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Nebraska Poultry Production

Nebraska is the corn and beef state. The farm poultry flocks are almost gone and Saturday nights are no longer set-aside for cream and egg delivery. Yet quietly Nebraska's poultry industry has become a steady and growing force in the state's economy. Nebraska poultry is the number one consumer of soybean meal and the number two consumer of corn. Let's take a quick look at egg production, turkey production, and broiler production in Nebraska.

Nebraska has the two largest egg processing companies in the United States. Michael Foods also called Waldbaum farms is located in the Northeast Nebraska town of Wakefield. They raise layer hens for egg production near Wakefield, near Bloomfield, Nebraska, at a large Iowa complex. They also have chickens under contract with farmer growers, including producers in Gage and Jefferson County. Waldbaum eggs are processed into egg products used in the restaurant trade, commercial baking, and some products on the retail self. Hemmingsen Foods located in David City, Nebraska is also an egg processing company. The eggs used by Hemmingsen's are all under contract with farmer growers in the general David City area. Nebraska is 10th nationally in egg production with nearly 3 billion eggs produced from its 12 million head flock. Gage County is also home to a breeding flock to supply hatching eggs for the layer operations. A major supplier to layer hen breeding stock has built a hatchery in Grand Island, Nebraska and has several breeding flocks to supply hatching eggs in that area. A major builder of poultry houses for egg production in the Central United States is Midwest Livestock Systems of Beatrice, Nebraska.

Nebraska has commercial turkey producers who ship the birds to processors out of state. These producers raise more than 3,000,000 turkeys each year. Turkey raising buildings are large curtain-sided buildings with suspended feed and water lines. A turkey hatchery in Beatrice, Nebraska supplies poults to producers across the country.

Broiler production disappeared in Nebraska except for family production until the beginning of Campbell Soup in the late 1980's. When Campbell quit producing poultry to concentrate on processing and marketing, the Nebraska production has been acquired and operated by MBA poultry now known as Tecumseh Poultry. The broilers are produced by contract farmer growers in Nebraska, Iowa, and Missouri. The processed chicken is sold under the SmartChicken label. This is the only chicken in the United States which is processed using an air chilled technology which limits added water and markedly reduces contamination of the meat by bacteria. Nebraska broiler production is over 60 million pounds. Local growers involved in SmartChicken production are located in Beatrice, Cortland, David City and Tecumseh. They are currently the nation's largest producer of organic chicken. The Costco broiler processing plant, hatchery and grower building in the general Fremont area will dwarf the size of current broiler production in Nebraska. The addition of the broiler industry, egg-laying facilities, and turkey hatching facilities in our area contribute to our economy through labor, value-added to the grain used in feed, processing and sales employment, trucking, and added tax valuation. The nice thing about poultry houses is that the added valuation for taxes is there and even though they are SmartChicken's they don't go to school. The poultry industry in Nebraska is much larger than most people realize. It is vital to the economy of our state that the poultry industry keeps evolving and changing to meet the needs of or consumer clients.

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