

Del. egg farm keeps eggs rolling

BEAR, Del. — When Shirley Steele trained as a research assistant at the Wilmington Medical Center, she never dreamed that one day she'd be business manager of a thriving egg farm. That was before she and husband Ken became partners in his father Jacob Steele's small farm-based business, Red Bird Egg Farms in Bear, De.

At the time, Red Bird had about 2500 laying hens. The couple added 5000 more as part of their investment in the partnership, and the number has been going up ever since. Today, 9 years later, the Steeles have nearly 3/4 million hens, 12,000 of them located on the home farm in Bear, the rest on farms in New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

Somewhere along the way, Shirley found herself handling the marketing end of this thriving family business. She also keeps the books and supervises personnel. Red Bird's rapid growth makes all this very challenging—especially for someone without any previous commercial experience to fall back on.

One of her biggest headaches is just keeping the eggs moving. During an

average week about 2 1/2 million eggs pass through the grading station in Bear. Each one needs to be washed, candled, graded, packed and sent promptly on its way to one of Red Bird's many clients. Customers range from small businesses like restaurants that need a case or two, up to hospitals and grocery store chains that take a truckload at a time.

When Red Bird went from one to two eight-hour shifts in their packing room last year, the logistics of matching up all those eggs with customer orders became too complex. That's when Shirley Steele called University of Delaware extension farm management specialist Dr. Don Tilmon for some advice on dealing with some of these management problems, including improving product flow through their grading station.

When you're dealing with a commodity like eggs, freshness is essential. At Red Bird, turn-around time from hen to customer is 48 hours. This poses problems you don't encounter with a less perishable item.

To fill client orders, grading station supervisors

need to know which flocks are laying which size eggs. Size and quality vary considerably with the age of the hen. So knowing their age makes it easier to decide which flock's eggs to run in filling a particular order.

It can get pretty complicated, trying to keep all that information inside your head. So Tilmon offered to develop a computer program which would do this job for them.

It took him about two weeks to assemble the historical production data needed to develop the basic model. Then, with the help of University program analyst Sarah Dennis, he plugged in specific information on the age and number of birds in each flock at Red Bird.

The result is a program which provides the company with a printout that tells management the percentage of eggs of any given size or grade that can be expected from an individual flock at any age during its production cycle. This has greatly simplified grading procedures.

Besides its help as a production tool, the model developed by Tilmon and Dennis also has value as a marketing tool in that it tells Shirley Steele what size eggs



Shirley Steele, business manager of Red Bird Egg Farms in Bear, De., and U. of D. extension farm management specialist Don Tilmon go over computer readout that helps rapidly growing company speed over 2 1/2 million eggs a week to its waiting customers.

she'll have to sell over a three-month period. This permits her to plan ahead for a special promotion sales when she sees there will be an excess of a certain size egg.

For example, if she knows there will be a lot of medium coming up six weeks from now, she can let customers know. Perhaps a grocery chain will decide to run a special on mediums as a result.

There's nothing miraculous about what the

computer does for Red Bird, explains Tilmon. It's just that it does it so fast. In a few seconds it can do calculations which would take a whole week to do manually. When a new flock comes on, it only takes a phone call from Shirley to update the model. In a few minutes another printout is in the mail.

The computer is used a lot in production agriculture these days, notes the specialist. He says this particular model could

easily be adapted to similar production systems on other farms.

For Shirley Steele the readouts have solved a big management headache. With all the other demands on her time, she could never work out this kind of detailed production schedule herself. And Red Bird isn't big enough yet to hire someone else to do the job. So the program is saving her both time and money. It's also making it possible for them to keep on growing.

Grain exports hit new record

WASHINGTON, D.C. — American grain exports have set a new five-week volume record, proving that the country's grain elevators can move huge amounts of grain safely, a U.S. Department of Agriculture spokesman said Monday.

Leland E. Bartelt, administrator of the department's Federal Grain Inspection Service, said from the week ending Oct. 18 through the week ending Nov. 15, more than 100 million bushels of grain were exported each week.

"This was the first time on record weekly grain exports needed 100 million bushels for five weeks in a row," Bartelt said. "Each week was also a substantial increase over the corresponding week for last year, and we also set a new record of 119,051,000 bushels exported in a single week."

The exact export figures in bushels for the period are:

Week ending Nov. 15, 115,272,000; Nov. 8,

119,051,000; Nov. 1, 106,735,000; Oct. 25, 107,851,000; Oct. 18, 110,102,000.

Bartelt said these export figures show that U.S. elevators are not being unduly hampered by the new requirements that all export grain be officially inspected and weighed before it is shipped to foreign buyers.

"We are pleased to have been a part of this record, and we are especially pleased that these records are being set in an at-

mosphere of improved safety," Bartelt said.

Bartelt noted that although there have been 16 elevator explosions so far this year, resulting in two deaths and 18 injuries, none of the explosions has occurred at export elevators.

He urged all elevator operators to continue to be alert to the dangers involved in moving large amounts of grain quickly, and to give special attention to continued improvement of housekeeping practices.



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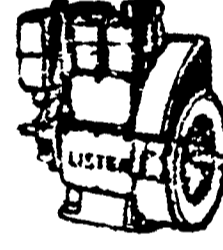
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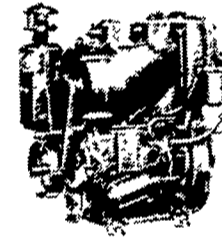
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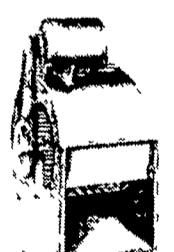
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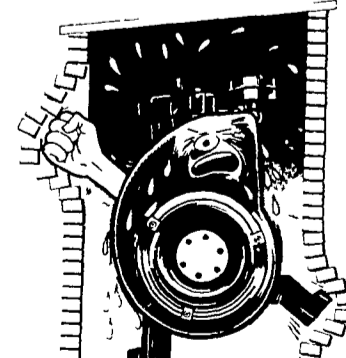
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