

Producer ^{OF THE} *Month*

AUGUST 2022



Misty Knoll Farms

VERMONT NATURALLY RAISED POULTRY



New Haven, VT



BRATTLEBORO FOOD CO-OP

Producer OF THE *Month*



The ride to Misty Knoll Farms is about two and a half hours from the Brattleboro Food Co-op, and every turn greets you with a new field, farm, barn, or gorgeous pasture with animals and crops. It is a delightful ride that reminds you of how abundant agriculture is in Vermont.

During the 1980s John Palmer assisted his daughter in raising turkeys for a 4-H project. Together they raised 20 or so turkeys in his basement and yard. At the end of the project, he gave away the ready-to-cook turkeys to friends and family, generating amazing responses. Due to the success of the 4-H project, he started a small-scale turkey farm to see if it was something he felt

could drive the next phase of his career. To his delight, the work of farming was quite appealing to him and in 1986 he purchased a 17-acre property and farmhouse (a property that dates back to the 1700s). The business now spans over 400 acres that make up the whole of Misty Knoll Farms in New Haven, VT. To this day, John still lives in the farmhouse on the property, mere feet away from their processing and storage facility. As turkey farming became more of passion and seemed viable as a career path, John left his job as an electrical engineer at IBM. At first John had a lot of help from friends and family to get the farm up and running. One of the first people on staff was his nephew, Rob, who

was shoveling turkey manure to help pay for his degree at UVM. In 1992 Rob graduated and launched the Misty Knoll Farms concession stand, which marketed the farm through the delicious food he served. The concession stand was not a profitable operation, but it did allow Rob to introduce the farm to Vermonters without a marketing budget. He met hundreds of Vermonters at agricultural events statewide, and it was a fantastic long-term investment in the public's awareness of the farm. On Rob's off days from the concession stand, he visited independent natural food stores and restaurants across Vermont to find customers for their high quality, locally raised, and locally processed turkeys. Rob jokes that



he made so much money selling food from the concession stand that he retired from that part of the business. In actuality he had to focus his attention on assisting John in all things related to running a turkey farm.

Misty Knoll Farms is a unique poultry farm for many reasons. While one of the largest producers in Vermont, they are tiny in comparison to large conventional poultry farms. In fact, they process the same amount of poultry in a year that a conventional processing plant does in a day. As a responsible, small-scale poultry farm, they choose exactly the right food for their turkeys and chickens and always purchase the same mixture of vegetarian feed, no matter how much the price

varies. The diet for their turkeys and chickens has largely been dictated by feedback from their customers, especially chefs and independent stores, who helped them settle on a flavor they enjoy. Furthermore, they raise the flock humanely by allowing the birds to grow naturally, which makes them robust and meatier. They focus on a stress-free and humane life with emphasis on a clean, spacious environment with plenty of fresh air. These areas support a delectable, happy, and flavorful bird. To this day John still walks the turkey and chicken barns every day as his ultimate responsibility is to raise their flock. Rob could not underscore enough how important the cleanliness of the barns is to

the health and flavor of the turkeys and chickens. Explaining that avian flu is a true risk to their business, the health of their entire flock, their staff, and customers, he said they chose to keep their barns closed in order to protect the flock from this illness. Even so, their birds have a spacious and clean place to live with an abundance of fresh air.

Another unique aspect of Misty Knoll Farms is that they process all of their poultry in their own facility, which is inspected by the USDA. Rob was very clear that when processing and storing poultry, they must be precise with the temperatures in their facility and freezers. They focus on temperature control



throughout the entire process. They have a tenacity and passion for detail, and during our tour all areas were immaculate. Because of their control across every aspect of the farming process, they charge what they believe is a fair price and distribute only to co-ops, independent restaurants, and natural food stores. Rob is heavily involved in processing, delivery routes, storage, and all things related to facilities and equipment. This entire process is in sharp contrast to large conventional poultry farms whose flocks are often owned by huge corporations that dictate what they are fed and how long they are raised. Those farms still invest plenty of money in infrastructure and labor to raise a flock of birds they do not own. Then the flocks are even shipped hours away to a slaughtering facility to be processed. The entire conventional poultry industry is much more stressful and less humane. Misty

Knoll Farms takes a responsible and local approach to ensure quality throughout the entire process.

Up until few years ago, Rob and John were processing most of the poultry by themselves, doing nearly all of the work from raising the flock to delivery. Over time, though, slow and organic growth has allowed them to expand their staff. They take a deep pride in supporting their workers—not only with living wages but with clean working conditions. They even provide excellent housing for those staff who move here to work. Misty Knoll Farms employs approximately 20 full- and part-time staff. They aim to create value for their employees so that they, in turn, take pride in their work. Their staff are a reflection of Rob and John, and this happy team ensures the high quality that Misty Knoll Farms seeks to offer their customers. Sales growth has also allowed them to expand their processing facility.

With the expansion they invested in state-of-the-art chilling equipment, vacuum sealers, extra freezers, storage facilities, and office space. They also acquired a new delivery truck just a couple years ago. Misty Knoll Farms has enjoyed steady growth due to expansions at co-ops such as City Market, Hunger Mountain, and your very own Brattleboro Food Co-op. They are very pleased to be focusing their attention on local, community-owned businesses.

What does the future hold for Misty Knoll Farms? An ongoing commitment to and focus on their customers by delivering fresh, quality, delicious, and humanely raised chickens and turkeys. They would like to concentrate more squarely on raising chickens, but with the Thanksgiving season being so integral to their business, they will always raise plenty of turkeys. However, they will not seek growth beyond their current customers as they enjoy the sweet spot they have found between volume and quality. Their approach has allowed them to continue their business in a responsible manner. They are also investing in renewable energy. For instance, they have a large solar array on their property, which they hope to continue to expand as it allows them to create their own power and positively invest in local businesses. Rob and John are excited about their continued work as turkey and chicken farmers and their commitment to local agriculture in Vermont.



Stop by the BFC Meat Department and get yourself some of the tastiest poultry available, local and delicious Misty Knoll Farms Vermont Poultry!