

5/30/97

Robert J. Litch

Results from Sare project FNE95-97

Introduction.

The Project took a direct downturn in the beginning as crates were unable to be leased but had to be purchased. Since this was in direct conflict with the nature of a Sare Grant, the author chose to re-evaluate his approach and stress outreach and education rather than pursue the original stated goals. The author has, however, retained the primary goals of education of the marketplace and proper growing and transportation methods.

Outreach and Advertising.

To advertise to the public, Misty Knoll has run a small add in the Burlington Free Press in the "On the farm section", Agriview, and placed posters in feed stores to advertise slaughterhouse services. Once the grower contacted the farm for services, a full line of options were presented to the grower including the use of crates for transportation.

The Author also presented to the Vermont agricultural community on Poultry Day April 22, 1995 in Montpelier Vermont with the assistance of his advisor, Roger Clapp. A copy of presentation materials is included. The focus of this presentation was to educate farmers about the potential of diversification into poultry farming, and, to present a basic framework within which to make decisions toward that end.

Results from the advertising were at best mixed. Primarily, the people using this service were very small growers whose sole interest was to grow foodstuffs for themselves. Thus, farmers maintained control of their food supply while growing poultry in a manner they found acceptable. This group of people constituted the bulk of participants.

Crate Movement.

Poultry is quite susceptible to disease, and, therefore the movement of equipment from one farm to another is not recommended unless it has been properly sanitized. The crates are cleaned and sterilized at Misty Knoll for the individual farmers prior to pickup. This process ensures that no mechanical transportation of disease from farm to farm will occur. Once at the processing plant, these crates do not leave the confines of the plant until they have been cleaned and sanitized. By following this procedure, no obvious disease outbreaks were detected at any of the farms participating.

List of participating growers.

Larger growers do exist in the state, however, and a list of those using the service follows:

Cavendish Game Birds, Rick and Bill Thompson, Grew approximately 4,000 Cornish Game hens. This was a diversification of their game farm. Their results in the marketplace showed that this bird was too small, 1 -1.75 pounds, to be profitable and the project was discontinued. The amount of money that needed to be charged to receive a fair return was over \$ 4.00 per pound and priced the product out of the reach of consumers. This product was sold to the Bread and Circus food Chain.

The Author worked closely on the development of labeling for this product, and coordinated transportation services for the poultry. Transportation to the slaughterhouse consisted of bringing the birds to the plant and exchanging contaminated crates for sterile ones. Once processed, Black River produce delivered the product to sales outlets.

Future Farm Organics, Ryan Rich, grew approximately 1,500 birds in an organic setting. This project did not yield a great amount of profit for the individual grower because high organic grain prices pushed the price of the product well above comparable chickens. This product was sold to individuals from the farm as well as to independently owned food stores throughout Vermont.

The Author helped develop labels for this company. He also worked closely on the distribution needs and established a working relationship between the farmer and Black River produce to deliver product to the marketplace. This company used Misty Knoll's refrigerated space to store their poultry until it was delivered.

North Hollow Farms, Mike Bowen, grows yearly approximately 2,500 chickens. His approach is to take larger chickens 5 - 6 pounds and sell at a price somewhat closer to the market price for comparable products. This is a diversification project from his main thrust of beef cattle, and mixes well with his existing products. Mike Bowen operates a farm stand and sells at Farmer's markets throughout the state.

The Author worked closely with this grower to establish better growing conditions and reduce breast blister downgrades. This problem was the result of poor litter in the growout area. A distinct difference was seen in the marketability of chickens once this problem was solved.

Results.

The results from each of these projects, although varied, were nonetheless encouraging. Each was a diversification of an existing farm endeavor that allowed the individual farmer to maintain his comittment to his farm.

Each sought their own market and were able to sell their products.

Future Farms' success suggests the typical framework from within which a poultry endeavor seemed to work best. Future Farms worked with existing infrastructure; Misty Knoll's Processing services and Black River Produce's refrigerated delivery services to maximize the time available to be spent on marketing their product and their farm. This was the most viable approach to selling their chickens to a geographically diverse population. This wholesale market approach, coupled with direct off the farm retail sales, seemed to yield the greatest return with the least inputs.

Conclusions.

The use of poultry on a diversified farm can help to produce a viable alternative to single product production. The typical inputs required for pure efficiency are expensive and dictate that a farm would need to commit heavily to this form of production, thus negating the goals of a diversified farm. The solution seems to lie in the model presented by community supported agriculture. Thus, a market can be established early, risk minimized, and the farm's income can be increased. This model would indicate that a stronger commitment to each individual farm would need to be established. So, a farm will not be selling its products as much as it will be selling its whole philosophy and commitment to the land. Poultry sales could easily be one facet of this approach.

PREFACE:

As a farmer, you are responsible for the food supply of your neighbors, your children, and your community. Some of you may plan on processing your poultry without inspection. Personally, I would not eat a chicken that hasn't been inspected and I certainly would never sell one. You expose yourself to the risk of being responsible for causing someone's serious illness or even death. I repeat, you would be responsible both on a practical level and on a legal level. It is very risky, without any real rewards, to not have your poultry inspected by a licensed and trained meat inspector. The inspector inspects each carcass, each heart, and each liver to ensure that the bird is fit for human consumption. He guards against foodborne illnesses the untrained person may not readily identify.

GROWING: What you can't see will cost you.

1. choose chicks that are from a proven hatchery.
diseased or poor performers will cost you money
2. begin and end with clean, dry litter. Why?
Breast Blisters
Foot problems lead to breast blisters
ie. daily maintenance is required
3. have enough room.
damaged wings, bruises, bruised or scratched skin
4. Know what size chicken you want to grow
estimate -- live weight * 70 % = dressed weight.

TRANSPORTATION: You grew a perfect bird. Now let's keep it that way. Don't kill what you just grew.

1. Discontinue the use of any medications, antibiotics, etc. for prescribed time. It is your responsibility to bring unadulterated poultry to be processed.
2. Remove feed, not water from the birds for 12 hrs.
limits amount of contamination by ingesta, feces
3. use care when catching.
disjointed legs, bruised wings, crowding, death
4. place in a well ventilated box, not over crowded.
keep cool, in the shade, allow airflow
avoid heat stress, suffocation
ex. unacceptable means of transportation: pillow cases, grain sacks, trailers, non ventilated boxes
6. know how many chickens you brought for inspection

LABELING:

All Processor's should have a generic label for your birds. ie. young chicken

If you want to say anything else; Free Range, no Antibiotics, your name, From Vermont, all natural,

Call in advance: 1 month is typical turnaround time for labels, including approval, printing, and shipping

MOST COMMON REASONS FOR CONDEMNING A BIRD

1. Airsacculitis-pneumonia
2. septicemia/toxemia-systemic change
3. leukosis-skin lesions