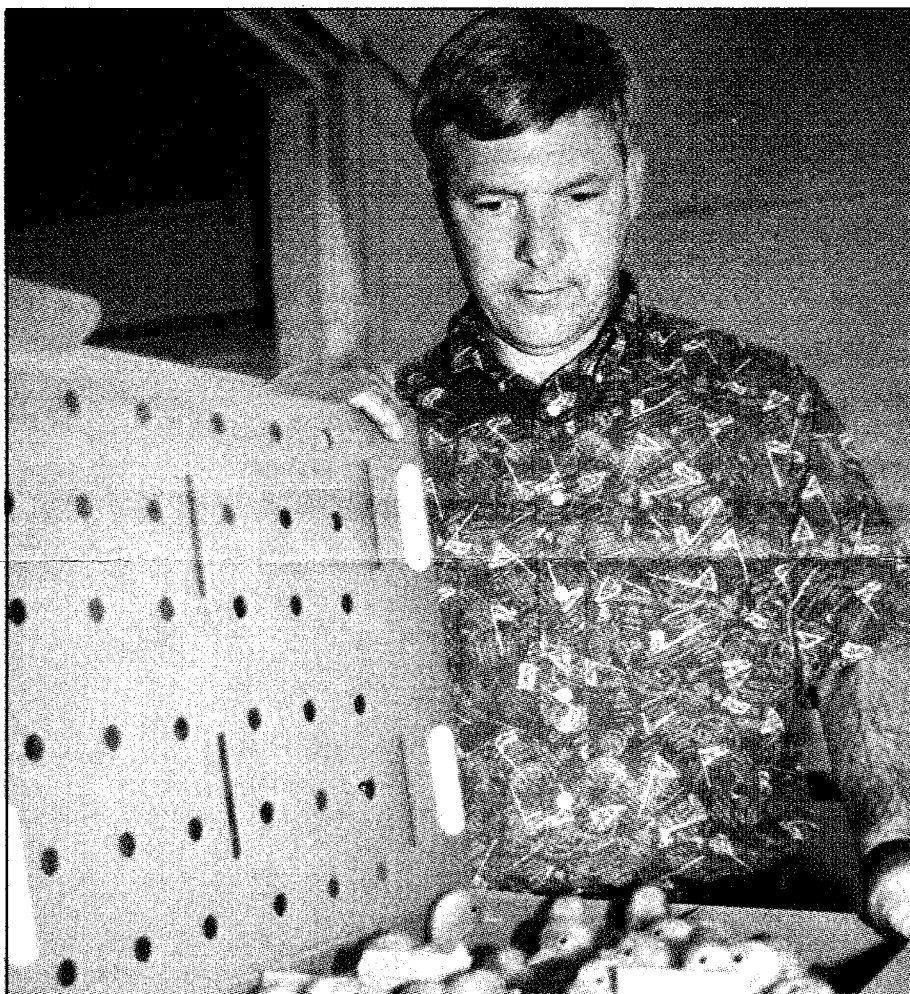


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Photo/Christine Souza

John Metzger prepares shipment of ducklings for a customer.

## *Hatcheries hit hard by ban on air transportation of young birds*

By Christine Souza  
Assistant Editor

Recent decisions by an airline and a shipping company not to ship live animals have complicated business for California hatcheries.

This is what John Metzger of Metzger Farms in the California coastal town of Gonzales discovered recently when he attempted to mail an order of day-old ducklings.

"We ship our day-old ducklings and goslings through U.S. Postal Service—the only viable method of transportation available to hatcheries. Until recently, this has been an excellent method of shipping to

our customers, whether they are in King City, Calif.; Fairbanks, Alaska; Bangor, Maine; or Hilo, Hawaii," Metzger said. "Now, with Northwest's ban on shipping poultry as mail, we and thousands of our customers will be affected. We need to resolve this now so when most of the birds start hatching in February, hatcheries throughout the nation have some way to get the birds to their customers."

Metzger's business was running smoothly until early September when Northwest Airlines announced it would no longer accept live animals, which include day-old birds, as United States mail. As a result,

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# Shipments

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some postal airmail facilities throughout the nation will not accept live birds.

"We had to advise our post offices, if the only available commercial airlift available is Northwest, then we cannot accept the (animal) shipment. We can't accept it when we know they are not going to take it, but we have not changed our (live animal shipment) policy," said Monica Hand, U.S. Postal Service spokeswoman. "Because Northwest has notified us they will not accept live animals as mail, we thought the most prudent and responsible thing to do would be not to accept them in those places where that is the case. (Whether we will take the animals or not) depends on the options available within each regional area."

