



**FREE Mailbox Market Ads 2 per month for 1 year = \$234 VALUE = More than pays for your 1 year Lancaster Farming subscription (\$49)**

- [Homepage](#)
- [Classifieds](#)
- [Mailbox Markets](#)
- [Place a Mailbox Market Ad](#)
- [Antiques Center](#)
- [Public Auction Register](#)
- [Order Classified Ad](#)
- [Sales Report Form](#)
- [Subscribe](#)
- [Agricultural News Feeds](#)
- [Agricultural Links](#)
- [County Dairy Princesses](#)
- [Electronic Edition](#)
- [North Electronic Edition](#)
- [South Electronic Edition](#)
- [Auctioneer Guide](#)
- [Photos](#)
- [Ag Directory](#)
- [Searchable Display Ads](#)
- [Alternative Energy](#)
- [Dairy Of Distinction](#)
- [About Lancaster Farming](#)
- [Mid-Atlantic Horse](#)
- [Contact Us](#)

Home » content

## Young Farmer Tour Stops at Berks County Duck Farm

Submitted by Editor on Fri, 02/08/2008 - 5:31pm.



**Chris Torres**  
Staff Writer

SHARTLESVILLE, Pa. — This week was Chinese New Year. It was also the week the Pennsylvania Young Farmers held their annual convention in Reading, Pa. So what better way to celebrate both than by touring the nation's second largest farm where a popular Asian delicacy is created?

Joe Jurgielewicz and Son, which processes more than 3 million ducks a year, is the major supplier of processed ducks to Asian communities across the East Coast, according to veterinarian and CEO Joe Jurgielewicz.

Originally started as a duck farm on Long Island, Jurgielewicz moved the farm to Pennsylvania in 1985 after the large number of competing duck farms on Long Island forced him to move his business onto a bigger farm in Berks County.

What started out as a 5,000 duck per week business has turned into a 3.5 million duck per year conglomerate that focuses almost exclusively on providing premium duck to Asian communities in big cities across the East Coast.

The company ships daily to New York, three times a week to Philadelphia and once a week to the Baltimore/Washington, D.C. area.

The farm sits on hundreds of acres in a remote location near the Berks-Schuylkill County line.

It is here where millions of ducks are bred, processed and distributed each year.

While handling ducks is very similar to handling chickens, there are distinct differences that make this process very unique.

Everything starts in the company's hatchery, where between 15,000 and 20,000 eggs are hatched each week, four days a week.

Scott Gettle, hatchery manager, led a tour through the company's hatchery, which includes 38 units where eggs are incubated.

The process of hatching eggs starts as baskets of eggs are dipped several times in 120-degree Fahrenheit water. Gettle explained the dipping process helps to prevent and kill bacteria.

Since the company handles so many eggs per week, Gettle said many of the eggs are first held in a room at 65 degrees Fahrenheit so they can be kept dormant while waiting to be moved.

They are then moved in crates into an incubation room, where they are kept for about four weeks at 98 degrees.

After incubating, the eggs are ready to be hatched. About 85 percent of the eggs that go through the process hatch successfully, Gettle said. Immediately after hatching, each duckling is debeaked and then shipped off to either a contract grower, of which there are more than 20 in the state, or they are raised on the main farm.

Gettle said the ducklings are debeaked to prevent competition between male ducklings and to prevent male domination over females.

After hatching, the ducklings are moved into a large growout house, where they live on wire floors for about 42 days. The ducklings are moved through a series of three rooms, which are then cleaned and disinfected after each use. Jurgielewicz explained they raise them on wire floors mainly because of the high cost of litter as well as sanitation issues.

Tim Diamond, growout manager, said the ducklings grow to about seven pounds by the time they are finished.

After growing out, the ducks are then moved into layer houses. It is here the ducks get ready to lay their eggs.

At seven weeks, the hens start to produce their eggs. Lester Adams, layout manager, said a typical hen can produce up to 218 eggs per year. The peak time for egg production, Adams said, is 31 weeks, when 92 percent of the hens will lay their eggs at one time.

