

POULTRY HATCHERY FEASABILITY STUDY

Farmer/grower Grant Final Report
FNE 02-414

Goals

The goal of the project is to determine the viability of establishing a small regional hatchery to supply a portion of the local market (New York, Pennsylvania, western Massachusetts) with poultry chicks that are bred for pasture-based conditions.

Updated Information

The farm information has not changed.

Cooperators and their roles

William Beckman, MBA, has done the economic analysis, business plan, and wrote, sent, and collated the producer surveys. He also orchestrated the trip to the Ridgeway Hatchery in LaRue, Ohio. He is also the contact person with Cornell, because as a poultry farmer himself he has worked with several of the people there.

Mark Grennan, Director of the Hudson Mohawk Resource Development Council used his administrative skills and many contacts to provide access to some of the information in this report. He also brought a broader view of the concept of sustainability to the project.

Project methodology

The first thing was to visit a commercial hatchery whose product we know and are familiar with. Bill Beckman has purchased most of his chicks (he processes about 1000/yr.) from Ridgeway, so that was where we went. Dean Ridgeway is a third generation poultry breeder, and breeds all kinds of birds. The buildings are modest, equipment is older, but everything is scrupulously maintained. Dean spent the better part of a day taking us through the equipment and describing the process. He has also offered to be a consultant to us in start-up. Ridgeway buys some eggs from outside breeders, and also handles proprietary breeds. Dean described difficulties in obtaining quality eggs from suppliers, namely variations in genetics and unpredictable hatching results within various shipments of breed types. Although they buy 2,000,000 eggs or "shells" each year, they are still considered small.

Ken Geiss made a visit to Timothy Shell in Virginia. He lives about a half-hour from Joel Salatin, the guru of the pastured poultry movement. Tim has worked under Joel, and also raised pastured poultry chicks for 7 years. In addition, he has been

developing a strain of meat birds by crossing a heritage breed, Delaware, with Hubbard's cornish cross and markets these under the "pastured peep" label. He makes extensive use of progeny testing. This includes evaluating feed consumption, foraging ability, grow out, vitality, and taste. Tim has also modified the Salatin range pen system into a fixed pen, moveable pasture system for his breeding flock.

Part of the market study involved identifying potential hatchery competitors. Ken used the internet, phoned the ag offices of numerous northeast states, and consulted the National Poultry Improvement Plan directories.

Results

The results can be seen in the business plan including marketing plan in this report.

Economic Findings

Based on survey results, it is clear that a local hatchery will be economically viable. Both survey results and meetings with local producers demonstrated the need. The Cornell avian specialist, a speaker at one of the NEPPA meetings, confirmed what we had long suspected: shipment to shipment variations results from both genetic variations from hatch to hatch, and also to shipping stress. Based on this, Heiffer International has agreed to fund the establishment of a local chick hatchery through NEPPA. The hatchery must be owned by NEPPA but will be run by Ken Geiss.

New Ideas

The results didn't result in new ideas so much as to confirm what we already suspected, the need for a regional hatchery. Getting fresh chicks as opposed to three day in the mail chicks affects livability and grow-out. We are proposing a cooperative venture involving NEPPA, Heiffer International, and Cornell. The plan is to work with Cornell to develop a new strain bred for this part of the country.

Outreach

Outreach efforts included interviews for the Amsterdam Recorder and the Evening Times in Little Falls, New York. Ken has spoken to the Little Falls Rotary Club and is scheduled to speak at the Margaret Reaney Memorial Library in St. Johnsville. Results are being made available to NEPPA members and, through Heiffer International, to their membership. We have spoken also to the Rensselaer County Economic Development people, and to staff in Senator Joe Bruno's office and to people in Ag and Markets. We have also made presentations to several meetings of the Hudson Mohawk RC&D. Through Heiffer International, we are working out a method of "passing on the gift" that will result from the establishment of a regional hatchery.

Respectfully submitted by Ken Geiss on January 16, 2003