the shavings after 12 days and then clean out the house when the birds are 3 weeks old and again when they are 4 weeks old, laying down clean shavings each time. At 5 weeks, they go outdoors.

When those birds go outdoors, we muck out the house and sanitize the floor to get ready for the next flock.

Conventional growers often don't clean out the litter, appropriately called "cake," for as long as two years. They may grow five or six flocks in a house before bulldozing out several feet of cake.

We check the birds for feed, water, heat and comfort every two to four hours.

Conventional growers do most of their monitoring by electronic sensors and reporting devices.

Sales rose significantly in five of the six areas we chart: Thanksgiving, the Fryeburg Fair, the Crystal Spring Farmers Market in Brunswick, frozen year-round items to stores and kitchens and farm-store/Christmas.

THANKSGIVING

For our biggest day of the year, we dressed nearly 1,900 Turkeys and sold 1,684.

This was an increase of nearly 400 Turkeys dressed and nearly 300 sold.

Success at Thanksgiving depends heavily on factors beyond our control, such as weather and refrigeration.

The warm November imposed extra stress on our chilling capacity. For example, we had planned to use about 11 tons of ice to chill the carcasses but wound up using 15.5 tons, which meant an extra truck trip to Portland to buy ice at the fish pier.

We had plenty of storage space for 1,900 birds, with three refrigerator trucks, a walk-in cooler, a walk-in free-

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Looking back at the farm's 2006 season

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zer (set to 28 degrees) and 10 large chill tanks that can be filled with ice.

That is, if everything is working properly.

In September, we had paid Carrier Transicold of Maine \$1,167 to inspect and repair the refrigeration units on all three trucks in preparation for the Fryeburg Fair and Thanksgiving.

But during a 20-hour span on Nov. 17, we lost the refrigeration on all three trucks. One ran out of refrigerant, one had a bad expansion valve that had not been detected during the inspection in September and one apparently had a bad connection that also had gone undetected in September.

The truck that ran out of refrigerant was loaded with ice at the time, so we could move Turkeys to it from the truck with the bad expansion valve. The expansion valve stuck open, so the unit continued cooling right down to 11 degrees below zero rather than shutting off when it reached its set temperature of 26 above.

Since the birds were overnight at minus-11, they were more than OK, but many arrived at stores in a partly frozen state. We took care of the third problem before the refrigeration technician arrived.

These breakdowns cost \$1,400 paid to Carrier Transicold, plus the cost of added labor for our crews to move birds and to troubleshoot the problems.

Farm manager Elaine Stevens deserves a great deal of credit for managing the people and the problems that day — I was getting ice in Portland when two of these three failures were discovered — and keeping the birds safely chilled. But those problems threw us behind in filling store orders.

As usual, Wednesday evening before Thanksgiving came just in time to save sanity and health. Everyone working at the farm slept soundly that night.

FRYEBURG FAIR

Weather is a huge factor at fair time, as well, and in 2006, the weather smiled on us. Following a rainy open-



ing day, we were blessed with seven days of clear skies and near-record crowds.

The result is that in our 17th year at Fryeburg, sales rose about 15 per cent, making it our third best fair ever.

For the first time, we included the drink in the price of sandwiches and dinners, which kept our crew at the drinks counter more than busy. This year, we'll probably separate drinks from meals again.

FARMERS MARKET

We have sold at 14 farmers markets over the years, from Farmington to Rockland to Orono. No other market has been so satisfying as the Crystal Spring Farmers Market in Brunswick.

Our cash sales at the market rose by nearly 41 percent. We were so busy late in the season that we needed three people in the 10-by-10 booth to keep up with customers. The cash sales do not count sales at market to CSA sharers.

Holiday sales at the market are figured as part of each holiday rather than as market sales. But for the record, Thanksgiving sales at Brunswick rose to 140 birds in 2006 from 126 in 2005. Christmas sales rose to 27 from 22.

