Niche Poultry Markets
Niche Poultry Markets

- Live Bird Markets
- Squab Production
- Duck Production
- Upland Game Birds
Chickens, Ducks, Geese, and other fowl are often sold at live bird markets. Some suppliers are partially integrated. It is normal for a supplier to own breeder farms, growout facilities, trucking, and transportation. However, most of the suppliers will not own their own feed mill or hatchery. This is mainly because of the smaller size of the company. Relatively few suppliers and many markets.
Many consumers at live bird markets are from various Asian ethnicities.

- Consumers may choose to inspect the bird live to make sure that it does not have any noticeable illnesses or defects.
- The traditional Asian consumers prefer to process their own birds at home for cultural reasons and to guarantee freshness.
- Younger generations may prefer their bird processed professionally.
Live Bird Markets in Chinatown
Market Structure – Similar to the commercial poultry industry, but much smaller market.

Some duck companies are fully integrated – owning all major aspects of production.

Processors typically own their own farms or contract with duck growers and market under their own brand.
Market Outlets for Duck

- Marketed to high-end restaurants and grocery stores.
Duck Processing

- Whole birds
- Some duck processors offer further processed products.
  - Cut-up products
  - Cooked products
Squab Producers

- A squab is a young pigeon.
- There is a high demand in the Asian (principally Chinese) community for squab and it is also marketed to high end restaurants and retail markets.
Squab Producers of California

- SPOC is an Agricultural Cooperative
  - Members pool their resources and work together to process and market their squab.
  - Squab Producers of California operates the largest squab processing plant outside of Asia.
  - Growers own their farms and their birds. Collectively the members own and control the cooperative.
  - By joining together, the squab growers can have more control over the supply, demand and consequently the price of squab.
    - Members also benefit from a more efficient processing plant. Instead of having many small processors, a single state-of-the-art processing plant is utilized by all members.
Upland Game Bird Growers

- Upland game birds include pheasants, chukars, and quail.
- These birds are raised for the specific purpose of hunting at hunt clubs.
- Some growers breed, hatch, and growout their birds.
- Some larger growers might even have their own hunt clubs.
Importance of Niche Markets

- Although the niche poultry markets are much smaller than the commercial poultry industry, they still are very valuable to the economy.
- Because of niche markets, consumers have a choice between different products.
- Many Asian American and Asian immigrants in the United States take advantage of the niche markets for traditional cultural reasons.
Breed Differences from Commercial broilers

Brown Leghorn Pullet
- The first brown chickens raised for meat in the U.S. in the early 1980’s.
- Used for egg production prior to 1980.

Companies make regular deliveries but some also offer on-farm pick up for birds to be brought to the market.

Due to the manner in which the bird is raised, the meat may be tougher than traditional broiler birds.
- Most birds are either boiled or barbequed.
Brown Leghorn Chicks
Brown Leghorn vs. Broiler Chicken
Age of bird varies with time of year and breed.

- Most common age bird is sold is 16 to 20 weeks old.
- The bird maturity plays a part in the time of the sale.
Diet Differences

- Because birds are raised longer than broilers, they are fed a different diet.
  - Feed formulas vary by the individual supplier but usually include a chick starter, grower, and a developer.
Processing

- Processing can be done by the consumer at home.
- Processing is also done at commercial processing plants that offer custom processing.
  - Birds that are processed must be sold and consumed within 7 days in order to maintain freshness.
  - Birds are never frozen and then sold in the markets as fresh.
- Whether the birds are professionally or personally processed, the bird is left whole with the head and feet attached.
  - This is called a Buddhist Style process.
  - The consumer can also tell the age of the bird by the size of the comb.
- A “Hot Plant” is offered for consumers to pick out the live bird they want and have it processed in a state inspected processing facility.
  - All other processing is done at USDA inspected facilities.
  - The birds are packaged with custom labels or packed directly on ice for transport.
Birds are sold in grocery stores, restaurants and live bird markets.

