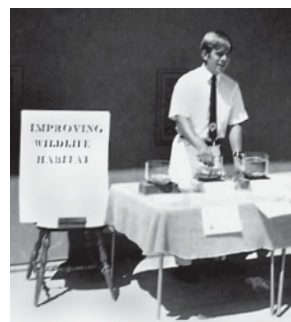


# Metzer Farms, Gonzales, CA

Nestled in the beautiful Salinas Valley of California lies Metzer Farms, home and business of John and Sharon Metzer. The Salinas Valley considers itself the "Salad Bowl of the World" due to the many row crop farms of lettuce, asparagus, broccoli, cauliflower and other vegetables. In fact, the Metzers' oldest daughter, Janelle, works at a local produce company that ships their vegetables nationwide. The other two industries in the county include tourism centered on the Monterey Peninsula along the Pacific coast and wine grape growing among the foothills surrounding the valley.

Temperatures were in the 70s when we visited in January, a nice



**A YOUNG JOHN METZER with FFA project. This demonstration won him the honor of giving it at the California Expo in Sacramento.**

change from the frigid Midwest temperatures. September is their warm season with temperatures in the 80s. January/February

is in the middle of their rainy season but this year rains were reduced, foreshadowing a dry season.

When John was in high school, his father Olin, an English professor, raised sheep as a hobby. Sheep are susceptible to liver fluke, so he started raising ducks to control snails which are



a host in the liver fluke life cycle. When neighbors said they'd buy ducklings, Olin encouraged his son to enter that business after college, and the business grew.

Sharon brags on John who was a linebacker in high school, and the class Valedictorian. She says he was the "best looking guy in high school without a girlfriend," a California dream, buff and blonde – but she rectified that situation. Sharon is now a retired ultrasonographer. Their youngest daughter, Erin, attended a



NAGA convention in Las Vegas when she was in the 9th grade but that did not convince her to be a game bird farmer. Instead she followed her mother's footsteps into the medical community and is now a speech pathologist.

The Metzers have a different operation from most NAGA members in that they hatch predominantly domestic geese and ducks, the only "game bird" being Mallard ducks and ducklings sold to dog trials, dog trainers, and hobbyists.

Metzer Farms is growing rapidly now as their son, Marc, joined them in the business last fall. Many new

projects are being started. Solar panels are being put on the roof of a new 50' x 160' brood/grow building. The com-

pany office is being moved from the home to a brand new office over the hatchery. Applications are being submitted for conservation funding for a manure storage facility and in-vessel composter for mortality and hatchery waste. A new website is being designed and new breeds are being considered to make a complete "product mix" for those hatcheries for whom they drop ship ducklings and goslings. Radio frequency identification (RFID) tags are being tried on their goose breeders to make identification and counting easier. And an automated outdoor feed system, inspired by presentations at the 2015 NAGA convention, will be installed for their goose breeders.

Metzers ships up to 850 orders on hatch day, many being "6 of these, and 2 of those" type orders of the 27 different breeds they carry. Though large orders to commercial growers are shipped by air freight from the San Francisco airport, the vast majority of their orders are mailed through the Post Office with 93% arriving

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within 1-2 days. John chooses to self-insure the shipments, concerned that too many claims will cause the Post Office to stop carrying live animals. GroGel is put in every shipment using Dixie cups stapled inside the box so each bird has some moisture and nutrition during shipping.

Besides hatching eggs, some interesting products sold to the



local Asian community are salted duck eggs and balut, a duck egg that is boiled and eaten after 17 days of incubation. The shells of blown eggs are also sold to decorators.

Recent Avian Influenza concerns have caused a change in some of the practices at Metzers. Previously, adolescent breeding ducks were allowed out on grass regularly; now those birds are kept confined. All their goose breeders are in flight pens. The geese cannot fly but it keeps out wild birds and predators. Eggs are gathered daily and passed through a doggy door in the hatchery wall, reducing the chance of contamination from the egg collectors being introduced into the hatchery. The eggs are then washed, racked, and incubated in single stage Jamesway incubators. ★



The view out the Metzers' window is the beautiful agricultural landscape of Salinas Valley.

At left, John Metzer describes his hatchery operation of ducks and geese, shown below in the inside breeder rooms and outside flight pens.

