

# These Farm Families "Farm" Pheasants



Pheasants are good flyers and, in confinement, find their way to areas inaccessible to other domesticated birds.

## The Darrell Forsgrens, Pelican Rapids, Minnesota

"We started small 10 years ago and it grew away from us," states Darrell Forsgren of Pelican Rapids, Minn., who has hatched and sold some 52,000 pheasants this year, sending them to buyers throughout the upper midwest.

Forsgren's operation — which includes wife Kathy and father Carl — is completely self-contained, from breeding of hens to the final packaging and marketing of adult birds. Birds are sold at all stages — as chicks to other growers and as live birds to sportsmen and wildlife preserves.

Each season begins in April when one rooster for every nine hens is placed among Forsgren's 1600 bird breeding flock, located in a double-decked barn. From April till mid-July eggs are collected daily and incubated in the Forsgrens' incubators. Once birds start hatching, the several-hour a day job of transferring hatched chicks to brooding barns begins.

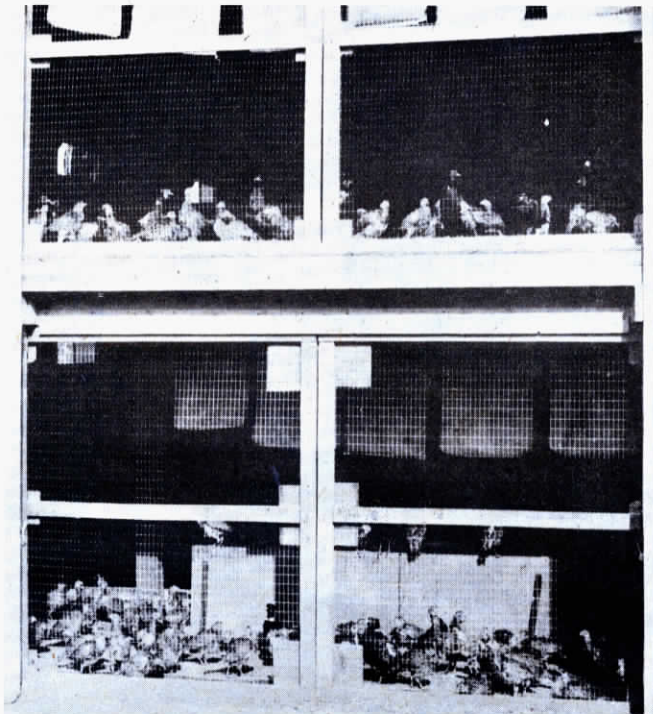
"Many of the birds are sold as chicks or young birds out of the

brooder houses," says Forsgren. The remaining birds go to barns on Forsgren's and neighboring farms, where in about 18 weeks they're finished to mature weights. That is, a dressed weight of 1 3/4 lbs. for hens and 2 lbs. for roosters, a size that isn't likely to change anytime soon.

"We select average size birds for breeding rather than large ones. That's because hunters like light, fast-flying birds," says Forsgren.

Pheasants are a relatively hardy bird and subject to few diseases. Forsgren says they eat much less than turkeys and chickens per pound — probably because of their wildness — but he has never been able to compute the conversion rate since his flocks are in continuous flux. Because they're good flyers, pheasants will find their way to rafters and other areas in the barn that are inaccessible to other domesticated birds. Like turkeys and chickens, though, pheasants are debeaked when held in confinement.

The Forsgrens begin dressing



The Forsgren's operation, complete from breeding to final marketing of dressed birds, is partially housed in a double-decked barn.

finished birds in September and continue through October. A crew of a dozen or so manages to kill and clean around 100 birds per hour. Birds are packed in plastic bags, and stored in a large walk-in freezer.

"We sell to restaurants as far as 200 miles away," says Forsgren. "We'll ship to anyone but the cost becomes prohibitive at too long a distance." Dressed hens sell for \$3.25 apiece and roosters for \$4.25. In contrast, chicks sell for 50 cents apiece shortly after hatch. "We probably make more profit on chicks," adds Forsgren.

The birds' feathers are also marketable, to a limited extent, to artists and others, making use of the brilliant adult-bird colors. But the main source

of pheasant income is from the sale of dressed birds to restaurants, sportsmen and individuals. "Many people prefer them over wild birds. The flavor is milder and there's no buckshot to chew on," he adds.

Even though his pheasant operation has grown into a full-time occupation, Forsgren continues to experiment. Three peacocks strutting about the yard make a visitor wonder what the market might be for them. Forsgren notes that they only had a trio of birds when the family started "farming" pheasants 10 years ago.

For more information, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Darrell Forsgren, Pelican Rapids, Minn. 56572 (ph 218 863-8803).

## The James Zindls, Sussex, Wisconsin

If you like working with birds but would like something different than collecting eggs every day, you might try raising pheasants.

Pheasant farming is a full-time enterprise for James Zindl in southeastern Wisconsin. Jim and his family are kept busy throughout the year raising and marketing 40,000 of the wild birds which are sold to sportsmen clubs throughout the Midwest to be released for hunting.

Zindl's operation is completely self-contained, starting with breeding of the hens, hatching eggs, brooding chicks, growing the birds to

maturity, to final marketing of adult birds. The breeding season begins in early spring when one rooster is put into the pens for every eight hens.

Each hen lays about 50 eggs during April and May. The eggs are collected and incubated in the Zindl's own on-farm hatchery. In 25 days, eggs hatch and baby pheasants are placed in a brooder house for their first three weeks of life.

During the next 5-8 weeks, the pheasant chicks live in wooden coops that house 500 birds each and are equipped with heat lamps. At 8 weeks of age, the pheasants are put

outdoors permanently in large wire pens. By this time they start to show some of their wild traits.

"It's important that the pheasants adapt to their natural outdoor environment," says Jim. "At first, they are somewhat tame because of the close contact with people. But, when they are put outdoors in the wire pens, they again develop their natural fear of human beings."

The birds are sold at 18-20 weeks of age. With the help of dogs, the pheasants are corralled and crated for shipping. A minimum order is 300 birds, and every order is personally delivered to the customer by the Zindl family.

Most of the Zindl flock is made up of the Chinese Blueback breed, a fast, active kind of bird. They also keep a small number of the Mongolian cross, a heavier bird that is dressed for mar-

ket to local restaurants. New breeding stock is selected from the old flock for the next year's breeding season.

Raising pheasants is a specialized job that Jim Zindl learned while growing up on the pheasant farm his parents started 40 years ago. Pheasant housing takes up about 15 acres, and another 45 acres are used to raise feed for the flock.

Any game farm, like Zindl's, must be licensed by the state and be inspected and approved. The Zindls are members of the North American Game Bird Assn. and a Wisconsin game bird organization.

For more information, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Oak Ridge Pheasant Ranch, W250 N5773 Highway J, Sussex, Wis. 53089 (ph 414 246-3120).