

Workshop Title: Poultry - Colourful Chickens, Odd Ducks and Flying Turkeys

Speaker: Harry Stoddart

Executive Summary: Harry Stoddart gave an overview of the various breeds of chickens, ducks and turkeys that they have worked with, and the characteristics that lend themselves to creating a profitable and enjoyable farm enterprise.

Detailed Notes:

We first watched a video tour of Harry Stoddart's farm, which is posted on their website. Grass-fed beef is the heart of the operation. They practice holistic management grazing in high legume pasture. They also raise pigs – Berkshire are durable animals. They raise both standard hens & rare breeds. They have a flock of sheep – Romney – and market their meat, skins, and wool, which they dye themselves.

In terms of rare breed and heritage chickens, they have raised many over the years, including:

- Chantecler, who were bred in Canada and are winter durable
- Copper Black Marans, who are very rare, have the darkest coloured brown eggs, and have a quiet temperament
- Ameracauna, who lay multi coloured eggs – aka Easter eggs
- Blue Cochin, a calm, heavy breed
- Buff Orphington, who are also a heavy breed and have a lovely temperament
- Old English game fowl, who are quite aggressive

At market, you need something to distinguish yourself. It's easy with chickens; they have a range of colours in every dozen, which creates conversation between customers and helps you develop a reputation.

For odd ducks: they have raised Khaki Campbell. These are more daylight-sensitive than regular laying hens; they have never got more than 320 eggs per year. They are better foragers – strain ponds and reduce mosquito population. They are hardier and messier – you can't put ducks in battery cages; you can't confine them without a slatted floor barn. They have found that keeping water outside buildings keeps things cleaner and that it's helpful to keep them with chickens.

Turkeys are beautiful birds with personality. The heritage breeds are smaller and now more desirable than standard turkeys. They fit marketplace better than industrial turkeys. People want 10-15 lb turkeys. They once raised wild turkeys, mostly because they are not controlled by supply management. They are slower growing and durable. They can also fly, but in their experience they came back for food. They became 10 lbs by Christmas. The lower gain made it difficult to pay.

Question: What is origin of the Ameracauna?

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Answer: They are descendants of the Aracauna, who had no tail. American breeders gave them tails and they became Ameracauna.

Question: Can you make rare breeds pay for chickens?

Answer: We made it work by having half our stock rare breed, and the other half are standard. We need to have a good story and some standard chickens.

Question: Do you ever sell spent-hens?

Answer: We no longer try; there isn't enough consumer interest; it costs as much to slaughter as we can sell it for. We've tried dual-purpose but they didn't pay. In our experience "dual-purpose" meant "good-for-nothing".

Question: Do you grow your own grains?

Answer: The cattle and sheep are pasture-raised; we grow grain but don't mill it ourselves.

Question: What are your suppliers for breeds?

Answer: It's difficult to source breeds.