

A tour of Sauder's Egg Plant fascinates Lancaster County Poultry Ambassador Kendra Weaver as she watches the process of getting the egg from underneath the chicken to the dining plate. Tom Fox, quality control manager at the plant, is at left, and George Georges of the Lancaster County Poultry Association is on the right.

From Underneath The Chicken To The Dining Plate

KENDRA WEAVER
Poultry Ambassador

LITITZ (Lancaster Co.) — Imagine walking into a huge building. The smell of disinfectant reaches your nose as the steady hum of machinery frustrates any effort to carry on a normal conversation. While the cool air nips at your nose watch as thousands of boxes of eggs are loaded into the back of a huge trailer bound for New York.

These are some of the fascinating sights and sounds I experienced recently on my tour of Sauder's Penn Dutch Eggs in Lititz. Tom Fox, quality control manager at Sauder's, escorted George Georges and myself on an informative tour to view the "behind-the-scenes" steps of an egg packaging plant.

The first room we walked into was the cooler and packed with thousands of eggs, from hundreds of farms, stacked taller than myself. Every egg was sorted into a dark or light flat — depending on their weight. Cases of large and jumbo eggs, which are 48-pound case weight or larger, were piled high on shades of bright oranges and reds while those that fell into the category of 36-pound case weight sat on dark green and black flats. As we walked through the walls of eggs, Tom Fox explained that Sauder's receives approximately 10-15 percent brown eggs and a small percentage of organic eggs. The birds, which are qualified to lay organic eggs, must be allowed to roam free while consuming "natural" feed made from grains never touched with pesticides and insecticides. Another special egg at Sauder's is the "Golden Egg" marketed for its rich supply of beta-carotene. Interestingly, the golden color is achieved by extract in the chicken's diet from a Cyan pepper native of Mexico.

Continuing our tour, we walked into the packaging room. Only eggs from one lot or one farm are done at a time. Near the beginning of the century, women were employed to inspect and package the

eggs and were considered exceptional for completing 39 cases of eggs per hour. Now however, using equipment from Diamond International, Sauder's is able to process 550 cases of eggs per hour. The eggs are mechanically hoisted onto a conveyor belt and spun through a 200-gallon washer kept between 115 and 120 degrees Fahrenheit with a pH of 11. After visible extraneous residue has been removed, the eggs are sent through steaming rinse water kept between 135-140 degrees Fahrenheit. This insures that all invisible pathogens have been killed. The eggs are then rolled under the scrutiny of "B-pickers." These employees manually pick out cracked eggs and those with other visible defects. After receiving a fresh coat of mineral oil to seal up the egg shell pores and prolong shelf-life, the eggs are carried into a dark, curtained room. Light beams up through the bottom of the eggs as employees with special electronic markers stamp any with interior problems.

The computer is able to separate these eggs because of the marking made by the electronic marker. Next, each egg is individually weighed and carried by machinery to the appropriate place where it is deposited into the correct "loading dock." Every "loading dock" scattered along the outside of the long machine (that transports the eggs) is suited with egg cartons, some of them for jumbo, extra large, large, medium and small eggs. Every carton is stamped with the date, the farm number the eggs came from, and the station number in which they are packaged.

If any trouble arises, Sauder's is able to immediately trace the eggs

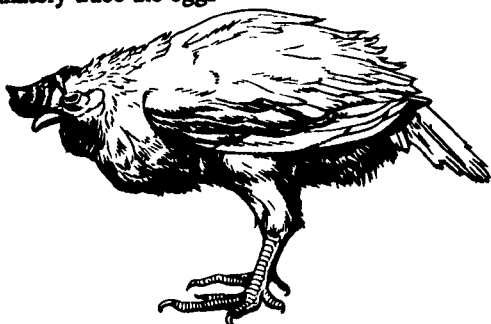
back to the farm from which they came. After the eggs are deposited into the cartons, employees pack them into boxes, crates, carts, or whatever the order happens to be.

It was obvious how consumer friendly Sauder's Eggs is. They alter their packaging method depending on what the buyer has requested including the kind of carton the eggs are shipped in.

According to federal law, egg packaging plants are permitted to have a 5 percent crack rate on the eggs they ship to consumers. However, Sauder's has their packaging method at a zero percent crack rate. The cracked eggs they sell to other companies at a cheap price are then sold by those companies for the regular grocery-store shelf price. Even though Sauder's is sacrificing profit, their reputation to package guaranteed high-quality eggs for the consumer is priceless and irrefutable.

Sauder's Eggs is one of the only, if not the only, company in the nation to have Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) installed in the machinery of the packaging plants. This system guarantees immediate attention to any part of the plant malfunctioning and halts entire packaging procedure if the problem sighted cannot be fixed in minutes.

Sauder's Eggs is the largest egg producer-processor in the east coast and fifth largest in the nation. They have six plants in three states including Maryland and Ohio. They export along the Atlantic Coast from Maine to North Carolina. Internationally, Sauder's eggs have reached Puerto Rico, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Hong Kong.



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