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# Profitable Turkey Production For Thanksgiving and Beyond



- PRESENTED BY -

Mike Badger

American Pastured Poultry  
Producers Association (APPPA)

- HOSTED BY -

**FACT**

Food Animal Concerns Trust

# Introductions



**Food Animal Concerns Trust (FACT)** is a national nonprofit organization that advocates for the safe and humane production of meat, milk, and eggs.



## **Larissa McKenna**

Humane Farming Program Director

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FACT's services for livestock and poultry farmers include:

- **Fund-a-Farmer Grants**
- **Conference scholarships**
- **Free webinars**
- **Humane Farming Mentorship Program**

# Our Presenter



Mike Badger

- Director of the American Pastured Poultry Producers Association (APPPA)
- Owns and operates Badger's Millside Farm in Hughesville, Pennsylvania



# PROFITABLE TURKEY PRODUCTION FOR THANKSGIVING & BEYOND

Mike Badger

# Key Issues

- Not Just a Big Chicken
- Genetics
- Brooding
- Feed
- Pens/Grazing/Structures
- Markets
- Processing



Everybody loves to learn about turkeys.

# Genetic Characteristics

- **Commercial:**

- 14 to 18 weeks
- Better FCR (3-4:1)
- Larger carcass
- Friendly
- AI breeding
- Mortality: 0-100%

- **Heritage:**

- 24+ weeks
- Can fly
- Worse FCR (5:1)
- Maintain breeding flock
- Smaller breasts/carcass
- Reliable genetics a challenge
- Hardier

# Genetics

- Commercial: Broad Breasted White/Bronze
- Heritage: Bourbon Red, Beltsville Small White, and more



Eli's Bourbon Red



Beltsville Small White  
And Broad Breasted

# Can Heritage Turkeys be Profitable?

- “The old guys always said that to market good standard bred turkey, the toms should gain a pound a week. A good White Holland or Bronze tom at 20 weeks should weigh in at 20 pounds live weight.
- In 24 weeks, a tom should weigh in at 24 pounds live weight and a 28 week old tom should weigh in at 28 pounds live weight. It is different for hens.”
- “A 20 week old Bronze or White Holland hen should weigh in at 10 to 12 pounds, and a 28 week old hen should weigh in at 16 to 18 pounds live weight.”
  - –Jim Adkins, APPPA Grit Issue 96



# When to start poults?

- Thanksgiving
  - November 22, 2018
  - Estimated processing date: Monday, November 19
  
- Broad Breasted White
  - 14 weeks - August 6
  - 16 weeks - July 23
  - 18 weeks - July 9
  
- Heritage
  - 26 weeks - May 14

# Brooder

- Clean, clean, clean
- 95 degree temp to start
  - (heat lamp, brooder box, gas brooder)
- Hay in corners
- Brood 4 to 8 weeks
- Tolerate 50 degree nights at 4 weeks
- Need parent figure



Ohio Brooder with  
thermostatically  
controlled heat



# Starter Feed Fundamentals

- Higher Lysine and Methionine requirements than chickens
- Starting on 19% broiler grower won't work
- Heritage Starter: 27.9% for 6-7 weeks
- Commercial Starter 26% for 4 weeks
- *Pastured Poultry Feeding and Management, Third Edition*
  - by Jeff Mattocks



# Turn 19% Broiler Into Turkey Starter

- 4lb. fishmeal to 20lb feed = 26%
- 2lb. fishmeal to 20lb feed = 21%
  - Feed as a grower #1 ration days 29 through 56
- The more you tailor your ration to the life stage, the better your turkeys will perform
- Based on Fertrell rations

# Additional Feeding

- Decreasing protein requirements as age
- Divide life cycle into quarters (fourths)
  - 1<sup>st</sup> quarter: starter
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter: grower #1
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter: grower #2
  - 4<sup>th</sup> quarter: finisher #1
- Free choice wheat or corn after 8 weeks
- **Feed grit always**
- Recommended Resource: *Pastured Poultry Feeding and Management, Third Edition* by Jeff Mattocks

# Turkey Feeding Trial

- Turkeys grow better with attention
  - 15 minutes per day yielded 1 pound more carcass
  - Trial by Casey Rogers, Fertrell. Published APPPA Grit 91.
- Processed at 14.5 weeks

