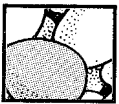


C A L I F O R N I A DAIRY & LIVESTOCK®

A SPECIAL PRODUCERS SECTION OF AG ALERT®

Embden geese

Eggs from Denmark will launch new project



**By Don Myrick
Managing Editor**

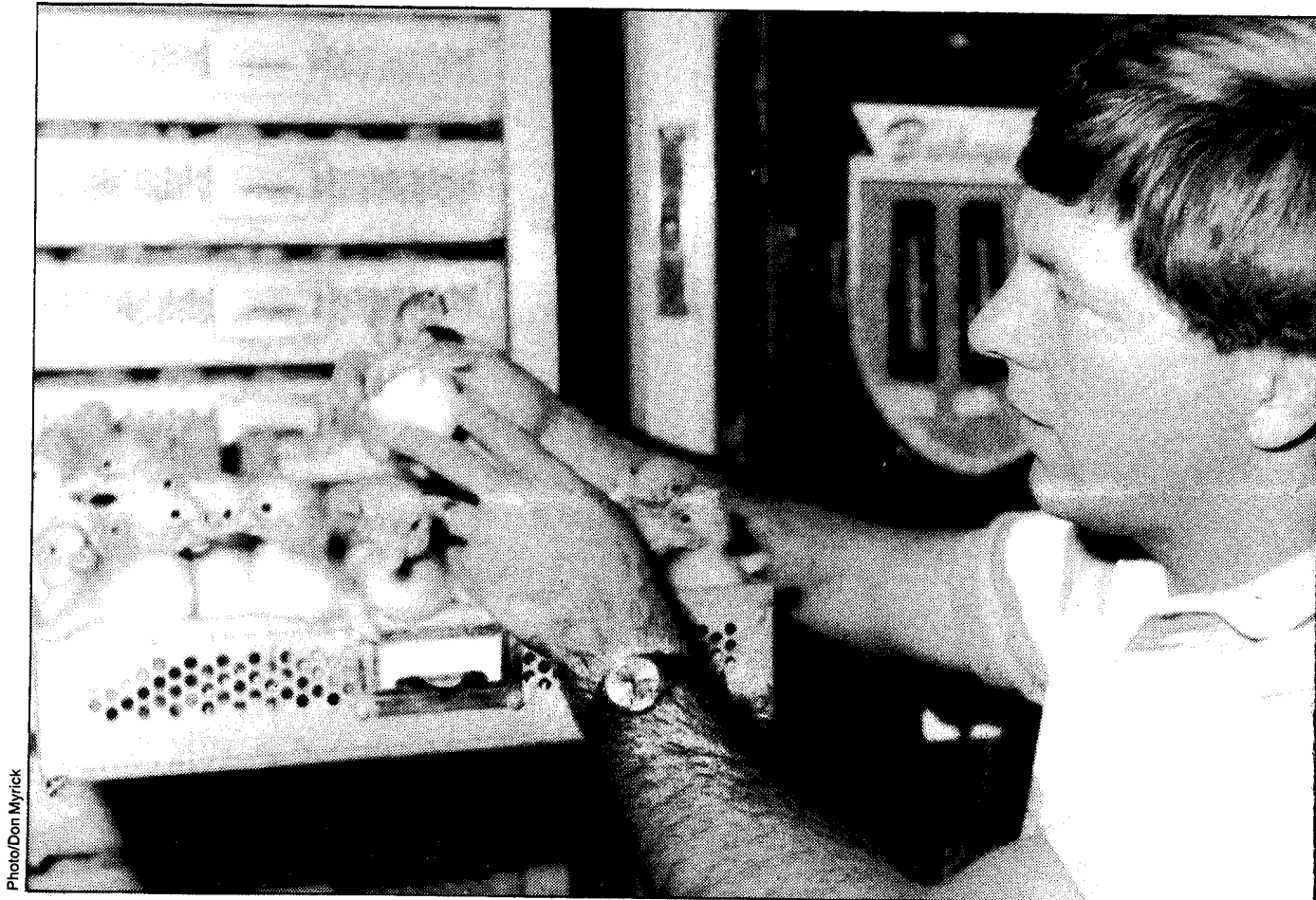
Early next spring John Metzer will pay between \$38 and \$40 for each of approximately 200 eggs he will receive. Besides the price, these are special eggs.

They will be Metzer's future breeding stock of Embden geese, a breed genetically engineered for superior meat qualities by Legarth International's Breeding Center for Ducks and Geese in Vejen, Denmark.

"I'll get the eggs by air freight and incubate them for 30 days," Metzer said, sounding all too much like a proud parent-to-be. "When the goslings hatch they will be my parent breeding stock."

Metzer, a UC Davis graduate, is the largest duck egg farmer in Northern California and the second largest in the state, with at least 8,000 ducks in his combined operation and 1,500 eggs being incubated at any one time. He has a "busy season" (March through June) capacity of hatching 5,000 ducklings each week.

Metzer also farms geese and goose eggs, with 600 geese providing close to 2,000 eggs each week. Like the



Photo/Don Myrick

ings, within 24 hours of hatching, a majority of goslings are shipped to feed and pet stores. The few kept are raised later as meat birds.

His new Embden breeding stock will start in egg production by the spring of 1983. He will incubate the eggs 30 days and then sell the one-day-old goslings to customers who want a large fast-growing, efficient goose. "These Embdens will grow to about 16 pounds in 4 weeks—nothing can beat them," he said.

When allowed to fully mature, the male Embdens—white with orange legs and black wings—would grow to 20 to 25 pounds, while the females top out at about 15 pounds.

