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 By Ashley Trosper
August 20, 2008

Photo By state journal/hilly schiffer

Larry Allison, owner of Four Feather Bird Farm, feeds hundreds of chickens at his farm. Allison has 10 different types of birds on his farm, including White Cornish and Rhode Island Red chickens, guineas, quail and peacocks. "This is a good example of a hobby that has gotten out of hand," Allison said. This year is Allison's first at selling the meat of the White Cornish chickens at the Franklin County Farmers Market.

The dispute about which came first - the chicken or the egg - doesn't really apply to Larry Allison.

He has both.

But what began as a hobby for Allison, owner of Four Feather Bird Farm, quickly escalated to a business opportunity.

Now Allison, who retired from state government in 2002, has White Cornish and Rhode Island Reds, guineas, quail and peacocks - 10 varieties in all.

Some, like the peacock, are novelties that people purchase for their farms, according to Allison, but he also sells game birds and meat birds.

"This is a good example of a hobby that has gotten out of hand," Allison said.

This is Allison's first year at the Franklin County Farmers Market, where he says he sells the White Cornish meat.

"They are the meat birds," Allison said. "But I also sell Rhode Island Red eggs and a few other varieties."

Though he says he has had a good deal of success with the market, Allison is unsure if he'll continue to sell chicken meat as feed costs continue to grow.

"This is my first year with the meat birds," Allison said. "I've sold the game birds for a while. People from all over the state come to my place to buy the guineas and quail. But it's costly. You have to make enough sales to generate funds to purchase food."

"When you don't, it's time to quit," he added, also saying he buys chicken feed by the ton, averaging around four and a half tons annually.

Allison and his wife, Rebecca, own the 100 acres where he used to hunt as a boy. The guineas and quail he hunted back then are long gone, but when he bought the property, he decided to repopulate the area.

"When I was little, this land was full of them," Allison said. "When I came back, I didn't see a single one."

"I like to listen to them whistle," he added.

Repopulating his land gradually turned into much more. He now has three incubators and several pens, which house hundreds of birds at any given time.

When The State Journal visited Allison's bird farm, there were approximately 100 White

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Cornish chickens ready to be processed the following day.

"They are full-grown in six to seven weeks," Allison said. "Each chicken produces about four or five pounds of meat."

The importance of disease-free chickens is the reason Allison participated in a training class seminar at the Kentucky State University research farm.

He says his bird farm is inspected by the state three times a year, and when he passes, the National Poultry Improvement Plan delegates a number to the farm, guaranteeing it's disease free.

Four Feather Bird Farm, located 15 miles north of Frankfort, received its number this past spring.

"My chicken is guaranteed no chemicals, growth hormones or steroids," Allison said. "After taking the seminar, that's when I decided to explore with these meat birds."

To acquire his birds, Allison buys eggs from a variety of places, but mainly online.

Fifty percent of the eggs will hatch, he says.

"The meat birds do not reproduce," he said. "I buy the eggs by the hundreds. It's a gamble. But I incubate all of my eggs."

The Rhode Island Reds and other egg-producing chickens begin laying in late May through the beginning of August.

Allison says he also enjoys selling the fresh, country eggs at the market.

"It's interesting," Allison said. "And it's good to see a lot of the people."



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