

The Turkey Times

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Report on 2005

Back from the brink

Back on firm footing. And not a season too soon.

That sums up the 2005 season for The Turkey Farm. After three years of battling fowl cholera and taking bigger losses each year, our farm turned the corner and is in a position to begin a string of successful seasons.

Sales were up in every activity but one, and at Thanksgiving and Christmas we had far more requests for our birds than we could fulfill. Despite across-the-board price increases, sales rose at our farmstore and at the Crystal Spring Farmers' Market at Brunswick. We had more birds available for Thanksgiving and Christmas,

and those sales rose as well. We set a record for subscriptions in our Community Supported Agriculture project.

Wholesaling to stores, kitchens and co-ops rose a bit, too.

Of course, there are always downers in farming, and this past season those were three: The Fryeburg Fair took a downturn, we received four deliveries of bad grain that threatened several flocks; and from Labor Day through Christmas we received nearly 30 inches of rain, which affected bird growth and comfort.

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Report on 2005

Sales rise in four areas

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Here are the details of how we fared in each activity.

FARMSTORE

We expect never to make a living from sales here at the farm. But farmstore traffic increases year after year. It was up about 3

UP 3%

percent in 2005. About half the people who stop in are doing so for the first time. "I drive by every day, and I've been meaning to stop for months," is the most common introduction we hear from customers.

The most significant increase has been in Turkey pies, which continue to gain popularity. The large pies make a quick meal and are selling now in numbers about equal to the small pies.

In addition to the retail traffic, 41 of our CSA sharers pick up their Turkey at the farmstore, and if we calculated their acquisitions as part of the farmstore sales the total figure would be much higher.

The farmstore also gives people an opportunity to stop in and order Turkeys for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

FARMERS' MARKET

Sales at the farmers' market at the Crystal Spring Farm in Brunswick started out slowly, and from mid-July until the second week in August were

UP 2%

running more than 12 percent below 2004. But a late surge closed that gap steadily and by the end of the final market day, Oct. 29, we were up about 2 percent for the season. We sold fewer items than in 2004, but a price increase at the start of the season pushed total income higher.

In addition to cash sales, the number of CSA sharers at Crystal Spring rose to 19 (see below) from 12, and the proceeds drawn from CSA accounts rose by 38 percent

We calculate CSA income separately from cash sales, but if the two are combined at Crystal Spring, our sales for the year rose by 8 percent.

We had orders for 120 Thanksgiving Turkeys at Crystal Spring and for 30 Christmas Turkeys. Oddly, two people didn't show up at Thanksgiving but eight were no-shows at Christmas.

A high point of the Crystal Spring season was the hiring of Hannah Weddle, a senior at Brunswick High School, to help us at the market. Hannah is bright and energetic and took to the work right away. She's good with customers, and it helped that she knew quite a few of them already. She also helped at Thanksgiving and Christmas.

We may have her help this summer, but in the fall she leaves for film school at New York University, one of the top film programs in the country.

THANKSGIVING AND CHRISTMAS

At Thanksgiving, sales rose by 40 percent at wholesale to nearly 900 birds and held about even between 550 and 600 at retail. Not only did we have more birds available this year,

UP 21%

but we had more of the larger sizes. When we can give a customer the 22-pound Turkey she wanted instead of a 17-pounder, the difference in the sale is more than \$11. Multiply that by several score of orders and you have quite a difference in gross sales.

We did run short in the 18- to 24-pound range, but more than 95 percent of our retail customers got the size they wanted.

By the way, we have an idea in mind for dealing with sizing issues at Thanksgiving, and it will be included in our goals for 2006, which will be featured in the spring issue of *The Turkey Times*.

We have been emphasizing retail sales, but the crunch is on in Maine for farm-fresh Turkeys at Thanksgiving, and we decided to help ease that crunch.

At the start of the year, there were five major growers of Turkeys in Maine but by spring that number had shrunk to three. One farm went out when the farmers divorced, and the other reportedly tired of

wrangling with the state agriculture department and just threw in the towel.

Those departures left some wholesale accounts scrambling, and two of our largest accounts – both had also bought from one of the farms that went out – asked for more birds for Thanksgiving and Christmas, and we agreed.