Serving the market is expensive. Each trip to and from Brunswick costs about \$100, and we hire a high-school student to help us there. On the busiest weeks, Marilyn Neal drives down from the farm to help during the heaviest hours.

But the expense is more than worth it. The clientele at Brunswick is know-

ledgeable and is committed both to eating locally grown food and to helping the Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust reinvigorate the historic farm.

WHOLESALE

We have sold our year-round frozen items at wholesale since 1988, peaking at 27 stores in 1994. We now sell to 14 stores and two kitchens. Sales to those accounts rose by nearly 15 percent last year, to a total that is higher than total sales in 1994 by more than half.

The frozen items account for more than a quarter of our annual sales but for very little profit. However, they generate cash flow that comes in handy through the months of growing Turkeys and provides jobs for local people.

FARMSTORE/CHRISTMAS

Our farmstore on Route 27 in New Sharon continues to chug along, with retail sales growing about 6 percent. Still, those sales account for only about 3 percent of our year's income. Most CSA sharers pick up their Turkey at the farmstore, so we are moving more Turkey out the door than the 3 percent figure suggests.

And, there is always plenty to do inside the plant, so the wages paid to staff the farmstore are not charged entirely to keeping the store open.

Christmas is not a huge Turkey holiday in Maine, but our sales did rise last year.

Wholesale Turkey sales rose by 9 percent, and retail by 29 percent for a total increase of about 16 percent.

COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE

Sales of shares in our sixth area of economic activity dropped a bit. See Page 3 for a report.

THE DOWNSIDE

No matter how well a season goes, there will always be problems, and last year it was feed-mill service and weather.

In mid-October, we switched feed
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Wrapping up the wrapup on the 2006 season

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mills because our 7-year supplier had got three orders wrong during the season. The feed was wholesome, but the rations were not what we had ordered.

Turkeys, like most animals, require different rations at different ages. They begin with a feed that is 28 percent protein to build large frames. About a third of the way through their lives, they move to a feed that is about 21 percent protein to start putting meat on that frame.

Then, about two-thirds of the way through, they switch again to feeds that are 18 or 16 percent protein that make more meat and give them a good "finish," which means a bit of fat on the breast and thighs and the conformation that we have come to expect from the modern Turkey.

The mill switched 21-percent and 16-percent rations, so some birds got a bit too much frame and a bit too little meat.



We took our business to United Cooperative Farmers, which has a mill in Auburn. We will work with UCF and with our former mill in Quebec to try to get back to feed that is certified free of genetic engineering, as we had with the Quebec mill starting in 2001.

Then, there's the weather. In two years, we had 110 inches of precipitation. Our annual average is 36 to 38 inches, so we are nearly 50 percent

above average.

This has created havoc with our attempts to rotate our birds from range to range and to reestablish a good root substructure in each range.

Turkeys clear cut if left too long on a piece of ground. And with heavy rain, their clear-cutting begins to take out perennial roots. With the rain and mud of the past two seasons, those roots were often exposed to the birds and couldn't survive.

This year, we'll take another crack at the restoration project so that we can leave the land healthier than we found it in 1980.

More about that in the next issue.

SUMMARY

All in all, 2006 was a great year. Now, we'll hold our breath as we head into 2007, hoping for another successful season, which would be our first ever three-in-a-row up seasons.

You can get close up and personal with your food through CSA

As people become more and more aware of the source and value of their food, many are looking for ways to move closer to the source of that food.

Community Supported Agriculture is one way to make that move.

Through Community Supported Agriculture, or CSA, households can pay for food ahead of time and receive a bit of a bonus from the farmer.

The CSA movement is particularly popular in Maine, where more than 70 of the nation's 1,400 CSA farms operate. That's about 10 times our share by population.

The Turkey Farm was the second farm in Maine to start a CSA. We began in

1990 with about 15 sharers.

