

This Year Excellent For Turkey Growing

(Continued from Page A1)

United Turkey breed.

Horst, who farmed in the dairy business with his father Lee near Gettysburg, decided to raise turkeys in 1991. Back then, Horst and his family were finishing turkeys for Round Hill. Wampler-Longacre purchased Round Hill soon after.

In 1991, the Horsts managed flocks of 12,000 light hens each — table birds. Last year, the Horsts finished flocks of 9,000 heavy toms each for Wampler. The Horsts finished 40,000 birds that year.

Again this year, about 14,000 light hens were finished in two buildings for the contractor. They finished about 36,000 toms this past year.

Two finisher barns occupy a great deal of footage on the farm. One measures about 50 by 250 feet and the newer one featuring pole construction measuring 50 by 350 feet. The finisher barns have a dirt floor, are curtain sided, and feature side and overhead ventilation. The 50- by 300-foot brooder barn has a concrete floor.

In another few weeks, about 14,000 hens will be shipped for the Christmas market.

Horst maintains 59 acres on the farm near Gettysburg, mostly in cash crops. The feed for the birds, along with the propane gas for heat, medications, and other supplies, are supplied by Wampler. He supplies the buildings, labor, electricity, and water.

For Horst, the challenges of the season vary from the high heat and heavy humidity of the summer to getting the birds ready for the contractor to ship on time.

Horst noted that he grows different kinds of birds, including hens and toms, for contract. The toms come in weighing less than an ounce and are shipped at 19 weeks weighing more than 34 pounds. Average gain per day is .2553, almost a quarter pound of muscle mass a day.

Hens weigh about the same when arriving. They are shipped from 14-16 pounds each. They require less feed, of course, than the toms.

The hens and toms are fed different formulations depending on their ages.

Four flocks of toms are shipped each year. For the hens, Horst can finish about 5-6 flocks.

"This year we had an excellent growing season," said Horst. "We had a hot spell in July and again in August, but it wasn't bad enough to lose turkeys from the heat. It was just an excellent year for raising turkeys."

The crops did well this year, despite droughty conditions in some parts of the county.

Horst raises corn for grain. He grows about 21 acres of corn and 30 acres in beans, all cash cropped.

The corn and soybeans, he said, are "sitting in the bins waiting for a better market." The ground, which lays low, holds the moisture in drier conditions. They can till in a wet year.

Daily chores with the turkeys include moving the waterers to different spots to keep the litter drier. Cakes of litter need to be cleaned up regularly. When finished with the flock, the floor is tilled up and sawdust is placed.

The heat and other environmental conditions are all computer-controlled in the houses. Fans keep birds cool in the summertime. The key is controlling the humidity.

"Turkeys can't take humidity," he said. "If it's 100 degrees outside and there is 100 percent humidity, it hits them."

Turkeys under heat stress simply lay over and die. A lot of heart attacks. The dead birds are composted at the farm.

Other challenges for the Horsts
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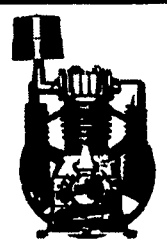
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