

The Turkey Times

Volume XVIII, Issue 2 ~ Winter 2008

Published by THE TURKEY FARM, New Sharon, Maine

Four reasons to become a locavore

By Bob Neal

You may not think of yourself as a trendsetter, but as a reader of The Turkey Times, you are.

Not only are you a trendsetter, but a word has been coined to describe you. The word is locavore (sometimes spelled localvore), and for 2007 it was selected by the Oxford American Dictionary as the word of the year.

Locavores try as much as possible to eat food grown within 100 miles of their homes. In July in Maine, that's easy. In February, not so much. But it is getting easier.

So, fellow locavores, you stand in the middle of the great battleground of American agriculture.

On one side stand the giant food corporations and their lapdogs, the federal and state governments. On the other stand a loose collection of small farmers and food artisans and their customers.

No one has depicted this battle more clearly than Michael Pollan, in *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and in articles since the publication of that book, or than Wendell Berry, who has been writing for more than 30 years about the scale of farming.

There is, of course, plenty of room for both monster-scale and small-scale farms, but anyone in a small town who has watched the big-box stores muscle in knows that there is no end to the appetite

There are at least four key issues.

Most important is the quality of your food. In almost every case, the closer food was raised to the person eating it, the higher the food's quality. And, there is a growing body of evidence that we need seasonally appropriate food, such as, say, butter-

harm frozen Turkey than 1,500 miles in a tractor-trailer.

Transfer that idea to fresh food and it becomes even more obvious. Which is fresher, lettuce raised in Durham and sold at Brunswick or lettuce raised at Buckeye, Ariz., and sold in Brunswick? The latter trip takes four to seven days.

In most cases, food is handled far less often when it is grown closer to where it is eaten.

Take that lettuce from Arizona. It's picked in the field, boxed for shipment, loaded onto a farm truck or directly onto the long-distance trailer. It is unloaded at, say, the Shaw's warehouse at Bridgewater, Mass., where it is unboxed and then repackaged for shipment to a Shaw's store.

Then it is reloaded onto a Shaw's trailer and driven to the store, where it is again unloaded and unboxed and then put onto display in the produce section, whether rewrapped at the store or left in the wrapping into

which it had been put on the factory farm.

The second issue is the use of resources to grow that food. Pollan and others estimate that 25 to 30 percent of all the diesel fuel sold in the United States is burned to transport food.

For comparison, let's load two trucks
(Continued on Page 2)



cup squash in the winter in Maine, more than we need food from other parts of the world, say, green beans from Chile, when that food is not in season here. Even frozen food, such as much of the Turkey that we take to stores and to the farmers market in Brunswick, fares better when it travels shorter distances. Sixty miles in a refrigerated truck seems less likely to

Riding the trend toward locally grown food

(Continued from Page 1)

with lettuce bound for Brunswick. One is a 53-foot trailer from Arizona, the other is a 14-foot refrigerated van traveling from New Sharon to Brunswick.

The trailer will hold about 18,000 heads of lettuce, the van about 3,600. At \$3.65 a gallon, the trailer will burn about \$2,464 in diesel fuel by the time it reaches Brunswick. That works out to nearly 14 cents per head of lettuce or a bit more than one cup of diesel fuel for EACH head of lettuce.

Now, load the van in New Sharon to a capacity of 3,600 heads of lettuce and drive it to Brunswick. It will cost \$31.29 for fuel, or less than a penny per head of lettuce. That's about an ounce of diesel fuel per head of lettuce.

Fuel isn't the only saving from buying locally. The boxes filled in Arizona with lettuce will be thrown out after they are emptied in Brunswick. The boxes packed in New Sharon will be reused several times by the farmer.

Wear and tear on vehicles, tires, etc., will be far less per head of lettuce on the shorter trip, as well..

Not to mention that the water used to grow the lettuce in Arizona will be drawn from the Colorado River while water to grow the lettuce in New Sharon will come mostly from rainfall.

It's easy to see by this example that the use of earth's resources can be far less when you eat locally grown food.

The third issue is the health of local people and local economies.

