

**Metzer Farms Legarth
Hybrid Pekin ducks**

Delving Into Duck Dividends

As a school lad, John Metzer and his father were visited one day by a gentleman who wanted John Metzer senior, a duck hobby grower, to supply him with 40,000 duck eggs a month. The figure was astronomical to the farm family and young John says that it was then

Duck Industry Chronicle

Commercial duck rearing dates back to the early 1800's with the duck industry weathering various industry hurdles over the years. In 1964 the National Duckling Council was organized to aid in industry promotion.

Today, the commercial duck industry is diversified into various markets: dressed ducks for consumption; ducks for the gamebird industry; duck eggs for the oriental market (balut); infertile duck eggs to artists; salted duck eggs (generally imported into U.S. for the oriental market); breeding stock; day-old ducklings to the backyard and commercial producer; duck feathers; duck feet, tongues and heads (to the oriental market) and duck oil.

Established in 1995, The Duckling Council is an organization of four White Pekin duckling producers* accounting for 75 percent of all duckling produced in the United States. The Council relates that its primary goal is to reintroduce today's duckling to the foodservice industry as it provides a new opportunity for aspiring and established chefs, restaurants and other culinary professionals. White Pekin duck represents 95 percent of all ducks consumed in the country, says the council.

The Pekin promotional efforts have been successful. American Poultry History 1823-1973 relates that in 1972 per capita consumption of duck was less than 1/4 a pound. Today that figure is up to six ounces. The Duckling Council mentions that White Pekin

DUCK continued on page 8

*Crescent Duck Farms, Inc., Culver Duck Farms, Inc., Maple Leaf Farms, Inc., and Woodland Farms, Inc. - The Duckling Council

that he was first exposed to the potential of raising ducks commercially.

The decision to delve into ducks by John Metzer Jr was realized in the late 1970's when he began producing ducklings and goslings at Metzer Farms. Family owned and operated, the company controls every aspect of its business from breeding to shipping.

Today, the operation sells 350,000 to 400,000 day-old ducklings and 75,000 day-old goslings annually as well as 10,000 to 20,000 duck eggs weekly.

Mallard Ducks



Metzer Farms

Raising Ducks for the Gamebird Industry

Commercial gamebird production is a thriving agricultural industry across the nation and mallard ducks are among the most popular gamebirds in demand today.

Ducks are in demand for several reasons, including loss of wild bird numbers, the increase in the number of individuals seeking alternative sources of protein, and the growing number of hunting preserves seeking good flying birds.

Individuals contemplating a future in raising ducks for the gamebird industry may wish to contact a gamebird association such as the North American Gamebird Association and visit a commercial duck operation in their area.

What can a producer expect to get for his ducks?

"It's next to impossible to set specific prices for gamebird eggs, chicks, started or mature birds. There are many variables," says *Wildlife Harvest* gamebird magazine. The journal also mentions that marketing should never be placed "last" in priorities.

"A quality product, at the right place (and the right price) promoted by the right people will SELL. The biggest mistake made by newcomers in this industry is (pricing their product too low). Pricing is critical! The future of any private-enterprise business is based on adequate margins."



Metzer Farms male and female Golden 300 Hybrid

Duckling producers reported a 11.5 percent increase in national consumption from 1995 to 1998.

Metzer Farms Duck Dynamics

Ducks are raised year round at Metzer Farms, which has a capacity for 110,000 duck eggs at a time. Four times a year the farm imports Pekin eggs to update their own commercial flock as well as sell parent breeders to commercial meat producers.

Metzer explains that most duck hatcheries that typically raise ducks for retail and to feed stores, generally hatch from February through July. By marketing duck eggs, the company stays in production year round. Explains Metzer, "Our special breeds lay for eight months anyway, so we market those eggs during the slow season."

Metzer Farms is renowned for supplying quality ducks such as the popular egg laying Golden 300 Hybrid (10,000 a year) and the White Golden Layer, also a hybrid. In addition they offer Pekin, Rouen, Khaki Campbell, Mallard, Blue Swedish, Buff, Cayuga, and Indian Runners.

