

Tail Of A Turkey

(by John Curry)

Chances are any area resident who bought an unfrozen turkey for Christmas dinner this year bought one raised on the Neill brothers' farm near Stewartville.

For Christmas this year, just like for the past 15, the Neill brothers are killing, plucking and shipping over 2500 turkeys to Ottawa, Carleton Place, Almonte and any other local place from which a special order might be placed.

Our turkeys are freshly killed, not frozen, Francis Neill who is "sort of manager" of the operation, said in an interview at the farm last Thursday afternoon.

"That's why it is so busy now," he explained.

Men do the killing and primary plucking while women, with occasional help from the men, do the minute plucking or "pinning".

The operation started going eight hours a day or more on December 8 and since then the brothers have been turning out about 225 plucked turkeys a day.

It takes about five minutes to complete the killing and primary plucking of a bird. Done

in the first of a series of three rooms which resemble railway freight cars, the turkey, after spending the night in the "starving room", is hung by the ankles and then bled through the neck.

The workers then "stick" the bird, which means they strike the bird in the brain so that it dies.

But it is struck so that the feathers are loosened by the bird's nerves. Feathers fly while the bird's post mortem nervous reaction propels the wings as though the turkey were alive and trying to fly.

The men then pluck out the remaining feathers while standing in an ever deepening pile of feathers.

One of the "pinners" in the next room remarked that the thirty pounder birds, when they perform this reflex ritual, "shake the building."

Francis, Gerald and Milton Neill, Jim Calberry, Percy Runtz, Doug Scheel, Allan Sinfield, Bill Miller, Clifford Smith and Merv McIntyre, among others, all work at this part of the operation.

Transferred to the next room where six or seven women sit, the turkeys are "pinned". This involves pulling out the small whisker-like feathers left on the bird after the men finish with it.

The women sit in a long narrow room amid shavings put on the floor every morning to catch the blood and small feathers which collect there. To pluck out the small feathers, they use instruments they call "strawberry hullers", which resemble miniature ice tongs.

The only complaint the women have is that their fingers tire from too much plucking and their behinds get sore from too much sitting.

It takes anywhere from ten to thirty minutes to "pin" a turkey.

The turkeys then have bags tied over their heads and are taken to the next room, the shipping room, where they await their early morning journey to market.

Francis Neil, said he knows of no other turkey farm in this immediate area.

He said his turkeys are mostly hens, although the larger ones are gobblers.

The turkeys, which are just over six months old, eat a ton of feed a day, he said. The feed consists of wheat and pellets which contain things like protein, he explained.

The birds, which vary from 10 to 39 pounds, are weighed and graded at the receiving point, not at the Neill farm, unless an individual has bought one or two birds from the brothers directly.



PINNING has become a regular event of the Christmas season for, from left to right, Mrs. Lester Neill, Mrs. John Schubrink, and

Mrs. Ken Michelson, since they have been doing it for many years.