People's physical health is almost certainly tied closely to the quality of the food they eat (issue No. 1). But other areas of health and well-being are affected, as well.

Many of our customers, for example, tell us that they feel better about themselves and their community when they eat locally.

And their community is far better off when they spend their food dollars with local growers. Many studies have shown that a dollar spent with a local entrepreneur is spent seven times locally before it leaves the area.

The profit on that dollar then becomes more local spending and some of it be-

comes local investment in infrastructure, materials and supplies.

But the profit in a dollar spent with a supermarket chain from Belgium or Arkansas will leave immediately and not come back. Supermarket chains contend that only 2 percent of their sales is the profit that goes to headquarters.

But remember that we don't buy food just once every few years. If you spend \$150 at the Supermarket every week, you are sending \$156 a year to Belgium, Idaho or Arkansas.

Spend that locally, and the \$156 turns over six more times, generating \$936 in local spending.

Think how much healthier that \$936 a year from ONE family makes that family's local community.

Finally, there is the issue of control.

The natural and organic foods movement has grown so large — several billion dollars a year and growing at 20 percent or more a year for nearly two decades — that corporate America wants to cut itself in on the action.

Its first maneuver, as always with big corporations, was to buy up organic and natural food producers, such as Celestial Seasonings (teas), Knudsen (spritizers), Cascadian Farms (veggies), etc. .

Next, they started organic sections in their stores, selling primarily the produce of the huge manufacturers that were already owned by their corporate look-alikes..

None of these giants says much about the source of its organic and natural foods, but the experience of farmers in Maine and elsewhere is that the mega-retailers will buy most if not all of their food from mega-producers. Their interest in locally grown food hasn't changed a bit. Basically, they're agin' it.

Check out the new national chains in Portland. Inside both Whole Foods and Wild Oats, signs proclaim support for local farmers and food. But look a bit closer, and you'll find a different reality. At Wild Oats, we found one — count 'em, one — Maine item in the entire store when we cruised it some months ago. That

was honey from Brewer, which is marketed through a wholesaler.

At Whole Foods, an employee told me she had been assured that the company sold only free-range Turkey. But the Turkey there is from Plainville Farm in New York State. I have toured the Plainville Farm. It is 100 percent indoors. No one driving past would ever know that 660,000 birds are raised every year on this farm.

Plainville does a great many good things, including growing much of its own grain. But its birds are not free-range and they are not chemical free, despite what Whole Foods managers may have told their employees. And they are certainly not local.

A few years ago, Shaw's was promoting as "local" food grown in Connecticut and New Jersey. Only under public pressure did Shaw's drop that claim. But it did not drop its policy of requiring Maine farmers who want to sell to Shaw's to truck their produce to southeastern Massachusetts on speculation.

The issue boils down to: From whom do you want to buy your food? From Whole Foods of Austin, Texas? From Wild Oats of Boulder, Colo.? From WalMart of Bentonville, Ark.? From Hannaford of Belgium? From Shaws of Boise, Idaho?

Or as much as possible from some guy just down the road?

If you answered the last, then welcome to the battleground, fellow locavore.

Disclaimer

Our words on these pages about Whole Foods Market in Portland are not just sour grapes because Whole Foods (Whole Paycheck, as it is sometimes called) would not buy from us.

Au contraire, Whole Foods approached us last year about selling our Turkeys and estimated that it needed 350 to 700 for Thanksgiving.

That would be a nice account, but we have for 20 years had a policy of selling only to locally owned stores, and we told Whole Foods that we will continue to put our money where our philosophy is, so we declined its overture.

Well, so much for retiring any time soon

By **Bob Neal**

A funny thing happened on the way to retirement.

In 2007, we had a third straight strong year, and that set us to rethinking our plan to phase out the farm by 2010. Instead, we are reinvigorating the farm to keep it going into the foreseeable future and to catch up on improvements let go because we had planned to retire.

Farm manager Elaine Stevens, who has completed her eighth year back at the farm — she had worked here part-time from 1993 to 1997 — and deserves a huge share of the credit for our success, urged us to rethink retirement. Her point: If we want to sell the farm, it's far better to offer it as a going concern than as a shell of its former self.

