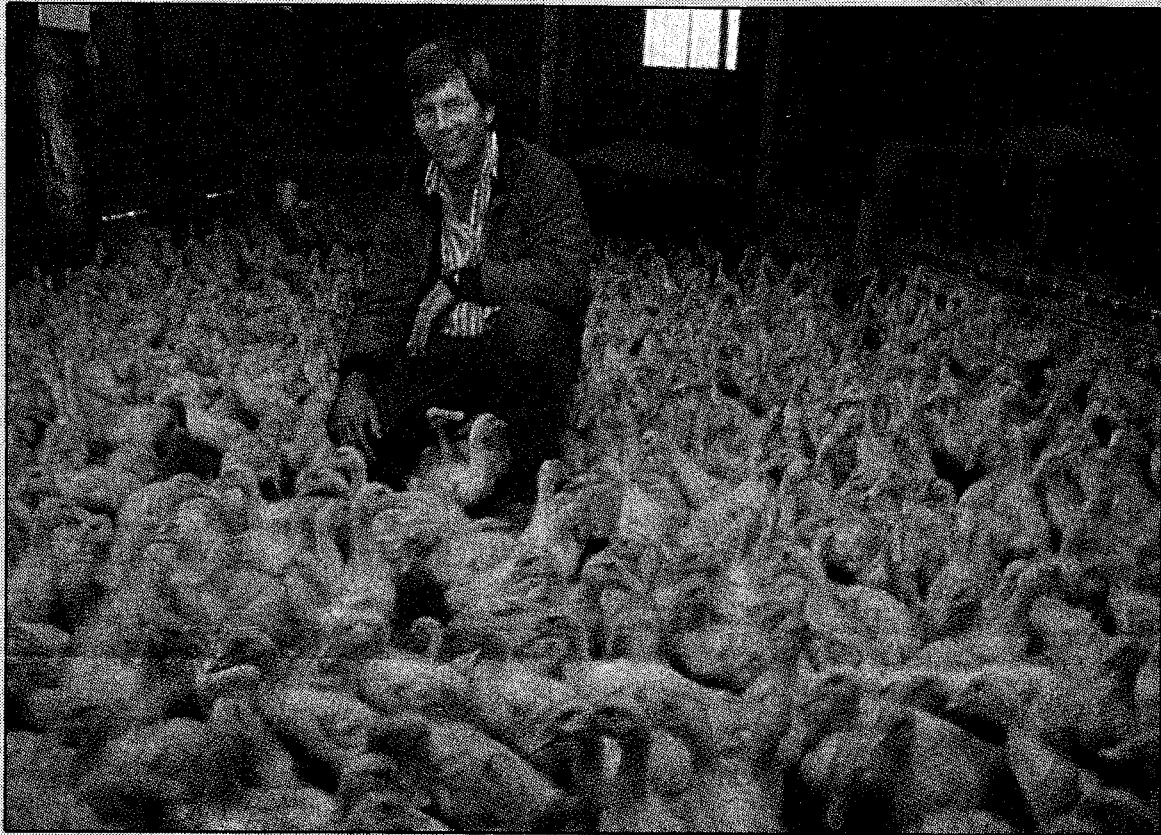


FOREIGN FOWL



Clay Peterson/The Californian

Gonzales farmer Tom Metzger watches 1,550 female ducks, 17 weeks old, which have been bred by a Danish firm to produce offspring with more meat than American ducks. Metzger imported the ducks for a Petaluma processor.

Farmer looking to break into Danish duck business

By **Walter Neary**

The Salinas Californian

GONZALES — This is another chapter in the story of foreign labor replacing American workers.

But not quite yet. Duck farmer John Metzger admits he plans to eat turkey today for Thanksgiving dinner. But next year — well, let's say Metzger sees ducks on the horizon.

The ducks are from Denmark, land of fjords and liberal social

welfare policies. And these are fertile, some might say lusty, ducks.

For while an American duck might produce 120 or 130 little ducklings a year, the Danish duck — product of sophisticated genetic research and breeding — will produce 200.

"You want a female duck to lay a lot of eggs just so it reduces your cost," Metzger said.

And the ducklings will have more meat, and less skin and

bones, than their American counterparts.

And while five American female ducks are typically courted by one male, seven Danish ducks can get by with a presumably cheerful male Dane duck.

The landlord of this squad of Scandinavians is Metzger, 32, owner of Metzger Farms, located in the fields north of Gonzales. He and a Petaluma chicken processor are planning to swim into Please see **DUCKS/Page 2A**

Ducks: Gonzales farmer looking for new flap on market

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the Northern California duck market with the best ducks around.

Metzer imported about 1,550 female ducks and 250 male ducks. The ducks cost about \$6 each, versus \$1.25 for American labor.

Metzer, who sits on the board of trustees of Hartnell College, is the kind of guy who writes a memo, which is posted on the wall of the processing facility, addressed to "Fellow Eggers."

Metzer has been around the duck and goose business all his life.

The duck and goose business may sound like a Vaudeville routine, but if you have seen baby geese or ducks around Easter in a store, they are probably Metzer's. And if you are Vietnamese or Filipino, you may eat balut from his farm. Balut is essentially boiled duck embryo in a shell.

Why a duck? The business got started a long time ago, because Metzer's father, Olin, an English teacher, really liked ducks. He

started a business, which did swimmingly even before his son took over.

Metzer and his Petaluma associate figure there is a lucrative market out there, not only for eggs but for duck meat — take Chinatown in San Francisco, for example. Allen Shainsky of Petaluma's Windy Hills Farm takes delivery of about 6,000 ducklings on Fridays, and plans to market them in Northern California.

Shainsky estimated about 60 percent would go to Asian markets, 20 percent would be barbecued, packaged and sent to Hawaii, while the rest would go to up-scale markets and delis.

But as for Shainsky himself, he also does not plan to feast on duck today for Thanksgiving.

"I ate so much duck this week during our experimental cooking that I got my fill of it," Shainsky said.

They've been rehearsing the process of hatching, growing and marketing for a few weeks, but

with American ducks. The American ducks will be phased out as the Danish ducks begin laying eggs.

Eventually, Metzer hopes to market the egg-layers to other areas in the country, as well as enter the Danish goose business.

The Danish ducklings, now almost 3 weeks old, are located in a shed near Metzer's farm. They are in a small enclosure, surrounded, ironically, by the American ducks which they are slated to replace.

The American ducks are much bigger, and entering their large chamber is like entering an echo chamber of squawks, with the scent of a men's locker room with broken plumbing.

The sound starts to swell in waves and begins to rattle like derisive laughter, 1,500 ducks wondering why Metzer and two visitors are looking at and taking pictures of the little Danish ducks, not quite a foot high, with wings about the size of a silver dollar.

But little do these American

ducks know that when the Danes mature, the American ducks have a date with sweet and sour sauce.

The Dane duck females are active, swirling around their shed, chirping for food in a much shriller cry than their large counterparts.

The 250 duck males are separated from the females. The male ducks are not moving around. They are in fact lying on the ground, apparently asleep.

Metzer swears that this is not because the males are tired from social activities. Metzer says that the rigid Legarth instructions call for the males to be better fed at this stage of their lives.

"Their bellies are full," he explained.

Metzer says he will not introduce the males to the females for about 15 more weeks.

Metzer says he has no plans to show them any Danish films beforehand.

"They know what to do," he said.