



Notes from the field

By Jay Martin

Week of June 16th

Some thoughts on the pastured poultry project at Provident Farm:

I have been intrigued with pastured poultry for years, but hesitated to get into it because of the labor and management intensity of growing 4-5 acres of vegetables. I was concerned that I would not have the time to monitor the project as carefully as I should. Those of you who have been with the CSA for the past few years are aware of the various struggles I have had related to labor. I do not want to revisit that now (or ever again), but for those of you who are new to the CSA, suffice it to say it hasn't been easy and at this stage of my life I have grown tired of managing a lot of help.

Growing meat birds is not labor intense. It is more of a babysitting job, much like caring for plants in a greenhouse, with which I am very familiar and comfortable. There are a couple of successful models that can qualify as "pastured poultry" from which to choose. A grower can build a permanent structure to house the birds and surround it with a sufficiently large permanently fenced pasture. This system is fixed and does not move around the farm. The area dedicated to this system should be large enough that the birds do not overgraze the pasture. Their manure provides enough fertility to maintain the pasture. Another method is the moveable pen system (MPS). Joel Salatin developed and popularized this system on Polyface Farm in Swope, Va. The MPS can be integrated with other farm enterprises such as beef cattle and vegetables. Joel's integrated system is well described in Michael Pollan's book, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. If you have not read it, I recommend you put it on your list. I chose the MPS because it is more space efficient and its ability to integrate with other farm enterprises mimics Mother Nature more closely than the fixed pasture method. There are two variations on the MPS. In both cases, the pens provide shelter for the birds and protection from predators. The grower can keep the birds in the pen throughout their lives and move them every

day or use an electrically charged fence to surround the pen and allow the birds out into the small pasture area during the day and herd them back in at night. In the second case, the fence and pen are moved weekly. We are keeping the birds in the pen and moving them everyday over an area in my backyard because it is the best pasture area I have available for the birds. If this project is successful and we find it to be a good fit for this farm, I would like to establish a 2 acre pasture in the field and switch to the weekly move system and increase the number of birds we grow. I think the weekly move system provides a better environment for the birds and allows them to more freely express their chickenness.

The breed I chose, Cornish Cross, is the same breed that is used in confinement growing. After



spending 6 weeks with these birds it doesn't appear to me they really care about expressing their chickenness. They don't seem to have any chickenness. Joel Salatin had tried many breeds and decided to use the

Cornish Cross in his daily move pens for one simple reason: They eat all the time and have the best feed conversion ratio of any breed. I wanted to try other breeds but decided to go with the proven winner and the one I felt would have the most market acceptability. In the future I would like to try other breeds that, I believe, are more adaptable to the pastured system. So far this has been an interesting project. If mortality rates can be considered a reliable indicator of success, we are doing well. I have read that typical losses are 10% in the first 3 weeks. At this stage we are just under 3%.

Onward,

Jay

Recipe of the week

Stuffed Zucchini with Ground Turkey

Ingredients:

- 3 medium zucchini
- 2 green onions, minced
- 1/2 green pepper
- 3 sprigs parsley
- 1 cup canned tomatoes
- 1/2 pound lean ground turkey
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon allspice
- 3/4 cup bulgur (rice or couscous can be substituted for bulgur)
- 1 to 2 tablespoons tomato paste, or to taste

Preparation:

Place zucchini in a large deep skillet and add enough boiling water to cover. Cook zucchini for 10 to 12 minutes, then chill quickly under cold water to stop cooking. Cut off stem end of each zucchini and split lengthwise. Starting from wide end of vegetable, scoop out pulp with a spoon, leaving a 1/2 inch-thick shell; reserve pulp. Place shells in a 9x13 baking dish.

Preheat oven to 350. In a food processor mince scallions, green peppers, and parsley. Add drained tomatoes (reserve the liquid), reserved zucchini pulp, turkey, spices, and bulgur; process until well mixed. Generously spoon mixture into scooped zucchini shells. Add enough water to reserved tomato liquid to make 1 cup, stir in a little tomato paste, and pour around the bottom of baking dish. Cover pan with foil and bake for 35 minutes, removing foil every 10 minutes to baste with liquid. Remove foil completely for last 5 minutes of baking. Serve hot.

Serves 6.

A Note on the "Share Bin"

We like to leave a "share bin" at each distribution point for you to exchange vegetables.

If there is anything in your share you do not want, you can leave it for others to take. You don't have to put something in to take something out. You just have to play nicely with others.

Sometimes, when we first start picking a crop, there is not enough for everyone. Often, the same thing happens at the finish line. We will stock the share bin with these crops and/or we will sell them at markets.

The Green Book Club

Our next "Green" book club and potluck gathering will meet on Saturday, July 26th at the home of Chrys and John Egan (210 Glen Ave, Salisbury, 410-726-5995, cnegan@salisbury.edu) beginning at 6 pm. Join us for a discussion of the potential risks and benefits of genetically modified (GM) crops, including those containing genes from organisms that would not be able to mate in nature. We have compiled a list of books that may be of interest plus some short, introductory articles that can found listed on the LESSON website under Activities: Book Club at www.livingontheveg.org. You are welcome to read the sample articles, any of the 6 books, or just come for the discussion if you don't have time for the readings. If there is interest, we can watch excerpts from the "Harvest of Fear" documentary produced by PBS Nova.