Her argument made sense, and we are preparing a plan to upgrade operations. We'll publish that plan in *The Turkey Times* in April.

The results for 2007 tell us that the farm has a strong future.

In 2007, we saw these highlights: We coped perhaps better than ever with changing market conditions; we had one of our best work crews ever; the livability of our birds continued at or near record levels; we gained in our ability to carry birds on our ground; we had an overall sales increase of 9 percent.

All this happened in the face of sharply higher feed costs that forced us to raise prices in June on frozen items and to raise our holiday prices by more than 10 percent.

A couple of downers for the farm: We coped again with a wet autumn. And we had a nasty incident with an employee who forged a number of our checks.

CHANGE OR DIE

We were quick to act and we stuck to our guns in a couple of areas, feed prices and demand for our products.

Since 2001, we have bought most of our feed from Moulee Vallee in Richmond, P.Q., the only feed mill to offer us grain certified free of genetic engineering.

We have always split the difference with you, our customers, in the added cost of the ge-clean feed. But in 2007,

2007 IN REVIEW

all grain prices rose sharply, primarily because of the increase in demand for corn to make tax-subsidized ethanol.

As grain prices rose, we faced the tough prospect of raising prices yet again, and on June 1 we put into effect an 8.5 percent increase. Sales immediately decreased, but through the season came back and brought with them a tiny increase in total units sold.

Later in the summer, the spiraling weakness of the American dollar hit us again as the Canadian dollar rose in relative value. The Loonie (Canada's buck) that two years before had been at 59 cents U.S. had risen above par so it took \$1.01 U.S. to buy \$1 Canadian.

It's easy to see how this affects us. Our feed bill for the season rose by more than \$10,000, or \$3 per bird.

We deferred acting again on the falling U.S. dollar but expect that we'll need to raise prices early this season to make up for what we're losing on the exchange rate. Our first ton of feed this year cost \$517.60, the most we have ever paid for feed. We use more than 150 tons a year.

We also changed our Thanksgiving practices to ensure we had enough Turkeys for retail sales. In the past, we had favored wholesale at the expense of retail supply. In 2007, we allocated 700 birds for wholesale and 700 for retail, and when the wholesale birds had all been allocated we held firm against further requests for wholesale birds. Still, we sold out at retail. You'll see the results of this ability to hold firm on policy when you read our sales results below.

GOOD CREW

We have long tried to follow the motto: "Hire good people and stay out of their way."

In 2007, we had one of our best crews ever. During the summer and early fall, Twyla Morris, a senior at UMF, worked nearly full-time for us. Twyla is bright, strong and energetic and worked well

with us. She left in November when her studies and other employment began to overwhelm her. We regret losing her but rejoice in having had her with us for most of the season.

We were joined later in the season, when we get even busier, by farm manager Stevens's daughter, Christyne, and son, Aaron, both of whom had worked here a bit in the past. Their presence, even though it meant the farm owner was way outnumbered by Stevenses, was valuable to the farm.

Many of our regular and past crew people worked again this past year, so we mostly had experienced people who didn't require the owner and manager to spend untold hours training.

THE MAGIC TOUCH

In 2007, we again had outstanding livability among our flocks. The flock that hatched on May 10 set a record for us at nearly 98 percent of birds surviving to slaughter age. Two other flocks hatched in Massachusetts did nearly as well.

The March 26 flock, hatched in Ohio, performed much less well, and we can attribute much of that to the stress on those birds while they were in the custody of the U.S. Postal Service. Of 600 ordered, nearly 100 died en route and another 50 died within 48 hours of arriving here. The Ohio birds were hatched on Monday morning, but didn't arrive here until Wednesday morning and, in one case, until Thursday morning. (The Post Office has fought hard in Congress to retain its monopoly on the shipment of live poultry even though it doesn't perform very well in handling birds.) Tracking marks on the boxes indicated that it took the Post Office 28 hours to fly the boxes from Cleveland to Boston.