Comfort is key to getting the hens to lay, Adams said. Unlike chickens, which lay in warmer temperatures, ducks live comfortably in cooler temperatures. Over the summertime, Adams said it becomes a challenge keeping the ducks comfortable, especially on hot days, no matter how many fans are running.

Another thing that makes ducks unique is their reliance on water. Adams said a typical duck must consume three to four times the amount of water that a chicken does so they can process food and stay hydrated.

At 45 weeks, the ducks are ready to be processed. They are sold to markets in the form of whole ducklings, duck breasts and even sausage. While most of the ducks are processed for food, their feathers are sold to

### FEATURES

- [Weather](#)
- [Recipes](#)
- [Letters/Commentary](#)
- [Receive Email Alerts](#)
- [Subscribe](#)
- [Archives 1955-1983](#)
- [Market Reports](#)
- [Penn State Ag Blogs](#)



Lancaster Farming Calendar

Mailbox Markets sponsored by



[Ag Scene by Dick Wanner -- \(click on photo\)](#)



### ADVERTISING

**More than pays for your 1 year Lancaster Farming subscription (\$49)**

### MARKET NEWS REPORTS

- [Northeast Butter](#)
- [Northeast Cheese](#)
- [New Holland Livestock Auction \(Monday\)](#)
- [Vintage Livestock Auction \(Monday\)](#)
- [Eastern Region Frozen Eggs \(Friday\)](#)
- [Daily National Egg Market-at-a-Glance](#)
- [National Feedstuffs Market Review \(Wednesday\)](#)
- [New Holland Pig Auction \(Wednesday\)](#)
- [Pennsylvania Produce Summary](#)
- [New Holland Hog Market \(Monday\)](#)
- [New Holland Cattle \(Thursday\)](#)
- [New Holland Sheep and Goat \(Monday\)](#)

**"Do you think the latest CWT (Cooperatives Working Together) dairy cow buyout will help milk prices recover?"**

Yes

Username or e-mail address: \*

Enter your Lancaster Farming username, e-mail address, or an ID from one of our affiliates: [Drupal](#).

Password: \*

- [Create new account](#)
- [Request new password](#)



There are currently 4 users and 8 guests online.

various Asian dealers to use in pillows and other things. This week, Chinese New Year, is the busiest time of the year for the company.

Selling to a specific market that is growing fast and will pay good money for the product is an advantage Jurgielewicz said he is blessed to have. But it's a challenging industry.

Like the poultry and swine industries, the duck industry is also dealing with very high feed costs.

Jurgielewicz said feed, which is made primarily from corn and soybeans, constitutes over 50 percent of the company's expenses each year, by far the largest expense.

Feathers, which were once a way for him to hedge against high feed costs because of how lucrative it is, have dropped in price, mainly because of competition from China, which he said has dropped prices from \$1.50 a pound to 70 cents a pound. He said it takes five ducks to make a pound of feathers.

And even though he produces enough ducks to support his solid markets in New York, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., he admits the Chinese market, if opened, would probably wipe him out.

More than 1.5 billion ducks are produced each year in China, compared to only 25 million ducks in the U.S. Chinese imports in the U.S. are not allowed because of sanitary issues. But Jurgielewicz still worries about that market being opened up.

"If they open up, you might as well forget about our farms," he said. Even with all of the recent challenges, Jurgielewicz said his success has been his devotion to quality. Being vertically integrated, he said, is the key to making everything work.

"We want to maintain consistency and quality," he said. "Good is the enemy of great."

Duck farming is a challenge but something he said is worth a farmer's time if they have the patience to do it.

"It's a niche market but it's a great opportunity," he said. "I'm amazed more farmers don't realize the potential of this. I just think it's a great opportunity."

» [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

No

older polls

Total votes: 80

86%

Copyright © 2006 Lancaster Farming. All Rights Reserved.  
E-mail us: [farming@lancasterfarming.com](mailto:farming@lancasterfarming.com)  
[Terms of Service Agreement](#)