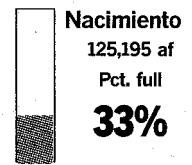
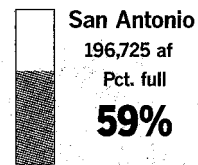


AG MONDAY

AGRICULTURE EDITOR: Katharine Ball PHONE: 754-4282 FAX: 754-4293 E-MAIL: kball@thecalifornian.com
www.thecalifornian.com

Lake levels



As of Sept. 5

Ducks and geese, oh my!

Ranch supervisor keeps a close eye on fowl

By ROBERT WALCH
The Salinas Californian

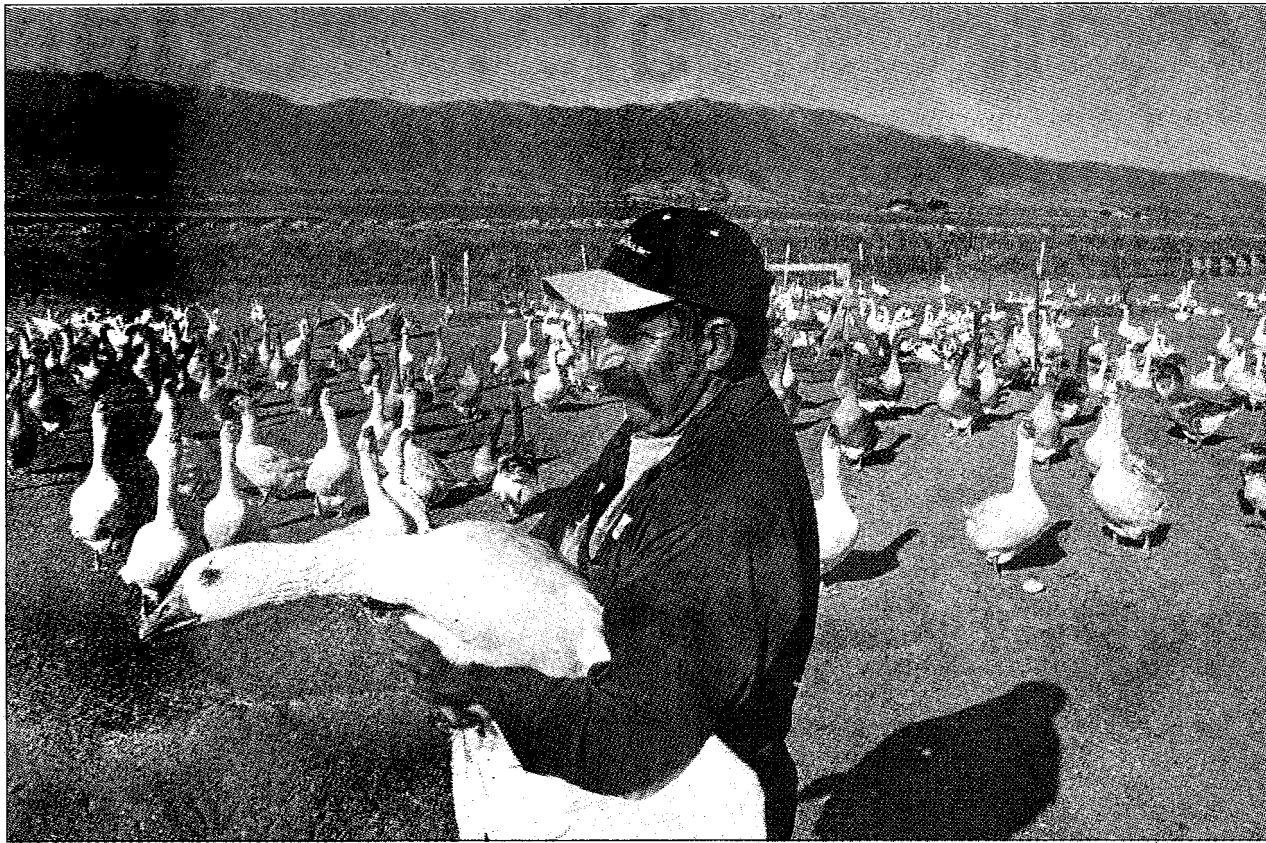
GONZALES — Save the duck and goose jokes; Guillermo Barbosa doesn't want to hear them. No, the supervisor at Metzger Farms — a Monterey County waterfowl hatchery — doesn't "quack up" if someone forces a duck joke on him. His children don't play with rubber duckies nor do they engage in rousing contests of "Duck, Duck, Goose." They aren't particularly fond of Donald Duck, either.

Admittedly, Barbosa loves what he does, so, if you did press him, he might begrudgingly agree, with tongue firmly in cheek, that his job is "just ducky."

Depending on the time of year, the Soledad resident spends his days caring for between 5,000 and 10,000 ducks and geese just off Old Stage Road in Gonzales.

Explaining the genesis of the duck farm, owner John Metzger said it started in 1978 as an outgrowth of his father's hobby. When he returned from college, Metzger transformed his father's avocation into what is now a successful business. Today Metzger Farms hatches about 500,000 ducks and 30,000 geese annually.

