

Turkey

When it comes to turkey, change your paradigm. Most commercially raised turkeys are slaughtered as adolescents, 12-14 weeks, which means they have no fat. Czack raises his Chocolates up to 12 weeks longer, meaning they are adult turkeys, hence their fat content is much higher. But that difference costs Czack \$40 more in feed per bird.

After a tour of the Elevage de Volailles, as I sit down in the farm kitchen, and partake of the moistest, tastiest mutton—as good as any Welsh lamb I have ever tasted—small chops Annette has pulled from the freezer to place on the grill, I am reminded how personal food is and how removed most of us are from those who make it possible.

Czack: “People are isolated behind their TV, phone and keyboard. Most people do not understand that the majority of farmers cannot pay their taxes and must take another full-time job to not lose the farm, so in essence, are subsidizing the consumer to buy their meat at a personal loss.”

Czack admits that Elevage de Volailles methods represent an extreme end of the spectrum, but he maintains hope that other sustainably-minded farmers could modify their methods to achieve a better balance.

Czack: “There is no doubt that we need factory farms to pump out food, lest people starve. These farms are vital to the nation as it is today. But you vote with your dollar. A balance can be brought to the table only when consumer values change enough to force the market to shift.”

Two chefs in the state support Elevage de Volailles—Chef Evan Hennessey of Stages at One Washington in Dover and Chef Cory Fletcher at Revival Kitchen in Concord.

Czack dreams about saving two more flocks—Emden Gans Geese, the 800-year-

old species of which there are just 90 in existence in Germany—and the Dindon de Gers, the last remnant of original turkeys brought to Spain around 1599. The last Jim knew, there were only 50 left. What drives Jim is the fact that commercial selective breeding to manipulate the goose for better profits is already underway, in much the same vein as was accomplished with the Cornish Cross chicken and the Broad-breasted turkey.

What is involved in making it happen? “I do not have the time to leave the farm, let alone the money for airfare and travel to Germany or France,” Czack said. “Someone willing to do this would collect the eggs, bring them back and treat them with kid gloves. The genetics are so rare they are safer where they are than wasting them in death to shipping.”

Sounds crazy? Elevage de Volailles stands as an uplifting testament to the power of the individual to make a difference, even if at times it feels as like David facing Goliath.

Czack: “We need to understand how fragile our food system really is. If we keep going back to commercial feedstock farms, we will eliminate genetic diversity on the planet. What’s left? Artificially-inseminated turkeys that cannot breed or grow feathers?”

Visiting this extraordinary farm made me think beyond the price of a “naturally raised” Thanksgiving bird, beyond the taste of yesteryear, and beyond simply splurging at a pricey restaurant. By drawing closer to nature, perhaps we can open up new perspectives about how to reconnect with and support our food supply, especially the farmers who make it happen.

For more information, see: www.elevagedevollailles.com.

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