

# Fun with feathers

Catching chickens is hard work

"This will get you guys into shape for football season," shouted farmer James Garber.

His words were drowned by the frantic clucking of several thousand chickens.

Thirty-five members of the Donegal Football Booster Club (mostly athletes and coaches) had their hands full of feathers last Wednesday evening, when they participated in a "chicken catch" at the Garber farm. The Boosters transferred 13,500 chickens from the Garber chicken barn to a truck. At 2 cents a bird, they earned \$270 for Project D-Lites.

Although coach Dennis Iezzi smiled cheerfully throughout the operation, most of the participants looked as if they would rather be doing push-ups on the football field.

The *Susquehanna Times* photographer told one Booster, "You know, I used to do this for a living."

"I think I'd rather starve," the booster replied.

According to our photographer, the Garber farm is a chicken-catcher's dream come true. The birds were very clean and healthy, and the ventilation system in the barn kept the ammonia in the air to a minimum. The Boosters, most of whom had probably never worked in a less well-managed barn, didn't appreciate the excellent working conditions.

Anyone who spends a few hours lugging chickens around is liable to get a little...well, dirty. To catch a chicken, you reach into her cage and grab her by the feet. Each catcher removes four chickens from each cage. Holding them by the feet, he carries them to a truck, where they are placed into a new set of cages. The chickens do not cooperate.

The Garber chicken house is as long as a football field, which means that the Booster Club volunteers got quite a bit of exercise while carrying their squawking burdens up the long corridors of cages. The building cost \$178,000, including equipment, and it incorporates the latest developments in poultry science.

The birds are confined in cages, where their feed and water can be delivered by automation. Each chicken has about 45 square inches for exercise. The tiered cages make even ventilation possible. Droppings fall through the mesh cage floors and into a pit; a system which improves the birds' sanitary conditions and simplifies manure handling.

Mr. Garber raises young



Dennis Iezzi must be a natural-born chicken catcher. He smiled as he worked.

pullets to the age of about 21 weeks. At that age, the birds are ready to start laying a lot of eggs. With the help of chicken-catchers, the birds are transported to another farm, where their eggs can be collected and sorted automatically. The chickens have a life-expectancy of 72 weeks. That's when their egg production drops, and they are shipped to a

cannery.

Until recently, most pullets were raised in the South, on open ground. Technological improvements have shifted a good share of that business to more northern places like Lancaster County. Mr. Garber has almost completed a second big chicken house, so the Donegal Booster Club should have plenty of opportunities to raise money in the future.

## Fish Derby winners

Winners of the Elizabethtown/Mount Joy Forest Fire Crew Fish Derby were:

First fish caught—Shawn Maxwell, age 11, 271 Park Ave., Mount Joy;

Smallest fish caught—Robert Shank, age 10, Box 146, Rheems;

Grand prize for the largest fish caught—Tom Stare, age 10, 216 N. Barbara St., Mount Joy;

First fish caught—Jeffrey Shelly, age 8, R.D. #2, Manheim;

First 8 fish caught—Melissa Nicola Gutshall, age 4, R.D. #3, Box 38, Mount Joy;

Smallest fish caught—Andy Smeal, age 4, 114 N. Market St., Elizabethtown.

The following businesses contributed to the event: Tradin' Post Sporting Goods, Elizabethtown; Joe The Motorist's Friend, Elizabethtown; Western Auto Assoc. Store, Mount Joy; McComsey's Sportsman's Center, Mount Joy; and J.B. Hostetter & Sons, Mount Joy.

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