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NF95-246 Nebraska Turkey Facts

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Nebraska Turkey Facts

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History

Turkey production began as early as 1916 in western Nebraska. The Agricultural Experiment Station in Scottsbluff recommended raising turkeys as a way farmers could control grasshoppers to save alfalfa fields. In 1995, Nebraska's modern turkey cooperative, the Nebraska Turkey Growers, markets turkey products throughout the Midwest and United States.



Production

According to USDA 1995 figures, Nebraska ranks 16th in the nation for turkey production following North Carolina ranking first. Annually, approximately 2.5 million turkeys are raised in Nebraska; 65% to 70% were hens in 1995. Nebraska has over 20 turkey complexes with housing units spread throughout the state.

There are two types of turkey farms – breeder and grower farms. Grower farms raise the hens separate from the toms to market weights. Turkey breeder farms have both hens and toms. Semen is collected from toms for artificial insemination of hens. Today, most growers house their flocks in scientifically designed, environmentally controlled, well-spaced facilities that protect birds from diseases, predators and severe weather.

All commercial turkeys produced today are white, broad-breasted turkeys. Each turkey eats approximately 60 pounds of feed. Nebraska turkeys consume approximately 1,600,000 bushels of

Nebraska corn annually and more than 20,000 tons of Nebraska soybean meal annually in combination with other grains, animal by-products and supplements.

It takes about 16 weeks to grow a 16-pound hen or a 24-pound tom. A 24-pound live turkey will dress out at near 20 pounds.

Marketing

All Nebraska turkeys are processed at the Nebraska Turkey Growers Cooperative in Gibbon, Nebraska, founded in 1936. This is one of a few plants left in the poultry industry that still operates independently and where producers control the marketing of their product. Only whole birds and bone-in breasts are processed in Gibbon, with U.S. and international markets. In 1994, the plant processed 50 million pounds of turkey for these markets.

Nebraska premium turkeys are packaged under the NORBEST label – the largest whole turkey marketers west of the Mississippi River for more than 50 years. NORBEST is a cooperative organization between Nebraska and Utah cooperative members, growers and processors. The Gibbon plant also does some private label packaging and employs approximately 220 people.

Hens are the most popular turkey for consumers because of size convenience. Toms are produced mainly for cut-up turkey products. Tom breast meat is used for premium cuts – such as deli breast meats.

Consumption

According to the National Turkey Federation, the per capita consumption of turkey has increased from 10 1/2 pounds per year in 1980 to over 18 pounds in 1994, a 72% increase. In 1994, 46 percent of American homes served turkey at least once in a two week period, that is up 35% from five years prior. More teenagers (81%) consume turkey today than in 1981, with 96% more people from ages 18 to 34 as well as 100% of females from age 55 to 64 are enjoying turkey.

Clearly, turkey appeals to all age groups. Only 30% of turkey consumption is in the form of whole turkey, with 70% in the form of franks and other deli items. Over 44% of turkey consumption presently is in the form of sandwich meats.

Turkey is a nutritious, low-fat food. A 3-ounce portion of white turkey meat without skin is only 137 calories and contains 3 grams of fat. Dark turkey meat without the skin is 163 calories and 7 grams of fat.

Various low-fat, convenient turkey products include: turkey breast, boneless turkey roasts, turkey ham, turkey lunch meats (pastrami, bologna, salami), ground turkey, turkey sausage, turkey bacon, and turkey kielbasa.

Both fresh and frozen whole turkeys are high in quality and the choice between them is based on consumer convenience. A fresh turkey is ready to cook immediately and should be refrigerated and used within two days of purchase. A frozen whole turkey should always be thawed in a refrigerator. You should allow 24 hours for every 5 lbs. of total turkey weight.

June is "Turkey Lovers Month", to remind people that turkey is enjoyable year round, not just during the holidays.

For more information contact your local Extension educator or the Nebraska Poultry Industries.

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