- Most live markets offer both live and processed product.
- The store is divided in two by a panel to separate the live from the processed cold storage.
Duck Producers

Terms

- Drake – male duck
- Hen – female duck
- Ducklings – adolescent ducks
Major Meat Breeds of Duck

› Aylesbury
› Muscovy
› White Pekin
Aylesbury

- Popular in England where the breed originated.
- Appearance – White feathered, white skin, flesh colored bills, light orange legs and feet. Adult drakes – up to 9 lbs, adult hens – up to 8 lbs.
Aylesbury
Muscovy

- Unrelated to other meat breeds. Wild Muscovy originated in South America; however, the French domesticated the Muscovy duck for commercial production and brought it to the United States. This is a major commercial breed in California.
- Appearance – many varieties, white is most desirable for markets. Drakes weigh up to 11 lbs and hens weigh up to 6 lbs.
- Non-migratory bird.
- Still considered a waterfowl; however is more comfortable on the ground than water. Enjoys scavenging in the mud and dirt.
- Muscovy ducks are indigenous of South America. Wild populations are found in Florida and Texas today because they were relocated by people to those areas.
Muscovy
Muscovy Hen with Ducklings
White Pekin

- Major commercial breed in the United States.
- Originated in China and introduced in the U.S. in 1870's.
- Appearance – White feathered, orange-yellow bills, reddish orange legs and feet. Can reach market weight of approximately 6.25 lbs in 8 weeks.
- Migratory Bird.
- Indiana is where the majority of Pekin duck producers are located.
Pekin Duck in the Wild
Pekin Ducks in Production
Muscovy vs. Pekin

- Muscovy ducks take 10 (hens) - 12 (drakes) weeks to reach market weight.
- Pekin ducks can reach market weight in 5.5-6 weeks.
Breeding and Reproduction

- Male and Female “Lines”
  - Male lines are bred for structural correctness, breeding productivity, efficient feed conversion ratios, and desirable carcass characteristics.
  - Female lines are bred to lay an optimal amount of eggs.
  - Crossing these two lines produces a superior terminal product (hybrid vigor).

- Incubation period
  - Muscovy – 35 days
  - All other breeds – 28 days
Growout

- Brood / Growout (very similar to chicken/turkey production).
  - Heat source
    - For the first week, ducklings need an extra heat source. The first week the temperature should be about 90 degrees Fahrenheit. Duck growers use brood stoves similar to the commercial poultry industry.
  - Litter
    - Mold resistant materials must be used for the floor cover – i.e., rice hulls, peat moss, straw, or shavings.
  - Feeding
    - All feed mixes are designed by an animal nutritionist with the health and welfare of the birds in mind.
      - Starter – high percentage of protein (about 22%)
      - Grower – about 18% protein
      - Finisher – about 16% protein
Muscovy Ducks in Production
Uniqueaveness of Squab

- Pigeon breeders are monogamous and mate for life.
- Squab are processed at about one month of age, before the bird can fly.
- Squab meat is dark, moist, and flavorful.
Reproduction and Production

- Pigeon Pair – mated male and a female pigeon. Since pigeons mate for life they are referred to as a pair.
- Nest – each pair has their own nest. This is where the eggs are laid and the squab are raised.
- Controlled mating – when a pair of birds are manually placed in a nest together. Common practice for widowed pigeons.
- Natural mating – is when the grower places the young birds in a pen and lets the pigeons choose their own mate. This is the most common industry practice.
- Clutch – a set of 2 eggs laid during the mating period.
Reproduction and Production (continued)

- Pigeon breeders are often given an identification band on their leg to help the producer keep production records.
- Once the squab reach about three weeks of age, the hen will lay another clutch of eggs. The female will be responsible for incubating the new eggs and the male will take charge of feeding the squab.
- Pigeon’s egg production peaks at about 3 years of age.
- A pair can produce about twenty-two squab per year at their production peak. However, they average about 14 squab per year over their average 5 year economically viable breeding lifespan.
- The grower collects the squab for processing at about 26-28 days of age.
Most squab are sold in metropolitan areas such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York city.

They are marketed to high end restaurants, grocery stores, and other Asian (principally Chinese) markets.