

Where Ducks Are Just Like Kids

LOU ANN GOOD

Lancaster Farming Staff
ELVERSON (Chester Co.) —
Duck farmers are a bit scarce. If they are like Luke and Elmata Hollinger of Elverson, what they lack in numbers they make up for in enthusiasm.

"I love ducks — they're just like my kids," said Luke who with his wife raises 12,000 Peking ducks with a new 3,000-head batch rotating every two weeks.

For 30 years, the Hollingers had raised 30,000 layer hens. When the equipment and housing became obsolete, and it became more and more difficult to contract 30,000 layers, the couple decided against expanding and updating their facilities. About five years ago, they quit the egg business.

Luke thought he'd concentrate on his full-time cabinet job where he'd been employed for years.

But he missed having something to tend.

"I get very bored if there's nothing to do," he said.

The Hollingers started checking out options. The feed company that had supplied their poultry operation for years suggested they

try raising geese.

The Hollingers did try it for a season, but the geese market did not pan out like expected.

Ducks were another alternative for raising in the obsolete poultry houses, but the Hollingers were skeptical.

They didn't want to rush into anything, especially if the market wasn't there. But they found that cities with a large ethnic Oriental population provide a steady market. They contracted with a Shartlesville grower who delivers newly hatched ducklings, picks up the finished ducks every two weeks,

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Luke and Elmata Hollinger never tire of talking about ducks. Luke said, "The ducks are just like my children. I feel better when I'm sleeping at home with them. If I go away, I always have the ducks in back of mind just like they're my kids. I keep calling home to see how they're doing."

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