The industry standard is to expect a mortality of 8 to 20 percent before slaughter. The past few years, we have planned for a loss of 10 percent. But with Elaine overseeing the care of the

(Continued n Page 4)

The retirement train gets sidetracked

(Continued from Page 3)

birds at their tenderest age, we have reduced losses to less than 3 percent in most flocks.

HEALTHY SOIL

One of Elaine's goals has been to keep the farm's soil healthy despite the heavy burden placed on it by the Turkeys.

For a couple of seasons, she has seeded our ranges with grasses to establish a root structure stronger than the claws of the birds. The plan is to rotate ranges so some land can lie fallow and the subsoil root structure can take better hold. We won't know until mud season how well the 2007 seeding worked, but we worked very hard at it.

Oddly enough, our success in the livability of young birds has made it more difficult to take care of our ground because we are placing about 8 percent more birds on the ground than planned. That means about one more full pen of Turkeys, and that means one less pen that can lie fallow.

SIX OF EIGHT: NOT BAD

In sales, receipts rose in six of the eight areas in which we track them. The larger decline, Thanksgiving wholesale, was planned

Nowhere did our response to the market show up in sales more than our sales of **retail whole Turkeys at Thanksgiving**. The number of birds we made available was up by 27 percent, and the total sales rose by 49 percent.

That more than offset the decline in **wholesale receipts at Thanksgiving**, which we had planned in order to reduce the wear, tear and stress on our crew at Thanksgiving and to give ourselves more margin in producing birds that meet our quality standards.

The wholesale side of Thanksgiving fell by 28 percent.

Sales at the **Fryeburg Fair** also rose quite nicely, by 21 percent. The eight days were generally bright and warm — too warm, in fact, hitting 91 degrees on Thursday of fair week — and the crowds were large and happy. Only rain during

2007 IN REVIEW

the supper hour of Saturday probably kept us from a record fair.

As it was, this was our third best fair ever.

The sale of **wholesale frozen items** rose by 14 percent, almost all of it in eastern Maine, where we twice had to make special-delivery trips to stores that had run out of Turkey well before their next scheduled delivery.

The **Crystal Spring Farmers Market in Brunswick** continues to be a major activity for us. Sales at the Saturday market rose by 11 percent. In 2007, we had no rain at market until Sept. 15 — unfortunately the third weekend in September is usually one of our busiest of the year — so shoppers turned out in record numbers.

The previous season, we had rain five of the first nine markets, getting us off to a slow start.

We are finding that the balance between traditional and prepared items is beginning to shift toward prepared items.

We introduced cranberry-chestnut sausage and Italian sausage this past season, and both did extremely well at market. We're looking at a couple of other new items for this year.

We had not intended to sell **Christmas Turkeys at wholesale** last season, but our July-hatched flock performed so well that we reversed field (another anti-retirement move) and offered whole birds to our store accounts.

The result: Store sales rose by 7 percent, and we'll probably continue to offer Christmas Turkeys to our store accounts.

Our **farmstore** is a wee part of a season's activity, so a 6 percent rise in sales doesn't add many dollars to the bottom line.

But the store provides a place for CSA sharers to pick up Turkey, and it provides a useful introduction for people to make contact with us.

And whoever is tending the store has plenty else to do around the place. One of our daily work orders is "Clean every-

thing in sight."

The smallest sales increase was in subscriptions for **Community Supported Agriculture**, which rose by 5 percent.

But the \$13,500 raised through CSA obviated at least one bank loan and gave us upfront capital for some building projects, including two new pens and other fencing.

Besides the decline in Thanksgiving wholesale receipts, sales also fell on **retail Christmas Turkeys**.

We sold the usual 100 or so Christmas Turkeys, but the trend was to smaller birds, so even with the price increase, we came out 3 percent lower than in 2006.

BUMMERS

Farmers seem always to expect and to cope with the downside, and for us in 2007, weather was a major factor.

Spring and fall were very wet, which meant we got onto the ground late to prepare and seed it for the season. And construction of new pens began late as we waited for the ground to dry out.

Then, come fall, we had to move Turkeys off some ranges earlier than we had wanted, leading to crowding on other ranges until the birds went to market. This crowding may have offset Elaine's work on soil health.