Then, UMF asked us to supply its harvest supper, which emphasized Maine-grown food, and we found it too difficult to refuse our local university campus.

And, every other wholesale account sold more of our Turkeys this year than last, so our wholesale business shot right up.

Overall, we sold nearly 1,450 Turkeys at Thanksgiving, up from about 1,200. And with the cholera under control, we had much better success meeting people's requests for sizes. The story was similar at Christmas, although in smaller numbers. For the first time, we sold out at Christmas. Wholesale accounts took 21 percent more birds, and retail sales rose by a couple of percentage points. We could have sold more, but the flock designated for Christmas was dramatically diminished by the bad feed (see below).

COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE

We had hoped to enroll 60 sharers in 2005, and we enrolled 62. Those 62 bought 74 shares as 12 used up their shares and then bought second (and in one case, third and fourth) shares within the year. The total invested was \$11,850, an average of \$191 per sharer or \$160 a share.

The 62 sharers included 47 renewals (12 at the Crystal Spring Farmers' Market and 35 others). There were 15 new sharers, seven at Brunswick and eight at the farmstore. We lost only four sharers from 2004.

We are gratified that a significant number of people – total number of sharers rose by 32 percent -- saw the advantages of CSA and placed their confidence in our farm. The sharers not only get a

**62
SHARES**

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Report on 2005

Some ups, some downs

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dividend on their shares, they get the finest Turkey available. And, they get the satisfaction of helping shore up Maine's shaky farm infrastructure.

Community Supported Agriculture shows us that people support our efforts and are confident that if they invest a few bucks in the farm the farm will produce the food it has promised. That gives us access to some market that we might not otherwise reach.

CSA also gives us some operating capital when we most need it, early in the season when other income is very low. The \$11,850 from sharers was money we didn't need to draw from our line of credit at the Androscoggin Bank for repairing equipment and for buying baby Turkeys, shavings and feed.

WHOLESALE

Sales of year-round frozen items to stores, kitchens and coops rose by 6.7 percent, despite a slight constriction in the number of accounts served. We discontinued a summer-only account because of difficulties coordinating schedules for delivery.

UP 6.7%

We continue with 11 stores, nine of which are natural-food stores, one of which is a feed-and-local-produce store and one of which can best be described as an organic neighborhood store.

In addition, The Turkey Farm is the supplier of Turkey to two kitchens, the College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor and FoodWorks in Portland. We sell at wholesale prices to two coops. A coop in Ellsworth has been buying from us for about a decade. The Pownal Coop has been a customer for two years. A third coop may be forming in the Bethel-Gilead area.

The six store accounts in Eastern Maine account for nearly two thirds of our sales to stores and five of the six continue to grow steadily. In fact, we sell about the same volume to those six that we were

selling five years ago to 19 stores.

We don't know what it is about Eastern Maine, but our Turkey has been extremely well received there.

On the other side of the coin, sales to stores in Southern Maine began to decline when the national chain Wild Oats opened in Portland in November 2003. The decline has continued, but our store account nearest to Wild Oats reported that sales started up again late last year.

To cope with declining sales in Southern Maine, we halved our delivery trips so that we now deliver there every even-numbered month. The rate of decline in sales has slowed, and we look for a turnaround soon as Maine shoppers learn that locally grown food is available at locally owned markets, not at chains from Boulder, Colo.

FRYEBURG FAIR

The first five days at Fryeburg, Oct. 2-6, sales were up by nearly 5 percent over 2004. Then, on Friday, Oct. 7, the rain began and it got steadier and steadier, heavier and heavier. It continued right through Saturday, Oct. 8, and washed out all of our gains from the first five days.

And then some. Sales on Friday, which is usually the second or third best day of the show, were off 25 percent. Saturday, usually the best day, sales were off more than 50 percent, and we had to send nearly half our crew home because we didn't have work for them. We had 8 inches of rain in the final three days.

Closing Sunday, the rain stopped but not until after the dinner hour, so we were down about 30 percent that day, as well.

Overall, sales were down by 14 percent.

