

## FIRST COURSE

# Duck Farm Dynasty

How pandemic demand fueled a local duck hatchery's growth all the way to Memphis, Tennessee.

By Jeff Mendelsohn

**D**riving south along Old Stage Road through the Salinas Valley, you will pass by a number of different farms. Farms that grow food, mostly, with some viticulture and floriculture operations sprinkled in. Family-owned farms that have been here for generations. Families whose surnames are as familiar to us as the crops growing right there in the ground. But as you make your way further south down Old Stage, and into Gonzales, you might find one farm that stands out from the rest.

Pulling off the road, Metzer Farms looks like many other Salinas Valley ranch houses. A well-maintained home with tidy landscaping and a certain charm that suggests the house has been in the same family for generations. But just behind the gate on the right-hand side, there's a driveway that leads to the business portion of the Metzer estate. If the barns don't give it away, the smell certainly will.

Metzer Farms is a family-owned duck, goose, poultry and game bird farm and hatchery that was founded in 1972. From here the Metzer family has been raising, hatching and shipping ducklings all over the country for over four decades. Although they're just one of a handful of commercial duck farms in the entire country, their operation has largely flown under the radar.

But after the Covid-19 induced "pet boom" in America, Metzer Farms had a banner year in 2020, as sales increased by over 25 percent. As a result, Metzer Farms is now in a position to expand its operation and put a new feather in its cap.



Marc Metzer with some newly hatched ducks. In addition to selling the just-hatched birds, Metzer Farms sells fresh duck eggs under the brand name Olinday Farms.

"The pandemic definitely spurred growth for our business," says General Manager Marc Metzer. "We saw a significant increase in direct-to-consumer sales, from just a few ducklings to large backyard flocks. We're hatching about 30,000 ducklings on average per week now, and that additional volume has definitely boosted our cash flow and opened new doors for our business."

**"We will be providing a service no one else can match."**

One of those doors will be opening very soon in Memphis, Tennessee. Metzer Farms is currently building a \$6 million, 21,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art hatchery to complement its existing 10,000 square foot operation in Gonzales. Why Memphis, you might be asking?

The vast majority of Metzer Farms' business, over 90 percent, is conducted via direct shipment to customers in collaboration with the U.S. Postal Service and FedEx, which just so happens to be headquartered in Memphis. Customers can order ducklings, or a variety of other birds, from Metzer Farms' website and have the live birds delivered directly to their front door. This new location in Memphis, a short waddle from FedEx's main hub, will allow for faster and safer delivery of day-old birds to customers all over the

country.

"We're excited to be in Memphis and be able to provide ducklings and goslings to people overnight across the country," Metzer Farms owner (and Marc's father) John Metzer says. "We will be providing a service to our customers that no one else can match."

In addition to the logistical alliance, the new Memphis hatchery has also partnered with a collection of local Tennessee Amish families. These families, who have been farming in that area for centuries, will raise duck breeders for the Metzers, and then sell the fertile eggs back to Metzer Farms to be hatched at the new Memphis hatchery.

Doing business with the Amish is a unique experience. "Horse and buggy is their only mode of transportation," Marc says. "They use zero electricity, so all of their farm work is done without the use of a tractor. It's really quite fascinating."

The home farm in Gonzales will still serve as headquarters for the family-owned business, but the expansion effort will be the focus, at least for the early part of 2022.

"It's an exciting time for us," Marc says. "Business is all about timing and taking advantage of growth opportunities."

For Metzer Farms, that time is now. Might as well take a quack at it. ★

**Metzer Farms** is at 26000 Old Stage Road, Gonzales. (800) 424-7755, metzerfarms.com.

## MORSELS

**POP-UP PREVIEW...**In a prelude to opening later this year, **Chez Noir** will be holding pop-up dinners at **Stationary**. The first will be held on Tuesday, Jan. 11, starting at 5:30pm. On offer is a seafood-centric, four-course meal for \$85 per person and a wine pairing with winemaker **Samuel Louis Smith** for \$45 per person. San Carlos Street between 5th and 6th, Carmel. [cheznoircarmel.com](http://cheznoircarmel.com).

**BIG SUR BENEFICIARIES...**The annual **Big Sur Food and Wine Festival** is about flavor and fun, but also a cause. The **Big Sur Food and Wine Foundation** has announced the beneficiaries of the \$150,000 raised by the 2021 festival, and the will be distributed to 13 different Big Sur nonprofits in the areas of health, education, safety and the arts. That includes \$45,000 each for Big Sur Fire and the Big Sur Health Center (the largest two amounts) as well as money for the Henry Miller Library, Esselen Tribe of Monterey County and more.

**FIRST FIRST FRIDAY...**Celebrate the first Friday of the year with **Night Market 831**. It's a great opportunity to dance, create art, shop and eat. **Central Coastan Pizza, Cre's BBQ & Soul Food, Mmm Churros!** and **Seoul Food 831** will help satisfy your hunger while **Nitrocycle, Post No Bills** and **Zumum Tea** will help you quench your thirst. You can also bring diapers of all sizes to donate to All In Monterey. Wear warm layers—it's all outdoors. 525 Ortiz Ave., Sand City. [facebook.com/nightmarket831](https://facebook.com/nightmarket831).

**PAELLA PARTY...**Carmel Valley olive oil boutique **The Quail & Olive** is hosting a paella cooking demonstration on Wednesday, Jan. 12 from 5-7pm. Chef **Camilla Mann** will guide you through the process of making paella valenciana, a traditional Spanish dish made with chicken, rabbit and snails. In addition to getting to taste the dish, you'll have the opportunity to do a wine tasting and purchase a paella kit. Tickets are \$55 per person, available at [bit.ly/MakePaella](http://bit.ly/MakePaella). 14 Del Fino Place, Carmel Valley. 659-4288, [quailandolive.com](http://quailandolive.com).

**HOORAY FOR HALF-OFF...**Who doesn't like a deal? You can get bottles of wine for half-off on Wednesdays at the **Big Sur River Inn**, and score \$10 off on Sundays at **Trailside Cafe** (from 6-8pm). The River Inn is at 64800 Highway 1, Big Sur, 667-2700, [bigsurriverinn.com](http://bigsurriverinn.com). Trailside Cafe is at 3 Del Fino Place, Carmel Valley, 298-7453, [trailsidecafevc.com](http://trailsidecafevc.com). Cheers.

By Jacqueline Weixel

Send a bite to [eatanddrink@mcweekly.com](mailto:eatanddrink@mcweekly.com)