In August, a man who had worked for us the previous holiday-season returned to the farm after serving time for operating after suspension. We had held a job open for him since he had expressed an interest in returning to our workforce and had done a good job for us in the past.

But on Sept. 14, our bank called about a coding error in some new check blanks, and that was how we found that he had stolen 17 checks, made them out to himself and forged my signature to them.

We helped State Trooper Scott Nichols in getting him arrested. He is free on bail. This is his third or fourth arrest for forgery, we now know, including one charge when he stole checks and forged his mother's signature to them.

As we head into the 2008 season, we are reinvigorated, and we will do everything possible to make this our fourth consecutive profitable season.

Our CSA sharers are all over the place

While sharers in our Community Supported Agriculture project are concentrated near our greatest retail activity — our farm in New Sharon and the farmers market in Brunswick — the map shows that we have sharers almost literally state-wide.

And out of state, as well.

The map shows the residence of all 104 people who owned shares at any time during 2007. Seventy-four people own shares as of March 1.

We were Maine's second CSA, and we have promoted the project heavily, so people have sought us out to buy shares.

If the idea is new to you, here's how CSA works. People who want the best in local food buy shares in a farm's (or several farms') harvest for the season. Then, they share in that harvest as it comes in.

Ours is a debit or draw-down CSA. People invest in the year's flocks, and we add a percentage to the investment and then repay with whatever in the way of Turkey items the sharers want.

Shares begin at \$100 and rise in increments of \$50. At \$100, we add 6 percent interest so the sharer draws \$106 in meat. As the increments rise, so does the interest. See the chart below

The largest share bought in 2007 was \$500, which paid \$610. We also had three shares at \$400, two of them from the same family.

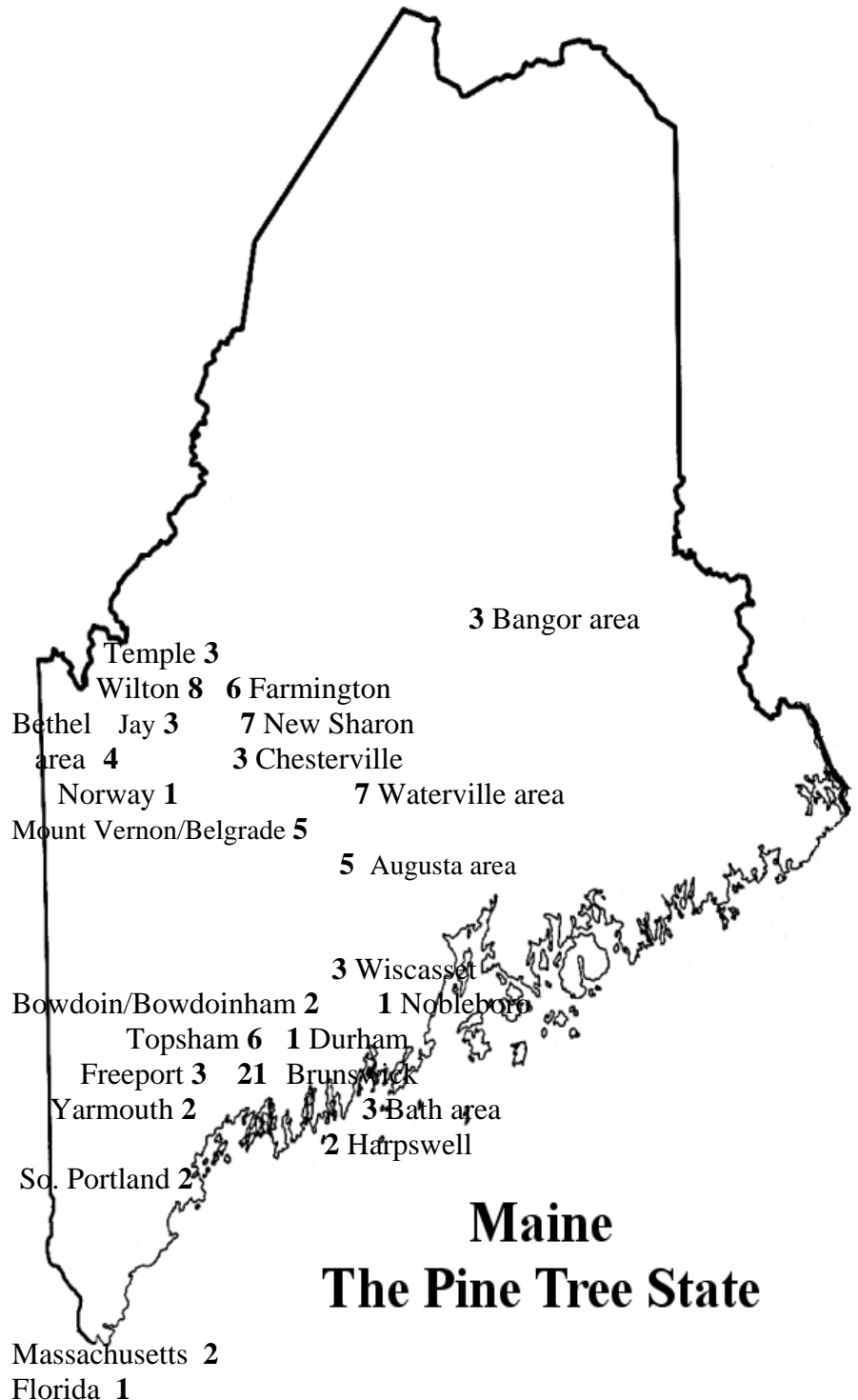
The average share was about \$180.