FEED SUPPLY

Since June of 2001, we have used feed milled from grains certified to be free of genetic engineering. We had asked five mills to develop this feed for us, and the only one that did was Moulee Vallee (Valley Feed) in Richmond, P.Q.

We have been generally satisfied with Moulee Vallee. But this past season, it shipped us for our baby Turkeys four

batches of starter feed that were bad. We sent three of those batches out for testing, and the results showed that the protein level was way too low for baby Turkeys, that phosphorous, calcium, vitamins A and D and salt were all so low as to endanger the health, the growth and even the lives of the Turkeys. And the feed was not ground finely enough for tiny beaks.

As a result, what was supposed to have been our final flock of the season was almost wiped out. We lost nearly 400 of the 700 birds hatched on Aug. 18, and we had to order a replacement flock in October. That flock is growing now and will be the processing birds that we usually slaughter at Christmas and cut up during the winter.

Another 120 of the surviving 325 birds were way undersized and couldn't be sold as whole Turkeys at Christmas.

We are preparing a claim to present to Moulee Vallee for our losses and extra costs attributable to the bad feed.

WEATHER

Farmers always need something to complain about, and right now it is the weather. As you know from the newspaper, 2005 was a year of record rainfall in Maine.

Rain was heavy in the spring, and the pumpkins and squash we planted for the Turkeys never sprouted. Then, we had seven weeks from July 10 until Labor Day weekend with barely a drop of rain.

But that ended with Labor Day weekend. We had 8 inches of rain in September, more than 12 in October and nearly 10 in November. And it didn't stop then. December brought another 8 inches, and January nearly 9 inches. Our average here is 38 inches a year, and we've had nearly 50 since Labor Day.

That slowed our birds' growth during their final few weeks, when Turkeys gain most of their market weight. Typically, Turkeys build frame for the first two-thirds of their lives and then flesh out during the final third.

But in rainy weather, Turkeys eat less, so they grow less.

The result for our customers was a shortage of medium toms, which usually come out in the 18- to 24-pound ranges but this time came out 16 to 20 pounds. To meet our orders for 20- to 24-pound Turkeys, we had

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OFF 14%

**TOO
WET**

Recipe

Crunchy baked Turkey strips

- 1/4 cup orange marmalade or apricot preserves
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 2 Tablespoons tamari or soy sauce
- 1/4 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 1/2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- 1 egg white
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1 to 1 1/2 lbs. Turkey breast cutlets or boneless Turkey thigh
- 2 cups corn flakes, crushed

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Grease a cookie sheet and set aside.

Whisk together marmalade, garlic, tamari, ginger, mustard, egg white, salt and pepper. Cut Turkey into 2-inch strips. Place crushed corn flakes in a pie plate. Dredge Turkey in the marmalade mixture, then coat with corn flake crumbs.

Place on greased cookie sheet and bake for 20 minutes or until golden and tender. Internal temperature should be 160 degrees for breast strips or 180 degrees for thigh strips.

Report on 2005

The season we were looking for

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to dip into a flock of larger birds, so some people wanting a Turkey of 22 or so pounds had to take a bird of 28 or so.

We have some ideas for easing the sizing problem this year, and they will be set out in our annual Goals edition in April.

SUMMARY

All in all, 2005 was the good season we had hoped and prayed for. Now, our task is to keep it up for a few more years until we retire.

WELCOME

If you are one of the 131 people who bought a farm-fresh Turkey from us for the first time this past year, we welcome you to The Turkey Times

We publish The Turkey Times quarterly. to keep customers up to date on happenings on the farm. We publish recipes (including a full recipe edition some years), we draw customers' attention to

Issues that affect their food supply and we print order forms for Community Supported Agriculture and for holiday birds. We also use The Turkey Times to communicate with customers about changes in our operation that affect them.

Our farm cannot survive if customers buy from us only at Thanksgiving. We hope you become a year-round customer, and we make it as easy as we can for you to do that with our farmstore, home and work-

place delivery and the Crystal Spring Farmers' Market in Brunswick and by wholesaling to stores around the state..

Year-round customers receive The Turkey Times every quarter. Others will next receive the Thanksgiving issue, which comes out in October.

Thanks for buying from us, and we hope you enjoy both our Turkey products and The Turkey Times.

