

Pallmans' Secret To Raising Turkeys

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raising fresh turkeys and capons for the holiday season.

The turkeys and capons are sold on an order-only basis and can range in size from the smaller-sized turkeys that weigh about 12 pounds to larger turkeys weighing more than 40 pounds.

In addition to raising poultry — an estimated 4,500 capons and 8,500 turkeys seasonally — the Pallmans also operate a strawberry farm.

The poultry operation was begun in the late 1940s by Art "Dutch" Pallman and is run by his sons, Rich, Brian, and Bruce.

Today, this unique combination of the strawberries in the spring and the turkeys and capons for the holidays continues to equal a successful operation for the Pallman family.

When the strawberries are in season, customers can pick their own and can also see the turkeys when they arrive at the farm. This provides an unusual awareness opportunity for the Pallmans, for many of their strawberry customers return in the fall for their turkeys.

The secret to their success is quality.

"Most people who get their turkey here become a loyal customer," said Rich.

Customers are from Scranton and the surrounding areas, but some will travel several hours just for a turkey. People arrive from Binghamton, N.Y.; New Jersey; Philadelphia; and North Carolina.

This family operation has only 23 full-time employees and is a one-of-a-kind operation in northeastern Pennsylvania with a retail fresh turkey and capon business.

The turkeys will arrive on the farm in June and July, raised to the proper weights, and then processed on the farm just before Thanksgiving.

Because of the farm size and

business type, the Pallmans continue to believe they are able to take good care of their birds, which results in a better finish. Rich said they give the birds a lot of "tender loving care," making sure they get outside and exercise. The farm can better maintain the litter and pay attention to detail.

Because of their "tender-loving-care" philosophy, the business has been built on word of mouth. The only other advertising they have is in the early fall, when they mail cards out to 4,500 people to notify them of ordering their turkey and when the pickup days will be. They also advertise for the Christmas season.

In addition to the retail business, Pallmans also sell gift boxes to small companies in the Scranton area and capons to distributors in New York City, eastern Pennsylvania, and Lancaster.

The health of the economy can play a role in how their company gift box sales are in one year. For the retail side, every year is about the same if not a little bit better.

Retail sales with customers are "not nearly as economically driven," said Rich, "because of the quality of the product that we have. And for that one meal for the year, people are willing to pay the price because they know the quality and they want that. The other aspect, the wholesale end, and dealing with the businesses — that is totally economy driven."

Rich also notes that 50 percent of their turkeys at Thanksgiving go to gift packages for small companies. However, there is no real risk to have a large volume of turkeys that cannot be sold since their companies are small.

Rich said, "when one business sector tends to struggle, another is having a good year." So they can easily pick up a new customer to make up the loss for one company in a year.

As the business continues to



The Pallmans offer larger-sized turkeys than can be found in the grocery store. Several turkeys will mature to a weight over 45 pounds.

grow and change with the times, they continue to shift with the consumer demands. The one change that Rich notes is that the shift in the holidays from Christmas to Thanksgiving.

"Back in the '50s, Christmas would have been just as big if not a bigger holiday," said Rich. With the gift boxes, "we used to do as much for Christmas if not more as Thanksgiving."

The demand for capons continues to diminish for the Pallmans. They note that a younger generation that does not know what a capon is, and for those who do, a health-conscious public does not want them.

Their ability to market capons is based on the use of distributors, selling live birds to a Kosher plant in New York, and the ethnic groups still in the Scranton area.

However, a greater problem continues to arise for the Pallmans as the demand for capons continues to decline. The genetics are not being improved upon, and finding suitable birds is difficult.

In addition, finding someone to caponize the birds is expensive and problematic. They note that they only know of two people in Pennsylvania who still op-

erate as independent contractors who will come to the farm to do the procedure.

Although the Pallmans count their location a blessing when considering the risks for poultry diseases such as avian influenza (A.I.), there are many distance challenges they handle that a farm in a poultry-rich area would not have. The challenges include feed, which is shipped from Lebanon County; having to go pick up their poults because of the small number they need, traveling eight hours away; and no local veterinarian.

The other challenge they face every year is free turkey giveaways at local stores.

"If there is anything that has impacted our business, that has," said Rich. "That has hurt our business a little bit. There is always going to be that person out there looking for the cheaper product."

Regardless of the challenges, the Pallmans move forward every year with the family turkey tradition. It is an enjoyable time through all of the hard work—especially on pickup days,

when their parents, Dutch and Leona, meet with the customers.

"Pickup days — they (our parents) are still there and like to help distribute the turkeys. There are a lot of personal friendships that they have developed over the years because the people have been coming for so long," said Rich.

Although the Pallmans claim that they really have never had any unusual things occur in their operation, they claim their turkeys have graced the table of the former Gov. Robert Casey's home. In addition, their turkeys have rumored to have been sold through one of their distributors to Martha Stewart.

The challenges are worth it.

"It's the light at the end of the tunnel," said Bruce. "We will all go to our mother's (for Thanksgiving)." And one of their turkeys will be served.

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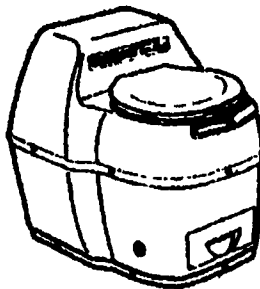
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