

MN Agriculture - Erica Nelson, Time To Talk Turkeys



All Things Minnesota Agriculture

Thanksgiving Day is near and how more appropriate than to feature Day 13 of my 30 Days of Ag "All Things Minnesota Agriculture" with Erica Nelson. Erica works for Minnesota Turkey AND her family turkey farm is located in Kensington, MN. Her family farm is run by her grandfather, her uncle, and her father. Her sisters, cousins and herself are also involved in the family farm. They raise turkey breeder hens. They are a little different from most Minnesota turkey farms. They aren't raising hens for meat, rather they lay fertilized eggs they sell to a hatchery. Those eggs are incubated at the hatchery, and when hatched, the day old poults (baby turkeys) are sold to Minnesota turkey farmers who are raising turkeys for meat consumption. The Nelsons also grow corn, soybeans, and wheat.

The Nelson family has a rich family history as they homesteaded in 1866 farming many different things at that time. In about 1900, her family started raising turkeys for extra income. At that time, raising turkeys was seasonal. They started in the spring, and harvested the turkeys in fall. The turkeys were sold to neighbors and brought into town. They now raise their turkeys year round. Her dad is a 5th generation farmer, making her a 6th generation farmer.

Social Media Sites:

The Nelson do not have any personal social media sites, but there is a website for Minnesota

Turkey, where Erica is employed.

Website: [Minnesota Turkey](#)



Erica and her dad

Tell me a little about what you grow/raise/produce/or service provided.

“We get our poults (baby turkeys) when they are one day old. We buy the poults from the hatchery where we also sell our eggs to. Our poults start out in our “brooder barn.” Poults are similar to babies in that they need a lot of care and attention. The brooder barn temperature is kept very warm, and the poults have constant access to water and food. Their food consists of corn and soybean meal.

When the poults are about 5 weeks old, we move part of the flock to another barn. We do this because growing poults need more room. In this new barn, the poults will still have constant access to water and food.

When the turkeys have grown to be about 30 weeks old, we move them to our laying barns. In our

laying barns the hens still have constant access to food and water. Our laying barns have nests where each hen has the option to lay her egg in (most hens chose to lay their egg in a nest instead of on the floor). Our hens are not raised in cages, and they have the ability to leave the nest whenever they want. We collect the eggs on the hour, for about ten hours a day. These eggs are brought to our wash room where we wash every egg in our egg washer. These eggs need to be washed and cleaned, because they will be going to the hatchery. The eggs (which are different from the chicken eggs you buy in the grocery store, because our eggs are fertilized) will be picked up by a truck from the hatchery. Once they arrive at the hatchery, they'll be placed in an incubator for 28 days. It takes 28 days for a turkey egg to hatch.

Our hens will lay eggs for about 8 months. That's about how long their cycle is. On average, a hen will lay an egg about 25-26 hours (this is the same in chickens). Did you know that hens like the morning? This is when they are most likely to lay their egg!

You may be wondering why we raise our turkeys inside, and there are a few reasons why. Any native Minnesotan knows we have harsh winters and hot summers. Turkeys don't like to be cold, and they certainly don't like being hot (they don't sweat like we do). By keeping them in a barn, they stay warm in the winter and cool in the summer. Our barns are specially designed for our turkeys, equipped with ventilation and heating systems. Minnesota is also full of wildlife, like coyotes. If we kept our turkeys outside, they wouldn't survive because they'd become someone's lunch. Turkeys also are prone to getting diseases from other wild fowl. If we kept our turkeys outside, we would be allowing wild fowl to eat their food, drink their water, and share the diseases wild fowl naturally carry. So in conclusion, our turkeys are comfortable, safe, and disease free."



Poults – Green Feeder

Where do you sell or provide services to? Who is your end consumer?

“We sell our fertilized eggs to Willmar Poultry Company. When our hens are done laying eggs, they will go to market to be harvested for meat, such as deli meat for sandwiches. The hens we raise will not be the whole bird you serve on Thanksgiving. These hens will weigh about 25-30 pounds, compared to your whole bird that will weigh about 12 pounds.”

What makes your farm/business unique or special? What are you proud of?

I think what makes our farm special and unique is that we’ve been farming for a long time

(1866). As with so many farmers, we have a lot of history to our farm, and it's something I'm very proud of. There's not one day I don't thank God I was raised on a farm with a family who is passionate about the life we've been blessed with.

What is one interesting fact about your farm/crops/livestock/your business you would like to share.

"Six years ago, Mike Rowe with Dirty Job on the Discovery Channel came out to our farm and did a show. Our hometown, Kensington, has a population of about 275 people...so this was an unbelievable experience to have a celebrity as big as Mike Rowe on our farm. And for all of you wondering, Mike Rowe is exactly what you see on television. He is humble, witty, passionate, and genuinely loves what he does."

What do you love most about farming/business?

"What I love most about farming is that it's a family business. Whether I'm picking eggs, driving grain cart during harvest, or talking turkey to a classroom full of kids, you can bet my Dad is with me. My grandparents are both 83 years old, and are still active on the farm and in the turkey world. I am blessed that I get to talk turkey with them and learn from all of their experiences."



Turkey

What is one thing you wish consumers knew about what you do or your farm/business?

“There’s a certain buzz word that we keep hearing. That word is sustainability. My family has been farming the same land since 1866.. The same land that I walk on today is the same land that 5 generations of my family have cared for year in and year out. There are many recreational lakes in the area that have grown in popularity immensely over the years. My family is extremely proud of the effort we put into protecting our most vital natural resource. If that’s not sustainability, than I don’t know what is.”

What is one interesting thing no one probably knows about your farm/business/product that you would like to share?

“Back in the mid 1900’s, my great-great grandfather built a pavilion on our farm. His brother had a disability that prevented him from farming full time, so managing the pavilion provided him with

some extra income. The pavilion hosted live bands and dancing. That soon changed to roller skating because dancing at that time was thought of as sinful. Growing up, many elderly couples throughout the community would tell my sisters and me that they met their significant other at our family pavilion. It's always put a smile on my face to know that our farm has fostered so many memories for others!" "

What makes Minnesota the place to farm/grow/ raise/ produce/ provide a service?

"For a turkey farmer, Minnesota is a great state to raise turkeys because of what a turkey's diet consists of. Turkeys eat corn and soybeans, which are two of the main crops raised here."

What is your favorite Minnesota location or a fun thing to do in Minnesota?

"Relaxing at our family lake cabin, near our farm."

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