

Pastured Turkey

A Short Course given January 25, 2007 at the Southern SAWG 16th Annual Conference in Louisville, KY. This course was offered by the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group in partnership with the USDA Risk Management Agency (www.rma.usda.gov).

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Proceedings

These notes provide information, discussions, and questions and answers from the course that are additional to the printed materials provided to participants (enterprise manuals, presentations, and other resources).

DISCUSSION:

Farmers need more USDA processing centers so that they do not have to drive so far to have their birds processed. USDA grants or SARE funding, if available, could assist in more MPU units. Universities could open their processing centers to local farmers. If farmers receive help in solving these problems then more of them will be able to raise pastured turkeys.

The following is a record of the Question and Answer session from the Pastured Turkey short course.

Are there any restrictions on where you can sell USDA certified turkeys?

There are no restrictions, you can sell them anywhere.

Are there different restrictions for different states?

Yes. Tennessee has strictest state regulations.

How far is the closest USDA processing plant to Walters Hatchery?

600 miles—the one in Ohio is the closest and the one in Missouri is the farthest.

Do you have to be USDA inspected to get a label?

Yes. Contact Tammy Myrick with USDA for label: 202.205.0279.

Is getting a USDA label hard?

No, this is the easy part.

Why is it not a good idea to put more than 100 turkeys on an acre?

More than 100 will clear out the land.

What is average cost per baby heritage turkey?

\$7.50 from farm to buyer per baby.

What kind of feed is important for healthier turkeys?

Buy feed with 28 percent protein—it is recommended that you find this feed through your co-op office.

How do turkeys get histaminases?

They get it from chickens.

What is one sign of histaminases in turkeys?

Check for yellow poop.

How can you stop it from spreading?

Digging up the earth or using bleach.

How do you prevent turkeys getting this?

It is recommended that you keep turkeys and chickens 100 yards apart. If you keep them clean they can run together but no more than 300 chickens per 100 turkeys.

What if you are raising them organically?

Chickens and turkeys cannot be kept together if you are raising them organically because the rain washes all the waste together.

What is a safe zone for putting turkeys on land where chickens once were?

Two months.

How do you know where to put the turkeys and where to put the chickens?

It is recommended that you keep the chickens on the south side and the turkeys on the north side.

What is confirmation?

Confirmation means that the turkeys will yield a good amount of meat.

Do you do any cross-breeding for better confirmation?

Bourbon Red crossed with Narragansett had more confirmation.

Will cross-breeding affect how they are sold?

Yes, you will have to market it as cross-bred, not as a solid heritage bird.

How do you select breeder birds?

Look at color patterns and weight.

Do you recommend any benefits of preserving breeds?

Yes, it can give loopholes in state regulations.

Is one heritage breed more popular than others?

The Bourbon Red is more popular because an article in the *New York Times* mentioned that they have a good taste.

What affects the taste?

The way the farmer raises it and what the turkey eats.

Is there any way of changing the flavor of the turkey?

You can change any flavor if change the feed within the last seven to ten days.

Are there other breeds people prefer?

The Narragansett and the Standard Bronze have a high breast meat ratio. The Blue Slate has good confirmation, but it's harder to find.

Is there any problem in running breeds together?

No, a turkey is a turkey and they can be raised together in one flock

Is there any particular breed that you recommend starting with?

If you order a mixed batch you get it earlier than if you order a straight batch.

Is there a market for selling live birds off the farm?

Yes, you can sell live birds to people off the farm. Most people buy them for pets.

What is the Slow Food ark?

Slow Food International is an organization that promotes foods that are in danger of disappearing. The Blue Slate, Buff, and Bourbon Red breeds are on the Slow Food ark. www.slowfoodusa.org

Is the Slow Food ark an advertising tool?

Yes. It promotes foods that have flavor and are unique.

Why wait eight weeks to put baby turkeys outside?

Because before eight weeks they will not have enough oil on their feathers to shed the rain, and their feet may become infected.

How many feeders should you have?

Six feeders per 500 birds and they should be filled every third day.

Do you have web page with a feeder design or measurements?

A web page will be available soon with this information at www.walterspoultry.com

How do you stop toms from fighting?

Leave them and let them fight it out. If you introduce new birds at night you will have less fighting.

Why do you prefer raising heritage turkeys?

They are designed to pasture range, they're more heat tolerant, they can get away from predators better, and they're better able to resist disease.

Are certain heritage birds more immune than others?

Black Spanish and Bourbon Reds

What are some disease preventative measures?

Try to avoid tracking germs in and out and make sure to keep everything clean. Mold kills turkeys.

Do you sell fresh or frozen?

Turkeys are considered to be fresh frozen by the USDA as long as they are not stored below 0 degrees for more than three weeks.