That's a drop from 64 sharers in 2005. Most of our sharers sign on near the beginning of the season so they can draw on their shares throughout our growing cycle and beyond.

Our CSA is known as a "draw-down" plan, which means that households buy shares and then draw Turkey from the share until the share is used up.

Shares last a year and unused amounts can be rolled over into the next year if a

sharer renews.

Shares begin at \$100 and rise in increments of \$50. We add interest on each share, and the interest rises with the amount of the share.

To sign up, just send a check with the order form, and your membership in CSA will begin immediately.

We have discontinued work shares, through which people had worked for the farm to earn a share.

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

In 2006, 61 households bought shares in our CSA project.

CSA Order Form

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Fill out and send to The Turkey Farm, 209 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 \$450 \$500

(I have enclosed a check for that amount)

Name _____

Address _____

Town _____ State _____ Zip _____

e-mail _____ Telephone No. _____

WELCOME

If you are among the 145 people who bought their first Turkey from us during 2006, welcome to The Turkey Times.

This is our quarterly publication, which we send to everyone who buys Turkey from us more than once a year. By that we mean the customers who support our farm through purchases of our 37 year-round items and those who support us by sharing in our Community Supported Agriculture project (see page 3).

We hope you become one of those customers, and we'll work hard to provide you with the best protein you can get in Maine.

In The Turkey Times, we publish news about goings-on at our farm and about Turkey and other food topics.

We include guides to finding our products and to ordering them, especially at holiday time, directly from us.

When we run across a particularly good recipe, we share that with readers, as well.

So, along with some good eating, we hope you'll find The Turkey Times provides you with some good reading as well.

Even in winter, Turkey is easy to get

With the holidays past, you may not think often of Turkey, but rest assured that your best protein source is available year-round.

Even when the snow is on the ground, we still have three ways for you to get our Turkey right through the winter.

OUR FARMSTORE

Our farmstore on Route 27 in New Sharon is open the last 50 weeks of the year and has all of our frozen items. These include:

breast cutlets, ground Turkey, ground breast, boneless breast roasts, mild and spicy sausage, breakfast sausage links, spicy links, tenderloins, steaks, thighs, drumsticks, kielbasa, Turkeyaki and pies (five styles, three all-meat and two meat and veggies, and two sizes of each style).

The farmstore is open from 2 to 6 p.m. on Wednesday and Friday and from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday. It is also open by chance, and during the week someone is almost always there, so don't be shy about stopping by.

And, the farmstore is open by appointment. So, if you're coming near us and want to be sure we'll be there, just call us at 778-2889, and we will arrange to meet you.

DELIVERY

We also deliver orders of \$50 or more to home or workplace at

no extra charge. We deliver east of the Kennebec River on the second Thursday of the month and west of the Kennebec on the third Thursday.

NATURAL FOOD STORES

And, we wholesale to the 14 natural food stores, listed below, that carry a variety of our items. If one of them is more convenient to you, check it out.

And, here's to good protein! .

BANGOR Natural Living Center 209 Longview Drive	ELLSWORTH John Edward's Market 158 Main St.
BAR HARBOR Town Hill Market Route 102	KENNEBUNK New Morning Natural Foods 3 York St.
BELFAST Belfast Co-op Store 123 High St.	NEW SHARON Whitewater Far Route 2 at the bridge
BIDDEFORD New Morning Natural Foods 230 Main St.	PORTLAND Food Works 47 India St.
BLUE HILL Blue Hill Food Co-op Green's Hill Place, Route 172	RAYMOND Good Life Market Roosevelt Trail at Route 85
BRIDGTON Morning Dew Natural Foods Sandy Creek Road (Route 117)	ROCKLAND Good Tern Food Co-op 750 Main St.
DAMARISCOTTA Rising Tide Food Co-op Business Route 1	SCARBOROUGH Lois' Natural Foods 152 U.S. Route 1

The Turkey Farm
209 Mile Hill Road
New Sharon, Maine 04955
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Please forward