

# Everything's ducky at King Cole

The word-play begins as soon as you walk on the property at King Cole, the amazing "duck factory" on Warden Avenue-north of Aurora Road.

Patty Thompson, marketing director of the company, says as we head out on a tour that she's going to give me the whole "duck and pony show". Jackie Fisher, Patty's sister and the manager of the farm that produces hundreds of thousands of ducks every year, inevitably comments on the drizzly weather that it's a "fine day for ducks". A receptionist in the office says to a walk-in retail customer that she'll give him the "Cole's notes" version of all the nutritional benefits of the company's product.

These responses come quite naturally to women who have spent the greater part of their lives with the beautiful white Pekin duck that is the company's sole focus. Patty and Jackie, after all, are the granddaughters of Jim and Margaret Murby, who founded King Cole over 50 years. The company was well established when they came into the world, and they've worked here since they were young children. King Cole is still a Murby family business, and although Margaret passed away a few weeks ago, Jim still works every day on the property at the age of 92, surrounded by the members of his extended family, and many others among the company's 130 employees who have worked at King Cole for decades.

The company isn't exactly shy; a large sign on the corner of the farm's thousand acres at Woodbine and Aurora celebrates King Cole's golden anniversary. But although most of us in Whitchurch-Stouffville might be familiar with the name, it's safe to say that most of don't know how remarkable an operation the Murby family farm truly is.

Were you aware, for example, that:

- King Cole is by far Canada's largest duck producer, annually processing over two million Pekin ducks for markets all over the world?
- that King Cole is a totally integrated farm - it breeds its ducks at a separate farm on Kennedy Road, where each of about 10,000 Pekin females (accompanied by a fifth that number of drakes) produces an average of five eggs per week; it hatches them, it grows them, about seven weeks later it kills and processes them, and it packages all the various products right on site?
- that it even grows its own corn-based duck feed and mills it at its own mill in Queensville?



- that King Cole is the epitome of the recycling farmer? The company doesn't just produce duck meat, it packages and

FOUNDING FAMILY - King Cole farm manager Jackie Fisher (bottom, left) and marketing director Patti Thompson (bottom, right) show off a couple of fine specimens of their favourite breed of bird, the Pekin duck. Their father, Bob Murby (centre), was just a teenager when his father Jim founded King Cole back in 1949. Top left, eggs from the breeding farm are inspected for imperfections; and at right, long-time employee Jim Barron shows off some fine duck down. Photos by Conrad Boyce.

sells virtually every part of the duck, including tongues (at \$20/litre!), livers (for paté), gizzards and feet, which each are considered delicacies in various parts of the world. Duck manure is collected, dried and sold to landscapers as some of the best fertilizer on the market. The feathers, of course, are cleaned and packaged in their own plant, and shipped by the truckload to clothiers and bedding manufacturers. Even the offal, the entrails of the ducks which are taken out as one of the first steps in the butchering process, are sold for use in soaps and a multitude of other products. And some of the over-large eggs are sold to a Hungarian craftswoman who paints them for Easter!

- that King Cole ships over 4,000 ducks a day for consumption in the restaurants of Toronto? The Toronto market, in fact, was what inspired Margaret Murby to specialize in ducks back in 1949. The company also recently won a competition, over several American



processors, to supply ducks to one of the U.S.'s largest Chinese food chains, P.F. Chang.

"We're not the biggest duck producer in the world," says Patty, "there's a farm in the U.S. that grows 18 million ducks every year. But we're proud of the fact that our products are all natural, totally grain-fed. And that gives us a big advantage with buyers who are looking for top quality."

Although most of King Cole's largest customers continue to be Asian markets, both here and across the Pacific, they also sell a lot to Quebec — the French have always appreciated duck — and even the local meat-and-potatoes consumer is slowly being converted.

"We're not principally a retail operation," Patty says, "but we have a lot of great products for the barbecue, the stir-fry wok, even for pizza!"

So drop in to King Cole, and try a great alternative to chicken or turkey. Just watch out for the duck puns.

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