John Metzer mentioned that he assumed business would grow, but that the farm has diversified a lot more than initially anticipated. "We're always adding new products," he says.

In addition to ducklings, geese and goslings, the company also offers a selection of breeding stock (including Pekins imported from Denmark), sexing services, and a number of miscellaneous items such as poultry vitamin packets, posters, and publications.

Metzer explained that the majority of duck eggs on the market are "balut" (a two-thirds developed duck egg). "It takes 28 days for a duck egg to hatch. We incubate the eggs for 17 days and sell them at that point. They're boiled and eaten by Filipinos and Vietnamese in the U.S. and predominantly in the San Francisco Bay area. We sell 10,000 - 20,000 eggs a week."

Duck eggs are also marketed salted (fresh egg placed in a salt brine for four to five weeks). Metzer remarks that these are produced inexpensively in the Orient and imported into the U.S.

There's also a market for duck eggs to artists. Infertile eggs are emptied, sterilized and shipped to artists for decoration or etching, etc. Metzer Farms sells around 2,000 of these duck eggs and 7,000 geese eggs a year. In addition, the farm offers ducklings to both the backyard and commercial meat producer.

A current project at the farm is

DUCK continued on page 11

DUCK continued from page 8

raising geese year round for the Christmas market as well as the domestic Chinese market. Metzger relates that hatching geese eggs are not a problem, but that enticing the goose lay during nontraditional times of the year is. "I don't know of anybody in the world that has done this consistently," he replies.

Duck Demands

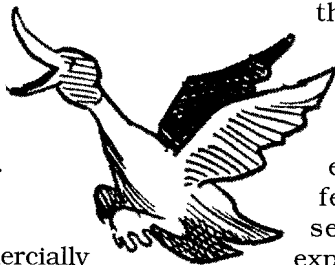
Raising ducks commercially for any market can be a challenge. Like most poultry, ducks are susceptible to several diseases and a beginning commercial producer generally has to be willing to experiment with various production techniques, as there's not a lot of production research data available, according to Metzger. He notes that majoring in animal science has helped him as well as

his background in genetics, marketing, nutrition, and management.

A prospective producer contemplating a future in ducks needs also to count the cost. Ducks may be small, but when you have thousands of ducks eating, it adds up. Metzger Farms consumes 24 tons of duck feed every eight to 10 days, with feed being their second largest expense behind labor.

Culver Duck Farms, Inc. of Middlebury, Indiana, reports annual consumption of around 24,000 tons of duck feed.

Industry advocates mention that the commercial duck industry is not saturated with producers as are other poultry and livestock industries for several reasons: the dressed duck market is fairly expensive and complicated to get



into; there's not an overabundance of commercial duck research and production data available; and some marketable ducks and duck byproducts are limited to the oriental populace.

"One of the challenges of raising ducks and geese is that there's not much known about them and that's because there are not many people doing it," says Metzer.

Back yard producers aspiring for a piece of the national market, Metzer relates, would have to go up against industry goliaths, who literally have spent millions on duck processing equipment, promotion and improved genetics, etc.

"It's hard for a backyard grower to sell dressed ducks," says Herb Culver, president, Culver Duck Farms. "You can't be too little and compete and it's very difficult. You need processing equipment (very expensive) if you're going to offer dressed ducks. And the duck has to come to market at a certain time, which is very tricky. Our ducks go off on exactly 45 days - it's a science."