Shares last for a year and may be renewed any time. More

than half of our sharers use up the investment before they use up the year and renew right away.

If a balance is left when a sharer renews, we'll roll that balance over into the new share so the sharer loses no value. Lapsed- share amounts can also be rolled over if the sharer returns to our CSA within a year of a share's expiry

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



Sharers may pick up at our farm in New Sharon or at the Crystal Spring Farmers Market in Brunswick. We also deliver orders to sharers.

To sign on, fill out the order form on Page 6 and send it in with your check. If you'd like more information, just call 778 or e-mail at turkeyfarm@gwi.net.

WELCOME

If you are among the more than 200 people who bought a Turkey from us for the first time last year, Welcome to The Turkey Times.

In this quarterly publication, we keep customers up to date on the doings at our farm and on issues affecting farming in Maine. We also announce projects, such as CSA (see Page 5) and the beginning of the holiday ordering season. And, we publish recipes that (not surprisingly) call for our Turkey items.

Year-round customers receive The Turkey Times in the mail four times a year, as do all CSA sharers. Holiday-only customers receive just the October issue.

Recipe

Breast cutlets in white sauce

- | | |
|------------|---|
| 1 pound | Turkey breast cutlets |
| 1 1/2 cups | white sauce (béchamel) or cream of mushroom soup |
| 1/4 cup | dry white wine |
| 1 cup | bread crumbs, Italian or other seasoned |
| 1/4 cup | butter melted |
| 1/2 cup | grated Swiss or cheddar cheese |

Arrange cutlets in a lightly greased 13 x 9 baking dish. Combine white sauce (soup) and wine, stirring well. Spoon sauce evenly over cutlets and sprinkle with bread crumbs. Sprinkle with grated cheese and melted butter. Bake uncovered at 350 degrees for 45 to 55 minutes or until the meat is no longer pink on the inside..

Easter/Passover birds

While we won't have fresh Turkeys, we do have quite a few whole Turkeys in the freezer available for Easter and Passover.

Easter is on March 23, and we can thaw a bird for you to pick up on March 21 or 22. Passover begins the evening of April 19, and we could have a thawed bird ready for you on April 18 or earlier.

These birds were dressed and frozen at our final processing of 2007 (Dec. 18). They are in the range of 12-13 pounds and of 21-22 pounds. We also have boneless breast roasts in sizes from 2 to 4 pounds. E-mail or call to order.

CSA Order Form

182

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 _____

Telephone _____ E-mail _____

The Turkey Farm
209 Mile Hill Road
New Sharon, Maine 04955
turkeyfarm@zwi.net
theturkeyfarm.com
778-2889

please forward