

Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture

PEOPLE IN AGRICULTURE

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Duck Production is a Niche Market for Berks County Company

May is National Egg Month, which begs the age-old question 'which came first, the chicken or the egg?' At the Joe Jurgielewicz & Son farm in Berks County, the question could be asked of another egg-laying avian - ducks. Here, thousands of eggs are laid, and thousands of ducklings hatch each day.

The Jurgielewicz name has been synonymous with Pekin duck production since Dr. Joe Jurgielewicz's grandfather began raising ducks in 1930 on Long Island, N.Y. Dr. Joe's father carried on the tradition, retiring from the business in 1980. He then purchased the 400-acre farm in Berks County and relocated with his family. After graduating from Cornell University's veterinary school, Dr. Joe restarted the family business in the new location.

Pekin Ducks are the specialty at Joe Jurgielewicz & Son, located in Berks Co. Chief Operating Officer Paul Steinmetz and owner Dr. Joe Jurgielewicz run the business that processes 70,000-75,000 ducks each week.

Raising ducks: Joe Jurgielewicz & Son is almost exclusively integrated, meaning they breed, hatch, raise and process all the ducks on the farm. Aside from purchasing feed, which also comes from local companies, the business is completely self-sufficient. The 'closed-flock' prevents the introduction of any diseases that could devastate the business.

Meeting the demand: Situated in a prime location between New York City, Boston, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., marketing fresh Jurgielewicz ducks and duck products is quite convenient. Frozen products are also shipped to Florida, Texas, California and Hawaii. Because duck is a favorite in Asian cuisine, nearly 90 percent of their products are sold in large cities with high Asian populations.

Much of the Jurgielewicz business is conducted through wholesale distributors that service high-end restaurants and other customers. They also market in central Pennsylvania retail stores like Weis Markets, Giant of Carlisle, Karns Foods and all AWI Distribution Center warehouse stores.

"We like the niche marketing," said Dr. Joe. "Because our products and customers are so specialized, we are not reaching for the big commodity markets."

The company has also opted to become a member of PA Preferred®, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's marketing program that assures consumers they are purchasing the highest quality products produced right here in the state.

Leading the industry: The Jurgielewicz team consists of 180 employees, headed by Chief Operating Officer Paul Steinmetz, and has helped guide the poultry industry into the progressive business it is today. Paul has served as a representative on many poultry industry boards like the PennAg Poultry Council. The company has also been involved in Department of Agriculture initiatives like the state-wide avian influenza preparedness plan and in setting live bird regulations.

The duck and the egg both may have come before the Jurgielewicz name, but Joe Jurgielewicz & Son are still the front-runners in duck production.



There are eight breeder/layer houses at the farm, each housing 4,200 ducks. One hen can lay 27 eggs in a 30-day period for a total of more than 3,500 eggs laid in each house daily.



All eggs are collected and sorted by hand each day, before being placed in the hatchery. At any time, there may be 300,000 eggs in the hatchery. The incubation period for an egg is 28 days and each egg stays in the 96-degree incubator for 24-25 days.



Hatchery manager Scott Gettle holds a newly hatched duckling. Nearly 75,000 ducklings hatch each week.

Three styles of duckling are processed at Joe Jurgielewicz, targeted at the Asian markets in larger cities like New York, Philadelphia and Washington D.C.



Jurgielewicz Farm takes a proactive approach to nutrient management. A manure system was installed to collect waste from the barns into two lagoons that can store up to 1.75 million gallons of manure. The solids are separated from the liquids and spread on the land for fertilizer. The liquids are treated and 'cleaned' and used for irrigating the fields.