

Poultry Queen Family Strives For Excellence In Farming

(Continued from Page 1)

decomposing.

After reading an article on composting in *Lancaster Farming*, Clark did a little experiment on his own.

He dug a hole, threw in chickens and covered them with horse manure. Three months later, he examined the dirt.

"There was nothing left — no bones — nothing," Clark said.

He realized composting was the way to go. ASCS subsidized 50 percent of the cost. Plans were approved by John Schwartz, Lancaster Extension director. In March 1992, the compost was ready to use.

"It's less labor to dispose of chickens now than before," Clark said.

"I thought I would need a college education to run it. But with the right ingredients, you can't mess up. It's a lot simpler than what I expected."

Four adjacent composting bins were erected near the chicken house. Instead of horse manure that Stauffer used in his original experience, he now uses poultry litter that puts the decomposing process in action.

Stauffer throws about three shovelfuls of poultry manure on top of the dead chickens each day. Water is not added. A roof must cover the bins to prevent rain from entering or the compost pile will develop an odor.

It takes about three weeks to fill one bin before it is topped with manure and allowed to go through a seven to 10-day heat cycle that reaches 150 degrees. After the heat drops to about 100 degrees, the bin's contents are dumped into an adjacent bin where it completes another heat cycle. (The dumping aerates to get the bacteria moving). At the end of the second heat cycle, the composting is complete and ready to be spread on the fields.

The process usually reaches 160 degrees. There is no problem with rodents, Clark said, because it gets too hot for ani-

mals to even come near. If the process does smell, odors are easily eliminated by aerating and adding more manure.

Clark said that at first he measured each ingredient carefully for properly calculated ratios, but now does it without measure.

"It's sort of like baking a cake," he said. "After you do it so many times, you can make it without measuring."

No commercial fertilizer is ever used on the farm as poultry manure does an effective job.

Stauffers were one of the first county farms to erect a non-pole barn in 1963. The chicken house is a no footer house without curtain sides. It is environmentally controlled with fans. The Stauffers contract with Pennfield to raise broilers.

Breeding and feeding methods have advanced the broiler industry substantially since Stauffer first housed them.

"The first flock I put in took 14 weeks to finish. The last flock took only five weeks and three days," he said. "It's getting to the point where they won't need to bring in chicks — they'll go straight to slaughter."

Feed conversion is 1.83 to a pound of weight gain.

"You can't get any animal more efficient than a broiler," he said.

Melissa and her two sisters are responsible for unloading the chicks when brought to the farm. After that Clark basically takes care of the chickens.

His daughters primary responsibilities are with the produce business.

"Seven years ago, I needed something to keep my three daughters busy," Clark said, "so I put in an acre of produce."

The first day, the family sold the produce at the roadside stand on the farm, they made \$15. Every day after that sales increased. Since then, it has been Stauffer's goal to double the stand's gross income each year. And, mostly that goal has

been achieved.

Not only do the Stauffers keep the home produce stand stocked, but they supply produce to three local supermarket.

"It took me three years to gain their (the stores') confidence," Stauffer said. He purposes to treat the supermarket like he would want to be treated. He, personally goes to the supermarket everyday to deliver the produce and to make sure everything is fine. He guarantees each product.

The supermarket has been so pleased that they've asked Clark to supply produce for the whole chain, but Clark declined.

He doesn't have the time, and he would find it difficult to supply top quality produce on a daily basis to such a large area.

In the produce business, vegetables and fruit must be picked the day it's at its prime — not one day later when its convenient. That often requires rising early in the morning and working late at night.

Nevertheless, Stauffer enjoys the fast-paced produce business. "It's interesting, exciting, and challenging to grow the best product," he said.

"Weather dictates the crop," Stauffer said. And, for him, this past summer was ideal with lots of sun. Dry years mean a more profitable business for Stauffer because he irrigates.

People will drive long distances for large, fully-developed sweet corn compared to the non-irrigated short, poorly developed ears, he said.

Wet years hurt produce sales because he battles more fungus and irrigating does not pay off.

The Stauffers use plastic to extend the growing season. Covering the crops with plastic in early spring has enabled the Stauffers to harvest cataloupe and tomatoes two weeks ahead of the market.

"The best advertising is word of mouth," Clark said. "People will travel miles and pay extra to get good produce. For that reason, the Stauffers irrigate by



She may be a poultry queen, but that doesn't mean a pampered lifestyle. Here, Melissa picks tomatoes, one of the many crops grown on 15 acres of produce.

using an overhead pump and pump water from the creek on the farm. Clark would like to go to more trickle irrigation, which results in less fungus problems and allows more careful monitoring of plants. But the overhead method has advantages. During hot summer days, the overhead irrigation systems wet the chicken house roof to cool off the broilers while watering the produce acreage.

Stauffer follows a three-year rotation plan for vine crops. To control weeds he uses spray and kids, he said. Sprays make produce gardening less labor intensive but he does hire help for cultivating.

For the past eight years, soil and water conditions are monitored on the farm by a U.S. geological survey with the Chesapeake Bay.

This requires the Stauffers to keep records of everything that goes on the soil, manure hauling, planting, and farming practices.

The Stauffer farm is only one of two farms chosen for monitoring. It was chosen because of the way the land lays, the conservation used, and the excessive manure.

During the first three years of the monitoring, Clark used normal farming practices, but studies revealed that too much fertilizer was being used. Clark stopped using commercial fertilizer and applied only half of the manure he previously did. "My yields are higher and I have less cost because I don't use commercial fertilizer and only half the manure," Clark said.

For two of Melissa Stauffer's favorite recipes in time to celebrate National Poultry Month, check the featured recipe on page B6.





FIRST STATE PACKAGING, INC.
"Progressive Packaging For The Pennsylvania Poultry Industry"

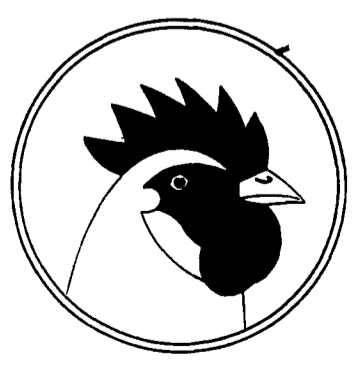


- Waxed Poultry Ice Pack Boxes
- Octagon Bulk Boxes
- Tray Pack Boxes
- Poly Cups Many sizes and styles
- Stock Boxes Many sizes
- Egg Cases and Filler Flats
- Poly Bags and Stretch Film
- Brooder Paper and Chick Box Pads
- Adhesives
- Any Specialty Items

NEW PENNSYLVANIA LOCATION!
Service to all of Pennsylvania from our Chambersburg, PA location.
Phone: (410) 546-1008 Fax: (410) 546-5341
Large Enough To Serve You. Small Enough To Care

RISSEY'S POULTRY INC.

P.O. BOX 52 • LITITZ, PA 17543



Over 60 years of prompt dependable service.

Tel. 717-626-5466

Buyers and Haulers of Leghorn, Medium, and Heavy Fowl.

Now using carts for the most efficient means of moving spent fowl.

FAX 717-627-3599