Northwest Airlines is one of several commercial airlines used by the Postal Service to transport mail around the country. A problem with some of those few remaining airlines that do ship live animals as U.S. mail is they do not travel to all of the domestic destinations that Metzger Farms and other hatcheries require. This decision by Northwest Airlines has left no affordable options for many U.S. hatcheries.

An equally serious problem for hatcheries is a newly negotiated contract between the Postal Service and Federal Express. To take advantage of the company's faster service, the Postal Service contracted with FedEx to carry much of the U.S. mail beginning Aug. 27. The drawback is FedEx does not accept live animals. Many air freight services that once carried live animals no longer do and hatcheries are left with no cost-effective alternatives.

"There are always problems, but this situation is probably the most serious threat we have ever experienced," Metzger said. "This is a threat to the entire mail-order poultry industry but one of the greatest impacts would be on our customers."

The tens of thousands of customers throughout the nation who purchase day-

old poultry will also lose out. Metzger's customers in the day-old poultry business are those who purchase birds and raise them for meat, feed stores and individuals who purchase birds directly from the hatchery.

"The inability to ship day-old poultry by air mail would harm feed stores throughout the nation that buy day-old chicks, ducklings, goslings, poult and more," Metzger said. "Not only would these stores lose out on sales of the birds, but sales of feed, equipment, supplies and medicines to nourish and manage these poultry."

Many of Metzger's customers sell ducklings and goslings in small markets to Asian communities for the meat. Asian-Americans, Metzger said, have a higher per-capita consumption of these birds. These store owners too could be out of business due to the Postal Service's inability to ship live animals to many destinations.

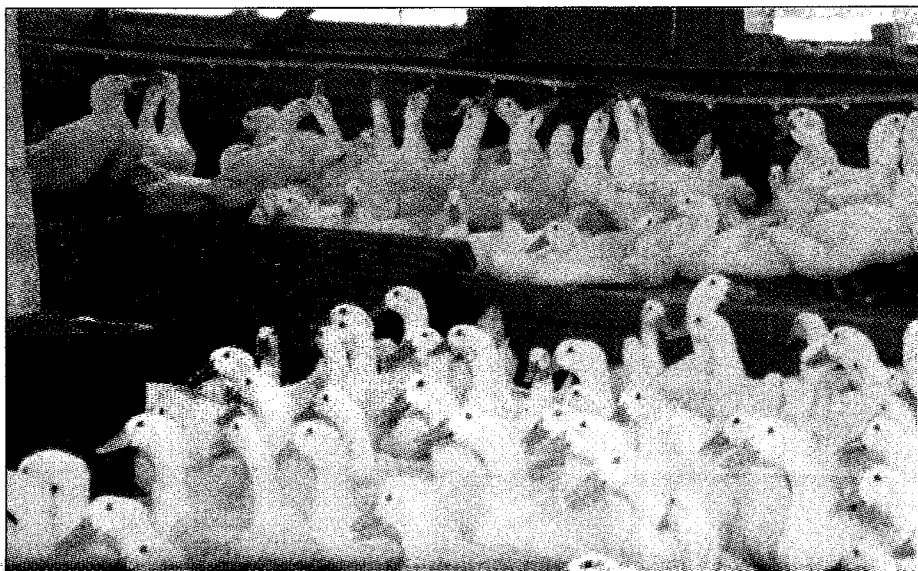
Another hatchery customer for Metzger orders between 10 and 20 birds and may utilize the birds for meat, eggs, exhibition, insect and weed control, or as pets.