Group	Feed Consumed	Water Consumed	Average Live Weight	Average Carcass Weight	Carcass Yield	FCR (Live)	FCR (carcass)
A (attention)	961.5 lb.	406 gal.	20.10 lb.	16.07 lb.	80%	2.39	2.99
B	1,220.5 lb.	478 gal.	18.94 lb.	15.07 lb.	79%	2.47	3.11

# On Pasture

- Turkeys are great foragers—rotate often
- Daily move shelter
- Day range



# Predator Protection

- Housing Style
- Electric Fence
- Guard Dogs



- Be vigilant against neighborhood dogs





# Markets

# Thanksgiving

- Whole birds
- Customers willing to “splurge”
- Sell ‘em all; romance fades
  - Some Christmas birds
- Matching weight to customer demand
  
- Pastured poultry producers have horror stories to spare about unfilled Thanksgiving orders and profits lost
  
- One chance to get it right

# Eat Turkey All Year

- Cut-up Options
  - Boneless breast, leg/thigh, stock
  - Bone-in breast, leg/thigh, stock
  - Whole (airline) breast, leg/thigh, stock
- Cut-up those 30lb. birds



# Cut-Up Math (Commercial)

- Simple 20lb example:
  - Cut-up:
    - Leg/thigh ( $3.4\text{lb} \times 2 \times \$6.00 = \$40.80$ )
    - Bone-in Breasts ( $3.8\text{lb} \times 2 \times 6.00 = 45.6$ )
    - Soup stock ( $6\text{lb} \times \$3.00 = \$18.00$ )
    - Total = \$104.40
  - Compare
    - Whole:  $20.4\text{lb.} \times \$4.00 = \$81.60$
    - Parts:  $20.4\text{lb} = \$104.40$

# Beltsville Small White Yields

- Cut-up Yields:
  - Average carcass: 11.375 lbs
    - Boneless breasts / skin: 3.5 lbs (29%)
    - Leg/thigh quarters: 3.3125 lbs (29%)
    - Wings: 1.25 lbs (11%)
    - Back/frame: 3.3125 lbs (29%)

# Ground Turkey

- Example: 20 turkeys dressing at 28lbs average
  - Yield 270 lbs. of ground turkey—13.5lbs per bird
  - Ground breast w/skin and thighs only
    - Legs have lot of tendons
    - Sell legs separately and sell stock
- Compare it:
  - 270 lbs of ground x \$13.00 = \$3,510
  - 20 whole turkeys x 28lbs x \$4.00 = \$2,240

# Sell Started Poults

- Turkeys can be challenging
- Some producers buy started poults



# Heritage Turkeys

- Hatching Eggs – 28 days
- Day old chicks
- Demand from other growers and family flocks





# So, You Want to Process in November?



# Processing

- Like chicken, almost
- Transport –crates or trailer
  - Air flow. Be careful smothering
- Cut feet off before scald
- Scald twice as long
  - approx 2 minutes
- Use a bigger plucker for better results
- Start processing 1 week before Thanksgiving
- Use a lot of ice



# Common Chilling Questions

- How long will a fresh turkey keep?
- Key spoilage temps based on Tompkin Paper:
  - 18 days to spoil at 32 degrees
  - 11 days to spoil at 37 degrees
  - 8 days to spoil at 42 degrees
  - 6 days to spoil at 47 degrees
- Reduce carcass temp to 40 degrees w/in 8 hours

# Contact Mike Badger

- American Pastured Poultry Producers Association
  - [grit@apppa.org](mailto:grit@apppa.org) | [www.apppa.org](http://www.apppa.org) | 888-662-7772
- Pastured Poultry Talk Podcast
  - [www.pasturedpoultrytalk.com](http://www.pasturedpoultrytalk.com)
- Processing Equipment, Ready to Lay Pullets
  - [www.millsidefarm.com](http://www.millsidefarm.com) | 570-713-9282



**Pastured  
Poultry Talk**  
with Mike Badger

# Questions & Answers

Please type your Q's!



# Connect with



## Upcoming **\*free\*** webinars

**March 14:** Goat Herding Basics

**March 21:** Livestock Guardian Dogs 101

**April 11:** Raising Pigs in an Agroforestry System

Register @ [foodanimalconcernstrust.org/webinars/](http://foodanimalconcernstrust.org/webinars/)

## Grants, Scholarships, Mentorship & More!

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