Duck Direction

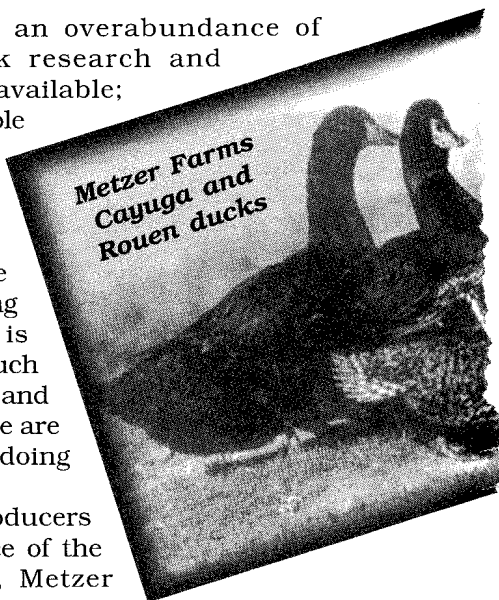
It may be wise to do your homework *before* you make the decision to delve into ducks commercially. Metzer offers this advice to the potential duck producer, "The first thing is you have to have a market - a product that can sell. You don't want to start producing something then worry secondarily about selling it."

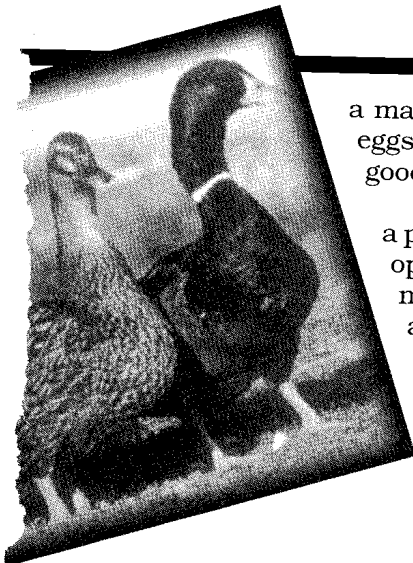
Metzer adds that aspiring duck producers need to "take it one step at a time."

So how can a producer get started?

"If you're going to raise ducks then you buy ducklings. You raise these, and if that goes well, then you purchase an incubator and hatching eggs (if you plan to operate a hatchery). If that goes well, you put up some buildings and obtain breeding stock. Eventually you produce and hatch your own eggs and raise and market your own ducklings," explains Metzer.

Metzer relates that location can also play a large part in a duck farm's success. "The majority of large duck farms are near oriental populations or they ship there (Long Island, New York's China town, Chicago, Vancouver, and San Francisco). Typically, Asians use more ducks and duck egg products than other nationalities. So if you're in an Asian community there's a greater chance that you'll have





a market for your ducks and duck eggs. Or, you'll have to be really good at your marketing."

While raising ducks may be a potentially profitable agventure option, make sure you have a market for your product and are able to supply that market. The advice from existing producers: make sure you have all your ducks in a row, before you begin a row of ducks!



Duck Directory

Culver Ducks

12215 County Rd.
10 Middlebury, IN 46540
1-800-825-9225 • into@culverduck.com

Metzer Farms

26000 Old Stage Rd.
Gonzales, CA 93926
831-679-2355 • 1-800-424-7755
www.metzerfarms.com
metzinfo@metzerfarms.com

North American Gamebird Association

919-782-6758, www.naga.org

Wildlife Harvest magazine

319-259-4000 fax: 319-259-4483

Duck Reading

Nutrition and Management of Ducks, 177 pgs, \$29.⁵⁰, The Home Duck Flock, 174 pgs, \$12.⁹⁵, Poultry House Construction, 92 pgs, \$15.³⁶, The New Duck Handbook, 96 pgs, \$6.⁹⁵, Waterfowl Care, Breeding and Conservation, 277 pgs, \$24.⁹⁵, Successful Duck and Goose Raising, 203 pgs, \$11.⁹⁵, **Metzer Farms order line** - 1-800-424-7755

Raising Waterfowl *An introduction to raising ducks and geese for show or market.* Order # A3311, \$1.50 + postage Cooperative Extension Publications • 608-262-3346

University of Minnesota Extension

Service ("Raising Ducks") -

[www.extension.umn.edu/
Documents/D/I/D11189.html](http://www.extension.umn.edu/Documents/D/I/D11189.html)

Duck Central • www.goldinc.com