

Turkey - The Product

Today, turkey is much more than the traditional holiday favourite. With today's variety of turkey products and recipes available, the demand for turkey is steadily increasing as an everyday meal on Canadian tables. Turkey can be found at the butcher or in the grocer's meat department as a traditional whole bird or as cuts like breast, thighs, drumsticks, wings or ground turkey. It may also be further processed into sausages or specialty cuts.

How the Turkey Got Its Name

There are a number of explanations for the origin of the name of Thanksgiving's favourite dinner guest. Some believe Christopher Columbus thought that the land he discovered was connected to India, and believed the bird he discovered (the turkey) was a type of peacock. He therefore called it 'tuka', which is 'peacock' in Tamil, an Indian language.

Young turkey poults



About Turkey – Additional Website Links

Turkey Farmers of Canada: on farm information:
www.turkeyfarmersofcanada.ca

Turkey Farmers of Canada: recipes, how-to videos, nutrition information and more:
www.canadianturkey.ca

Turkey Farmers of Ontario:
Visit: www.turkeyfarmers.on.ca
www.makesitsuper.ca

British Columbia Turkey Marketing Board:
Visit: www.bcturkey.com

Alberta Turkey Producers:
Visit: www.albertaturkey.com

Turkey Farmers of Saskatchewan
Visit: www.saskturkey.com

Manitoba Turkey Producers:
Visit: www.turkey.mb.ca

Les Éleveurs de volailles du Québec:
Visit : www.ledindon.qc.ca

Turkey Farmers of Nova Scotia:
Visit: www.turkeyfarmersofnovascotia.com

Visit a Canadian turkey farm on line at
www.virtualfarmtours.ca

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Facts & Figures About Canadian Turkey Farms

In General:

- As of 2016, there were over 500 turkey farms in Canada.
- Approximately 12% of Canadian turkey is exported. Import access is equivalent to 3.5% of Canada's total domestic production.
- Per capita turkey consumption has remained relatively stable over the past 15 years, with production and consumption growing at approximately the same rate as the population.
- Thanksgiving, Easter, and Christmas account for over 90% of annual whole turkey sales.
- In Canada, turkeys are produced in various weight ranges including:
 - Broiler turkeys up to 6.2 kg
 - Hen turkeys 6.2 - 10.8 kg
 - Tom turkeys 10.8 kg and up



You were asking about...Turkey

Housing: Where Do Turkeys live?

- Most turkeys are raised in specially designed, environmentally-controlled barns to provide protection from predators, disease and bad weather. The turkeys' environment is monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure access to feed and water, adequate lighting, temperature, air quality, and space per bird.
- Turkeys are not raised in cages; they roam freely around the barn, on a floor that is covered with bedding (e.g., straw or wood shavings).
- Turkey barns are designed to provide birds with ample room to move about with easy access to water and feed. Natural and/or artificial light is provided and barns are insulated to help maintain a constant temperature.

Nutrition: What Do Turkeys Eat?

- Turkeys are fed nutritionally-balanced diets of mixed grains and oil seeds, which typically include corn, wheat, barley, soybean meal and canola meal. The feed provided is adjusted to match the nutritional requirements of the birds at different stages of growth to reach the desired market weight. Young turkeys, called poults, are fed a "starter" mixture; then as they grow the feed is changed to a "grower" mixture. Each type of feed includes protein, energy, fibre, fat, vitamins and minerals.
- Feed and water are always provided throughout the barn so the birds may eat and drink freely. Turkeys drink two litres of water for every kilogram of feed they eat, which comes to just over ½ litre per day at 10 weeks of age and about one litre per day at 20 weeks of age.

About the Life Cycle of Turkeys

Breeder Farm: This is where turkey eggs are produced. Hens (mature female turkeys) are bred. The fertilized eggs are collected throughout the day and carefully stored to be sent to the hatchery. Hens start to lay eggs at approximately 32 weeks of age and will continue until about 55-70 weeks of age.

Hatchery: The fertilized eggs are incubated and hatch within 28 days into poults (young turkeys). Just as children receive their vaccination shots, the poults are vaccinated against the most common turkey diseases. Turkey beaks can be dangerously sharp to other birds, so trained professionals who work in the hatchery may trim the poults' beaks using lasers. Their sharp toes can also be hazardous to other birds, so they are sometimes trimmed using a tool that applies microwave energy to the tips of the toes.

Turkey Farm: Poults are sold to a turkey farm and transported within 24 hours of being removed from their incubator. These day-old turkeys are then raised in climate-controlled barns that protect the birds from harsh weather, disease and predators.

The first stage of growth from one day of age to five weeks of age is called brooding. During this time the young birds are carefully watched, encouraged to begin eating and drinking at will, and kept warm. As feathers replace the birds' down, the heat in the barn is gradually reduced from 35°C to 21°C.

The next stage is called the growing cycle as the birds grow from five weeks of age to between 11 and 17 weeks of age, when they will reach their desired market weight. The birds can move freely throughout the barn and continuous access to feed and water is provided. Most turkey farms have automated feeding systems that supply the birds with their food and water. Farmers take special care to monitor the equipment in their barns to control the temperature, humidity, light and ventilation at levels that are safe for their birds.

After each flock of birds is raised, the barn and equipment are cleaned for the next flock. This practice helps prevent the spread of potential disease from one flock to another.

In Canada, **hormones are strictly prohibited by law for use in any poultry production, including turkey farming.** It is scientific advancements such as selective breeding, better feed formulation and modern management practices that are responsible for the larger, healthier turkeys produced today.