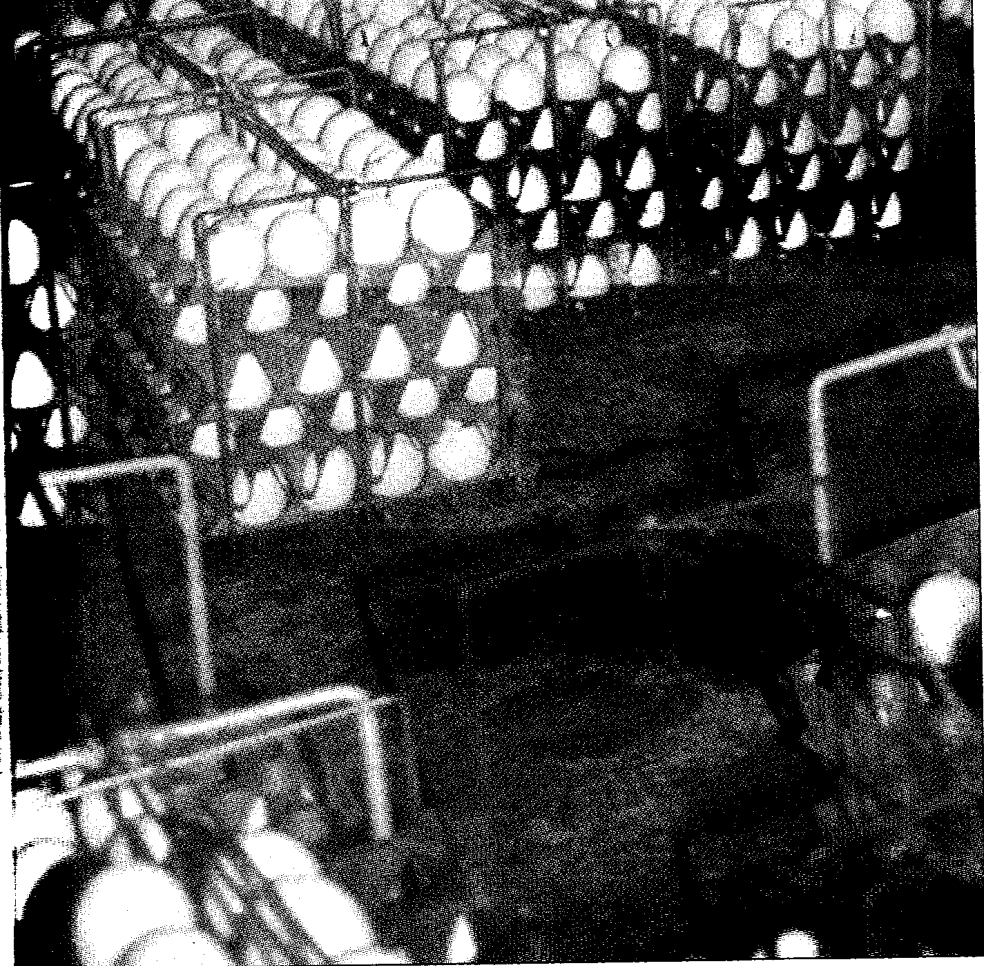
Northwest Airlines spokesman Doug Killian said shipping live animals as U.S. mail was stopped by Northwest because it was a service that proved to be unprofitable for the company and the airline could not provide safe handling for the animals.

"We just cannot offer a service where we're losing money. We are getting compensated 35 cents a pound. That is far below a profitable level for our service given all of the handling these shipments require and the fact that we do have a lot of them," Killian said.

Killian also said up to 30 percent of day-old-chick-orders tendered to Northwest were already damaged. Northwest reported in many cases the boxes were crushed and the chicks dead. He said Northwest had very little control over the handling of these animal shipments and this is how the birds were received when they arrived from the Postal Service.

Northwest will continue to accept ship-





Duck and goose eggs, above, are prepared for shipment at Metzer Farms in Gonzales. Photo below shows breeding stock at the Metzer facility.

ments of chicks and other poultry through its cargo services, which cost about 93 cents a pound for very large shipments, three times the Postal Service rate. Minimum charges for the airlines are about \$36 vs. the postal rate of \$5.20 for an order of 25 chicks. Another drawback of the cargo service is it requires the recipient to pick up the shipment at the airport as opposed to having it delivered to his or her door.

"Effective Sept. 1, live animal cargo shipments are put in a temperature controlled environment in the lower level of the aircraft," Killian said. "There we can ensure the birds are well handled on the flight and are not crushed or exposed to high temperatures. That is one of the

Northwest's new policy states it will accept chicks and other warm-blooded animals as cargo. Insects, bees and cold-blooded animals such as reptiles may still be shipped as U.S. mail.

Fortunately, the decision by Northwest Airlines to ban the transport of chicks and other animals as U.S. mail, comes during the hatchery industry's slow season. Some hatcheries have ceased shipping altogether and have indicated they will concentrate on business during the busy season, in the spring. Metzer's operation runs year-round, but it is not currently running at full capacity.

In the late 1970s, Metzer returned from the University of California. Davis to Gonzales, where he worked to transform his father's hobby of raising ducks and geese into a profitable business. What began with 500 ducks has grown into the Metzer Farms hatchery operation of 8,000 ducks and a breeding stock of 1,200 geese. He sells approximately 400,000 ducklings and goslings annually to a variety of customers.

"This decision hurts everybody. I have people back East that buy birds," said Kevan Taber, Metzer Farms hatchery worker who maintains a flock of 1,500 quail that contains 13 different breeds at his home hatchery.

A number of hatchery owners have hired a lobbyist and organized Bird Shippers of America to present legislation to address this situation of shipping live animals as mail.