His present goose flock of 600 are currently evenly divided between four breeds: White Chinese, Toulouse, American and Canada and Metzger will

continue this feed and pet store destination operation, while carrying out the Embden operation strictly for the dinner table.

Geese lay about 40 eggs during the period between February and July and then stop until the next season. Unlike ducks who lay their eggs during the night, geese lay their eggs during the day and again, unlike ducks, in nests, rather than on the ground.

Many of Metzger's goose customers are Hutterites (members of a Mennonite sect, living communally and holding property in common) from South Dakota, Montana and Canada. "They try to grow as much of their own food as possible with ducks and geese as a traditional Sunday meal," Metzger explained.

The Gonzales-based Metzger Farms

deal in four basic products, Metzger said:

- Balut or partially incubated eggs make up over 50 percent of his current business.
- The sale of ducklings and goslings (one-day old) to feed and pet stores.
- The sale of ducklings and goslings (one-day old) to be raised for meat.
- A breeding stock sales representative for Legarth International. "I pick up the eggs (air-freighted from Denmark) from the airports at either San Francisco or Los Angeles; I incubate, hatch and sex them and then ship them to breeders throughout the U.S. and Canada."

Metzger further explained his breeding stock operation: "Legarth

See GEESE, Page 17

**John Metzger,
Northern
California's
largest duck egg
farmer, checks on
some newly
hatched
ducklings at his
Gonzales facility.**

Geese

Continued from PAGE 14

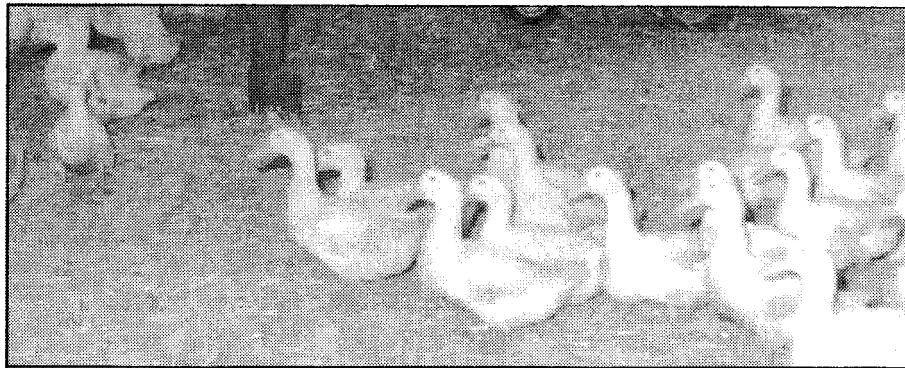
will send us, say, 3,000 female-line eggs and 800 male-line eggs. We'll incubate and hatch them separately and we keep the females from the female line (bred for egg production and fertility) and the males from the male line (bred for size, meat and growth characteristics). We mark the males and send these as a breeding package or unit to the customer (other breeders)."

Males from the female line and the females from the male line will be sold by Metzger for California consumption.

The balut part of Metzger's operation accounts for 50 percent of his annual business. About 95 percent of his balut business is destined for the state's Asian communities, "Mostly in the Bay Area but some go to Hawaii."

The so-called balut egg (Metzger sells from 10,000 to 18,000 per week) is one that is pulled from a 99 degree incubation tray at day 17 and as the egg cools the two-thirds developed embryo dies. They are known as "balut sa puti" to Filipinos and as "hot vit long" to Vietnamese.

Many Asians, Metzger said, boil the egg for 30 minutes then break the large end open and drink the soup-like fluid there and then peel the shell down and consume the embryo right out of the shell. "They like the taste, feel it gives



“You want them to be between five and six pounds at production time and if you didn't keep them on a diet they'd weigh seven or eight pounds.”

them energy and consider them an aphrodisiac.”

Despite the year-long consistent balut demand, Metzger made it clear that his main concern was with the selling of ducklings and goslings and also made it clear that money was the bottom line.

“A duckling (one day old) sells from 80 cents to \$2, a gosling of the same age, from \$3 to \$4.50, while one balut egg sells from 25 cents to 50 cents—depending upon its size and whether the sale is retail or wholesale,” he explained.

With the sale of day-old ducklings and

goslings (combined annual total of approximately 110,000) comprising 30 percent of his business, Metzger gets another 15 percent from the sale of seven-week-old ducks and geese from people who buy them for meat.

A duck kept for breeding purposes comes into production at about 25 weeks of age and produces for about 40 weeks (male and female) and then, typically, is sold somewhere between 65 and 70 weeks of age.

Breeding female ducks lay one egg every one to three days, Metzger, a longtime member of the Monterey County Farm Bureau, said. “At the

beginning, for every 100 females in a pen, you'll get 90 eggs and as that gradually drops off to 40 or 50, that particular flock is sold.”

A few are allowed to molt and are brought back into production a second time, but Metzger said, “they never do as well the second time.” Molting, he explained, “is just a resting, rejuvenating process that lasts 8 to 10 weeks, “another way to spread out the breeder cost.”

The old (usually about 18 months of age) breeder stock is sold for about \$4 each. “Most buyers come right here to the farm and buy from five to 300 at a time. They tell me they usually cook them as we would a stewing chicken,” he said.

Ducks that Metzger is raising as breeders are kept on a severe diet from about day 18 until they are 24 weeks of age and ready for egg production. “You want them to be between five and six pounds at production time and if you didn't keep them on a diet they'd weigh seven or eight pounds.”

Once ducks or geese begin egg production they are allowed to eat all they want. Ducks eat about half a pound of prepared pellets (corn, wheat, soybean meal, meat and bonemeal) each day. Metzger buys his feed in bulk—24 tons every 10 to 14 days.