Some farmers may choose to add a probiotic, vitamin or other type of supplement to the feed or water to improve its quality and promote a higher level of flock health. The use of supplements has been approved by Health Canada or the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) with a regulated withdrawal period, as required, before turkeys are shipped to market. In addition, antibiotics may be used to prevent and treat disease. The turkey industry, along with other poultry industry partners, is working to control, monitor and reduce antibiotic use where possible. Antibiotics serve an important role in reducing the incidence of infectious bacterial disease and their responsible use is important to ensure a turkey flock's health and welfare. Antibiotics are used in turkey farming in consultation with a veterinarian and have been approved by Health Canada. Use of antibiotics is determined by veterinary prescription or by following product labelling which details use, dosage and withdrawal periods. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) has a chemical residue surveillance program in place to monitor and test meat products to help ensure that consumers receive a safe, wholesome product.

The Turkey Farmers of Canada (TFC) On-Farm Food Safety Program[®] (OFFSP), is a science-based program for turkey farms across Canada. It outlines specific management practices to help ensure that the turkeys going to market are safe and of the highest quality. The program contains biosecurity measures to reduce the risk of disease in turkey flocks. One of the goals of the OFFSP is to promote the proper and effective use of medications and farm chemicals, to ensure that the turkey meat is free of any medication or other chemical residues. Turkey farmers keep records to prove the proper measures are being taken, and these records are audited on a regular basis by qualified on-farm auditors.

The Turkey Farmers of Canada Flock Care Program[®] (FCP) is an auditable national program that provides turkey farmers with the most current measures to ensure the proper handling and care of their birds. The TFC FCP is based on the *Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals (Chickens, Turkeys and Breeders from Hatchery to Processing Plant)*, which is a set of guidelines developed by farmers, government, animal welfare advocates, researchers and processors. The Code of Practice outlines optimal housing, management, transportation and processing practices for the humane treatment and health of birds.

For more information on the OFFSP or FCP, click www.turkeyfarmersofcanada.ca/on-the-farm. To view the *Code of Practice*, visit www.nfacc.ca.

Breeds

The breeds that are used today in commercial production have been selected for good meat production characteristics, disease resistance and fertility. Most of the turkeys grown for commercial meat production are white-feathered because their pin feathers are less visible after processing; however, a number of coloured breeds are available for specialized markets or poultry fanciers.

For more information on other turkey breeds, click here: www.rarebreedscanada.org.

Off to Market

Turkey production in Canada is supply-managed. Each province is allocated part of the national quota, with Ontario providing 45% of the total national requirements. Supply management matches production to demand, to satisfy consumers while ensuring fair returns to turkey farmers.

Care is taken during transportation so that each bird arrives at the processing plant in the best possible condition. Because farmers are paid on the basis of quality and condition, it is in their best interest to ensure their birds arrive in good health.

When birds are ready for market they are loaded into specially lined trailers and transported to the processing plant to ensure swift and humane transportation. Weather conditions are taken into consideration when shipping birds. The trucks are covered with protective tarps that can be raised or lowered by a computer inside the cab of the truck to help control the climate for the birds. Drivers take care to avoid sudden movements that might harm the birds on board.



TURKEY TRIVIA

Did You Know...

- Only male turkeys (toms) gobble. Females (hens) make a clicking noise.
- Mature turkeys have approximately 3,500 feathers.
- The fleshy growth from the base of the beak, which is very long on male turkeys and hangs down over the beak, is called the snood.
- Turkeys are the only breed of poultry native to the Western Hemisphere.
- Turkeys have great hearing, but no external ears. They can also see in colour, have excellent visual acuity and a wide field of vision (about 270 degrees), which makes sneaking up on them difficult. However, turkeys have a poor sense of smell but an excellent sense of taste.
- Domesticated turkeys cannot fly. Wild turkeys, however, can fly for short distances at speeds up to 85 kilometres per hour. They can also reach speeds of 40 kilometres per hour on foot.

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Turkey Terminology

- **Biosecurity:** A set of flock management practices, which reduce the potential introduction and spread of disease onto, and between, farms. It includes restricting access to barns and farm premises, requiring boot and clothing changes before entering a barn, and cleaning barns and equipment between flocks. It also means that anyone visiting a turkey farm must follow biosecurity practices and say where they have been, to prevent them tracking a poultry disease from one farm to another. Biosecurity on Canadian turkey farms is mandated through participation in the Turkey Farmers of Canada On-Farm Food Safety Program[®].
- **Breeder farm:** A farm where turkeys are bred and fertile eggs are collected to be sent to the hatchery.
- **Broiler:** A meat turkey raised to a weight under 6.2 kg.
- **Brooding:** The first stage of production from one day of age to about five or six weeks of age.
- **Flock:** A group of birds that is raised by a farmer.
- **Hatchery:** Location/business where turkey eggs are hatched into poults. At the hatchery, turkey eggs are in incubators for 28 days.
- **Hen:** Adult, female turkeys. They are raised to weigh between 6.2 and 9.8 kg and have a wing span of up to 1.25 metres. They make a "clicking" sound, but don't gobble.
- **Incubation:** The process whereby eggs are hatched. Turkey eggs are incubated for 28 days before they hatch.
- **Poult:** Young turkeys from the time they hatch until they are 14 days old. Poults are covered with a soft yellow "down" and make a peeping noise.
- **Snood:** The snood is the fleshy growth that hangs down over the beak of a turkey.
- **Tom:** Adult, male turkeys. They are typically raised to a weight between 9.8 to over 13.3 kg and have a wing span of up to 1.5 metres. It is only tom turkeys that make the famous "gobble gobble" sound.
- **Wattle:** The reddish-pink flesh-like covering on the throat and neck of a turkey. It helps to release extra body heat.