"We are probably the biggest waterfowl hatchery in the western half of the U.S. that offers a variety of breeds and ships the baby ducklings and goslings directly to individuals, schools, pet and



RICHARD GREEN/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN

Ag Monday profile on Guillermo Barbosa, outside supervisor at Metzger Farms holding a goose, Metzger Farms raises about 5,000 ducks and geese.

GUILLERMO BARBOSA

■ AGE: 38

■ OCCUPATION: Outside supervisor at Metzger Farms.

■ WORK: Field worker, 1981-91. Employed in a butcher shop, 1992-97. Metzger Farms, 1997-present.

■ EDUCATION: Born and raised in Quila, Jalisco, Mexico, a small town of 10,000 inhabitants.

■ PERSONAL: Lives in Soledad with his wife and two sons.

feed stores and commercial growers," he said. "There are bigger duck farms, but they only hatch them for their own meat

production."

Barbosa had no previous experience with waterfowl when he landed a job at Metzger Farms in 1997. Raised in Mexico, Barbosa came to California in the 1980s. He spent a number of years working in the ag industry and at a butcher shop on the Central Coast before working at the hatchery.

But over the past decade, Barbosa has become a virtual walking encyclopedia on ducks and geese.

Questioned about his decision to leave the meat market for a new career in the duck business, Barbosa said it was a family issue. He wanted his weekends free to spend with his wife and children. Currently he spends only

Saturday mornings looking after the waterfowl and has Sunday free.

When he started at the farm, Barbosa's job was cleaning the large, enclosed duck sheds. After about two months he was given other responsibilities, such as feeding the birds and doing various maintenance jobs.

Eventually Barbosa moved up to a supervisory position and now oversees the farm's "outside" barns and open pens where the ducklings and goslings are raised for breeding purposes.

Soon after hatching, the majority of the waterfowl chicks are on their way to their new homes. They are sent out in special

cardboard containers to customers throughout the country. Shipped via Priority Mail, they reach their destinations within a day or two.

A small percentage of the chicks are kept for breeding purposes or raised to adulthood for other reasons. These are the ducks and geese Barbosa and his staff care for once they are old enough to be switched to the "outside" sheds.

Besides making sure the pens are cleaned and the birds are fed and watered properly, Barbosa monitors the enclosure temperatures, checks to see that the birds remain secure and tracks their progress.

See BARBOSA, Page 5B

BARBOSA/ Knows operation well

From Page 6B

The collection of eggs from breeding ducks and geese is also part of the daily ritual.

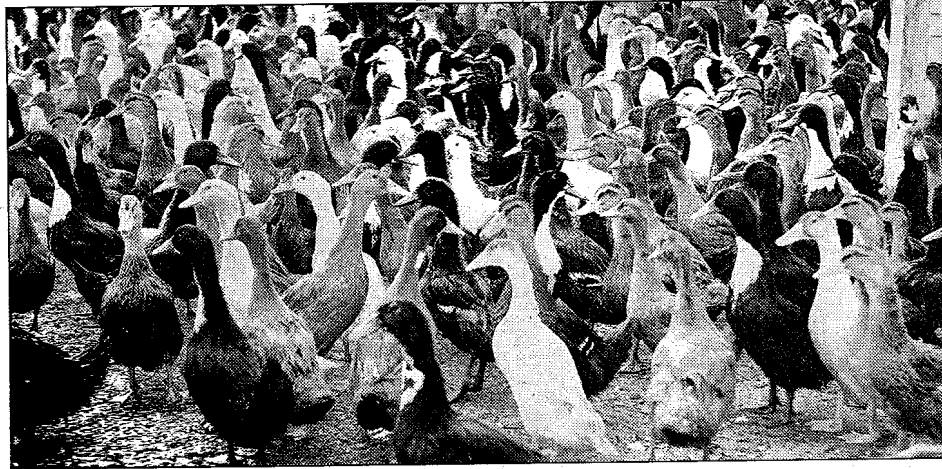
At each stage in its development a duck or goose receives different feed. The farm's large, metal feed-holding bins are replenished weekly, and then the staff makes sure the correct food gets to the right holding pen. In between quacking and honking, the birds manage to consume 24 tons of feed a week.

When they are first moved into the outside barns, the ducklings are all mixed together. As they mature, Barbosa wades into the feathery sea of fluffy birds and

separates them by breed. They are then housed in smaller brooding areas where they begin laying their eggs.

Being able to easily identify the 14 breeds of ducks and the 12 to 14 different types of geese is a skill the supervisor has acquired over the years. Where a visitor will see only a noisy mass of ducklings waddling around a shed, Barbosa's practiced eye can quickly identify the different breeds — which often look very similar — as well as the bird's gender.

While the ducks are kept indoors, the larger geese are raised in open, outdoor pens. Barbosa said there is a problem with predators such as coyotes, foxes and



RICHARD GREEN/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIA

Ducks are seen at Metzger Farms.

an occasional bobcat.

"We probably lose about two or three birds a week," he said. By inspecting the remains, the savvy super-

visor can tell if a fox or coyote was the culprit.

Adult geese have a reputation of being rather aggressive and nasty. Has

Barbosa ever been nipped? "Oh yeah!" he said with a laugh. "When they are breeding you really have to watch out!"