

## Birds pampered from birth

By Scott Starnes

Of The Print

The turkey which sits on the dining room table this coming Thanksgiving is no ordinary bird. Every part of it, from the breast to the drumsticks, has been carefully nurtured from birth to the dinner table by the turkey farmer.

Guy Wheatley of Molalla is the only turkey farmer in the state who naturally breeds his turkeys. "As far as I know, I'm the only one in the state who breeds his turkeys this way. I find that this is the correct way of raising these birds and obtaining the best quality bird," Wheatley said.

Wheatley said he receives the turkey chicks on his farm when they are about 12 weeks old. "Viewpoint Hatcheries, located in Salem, incubates the turkey eggs and then sells them to me," he said. "We have to do it this way because the parent birds do not know how to properly raise their young."

Once receiving the turkey chicks, Wheatley said that the birds are distinguished for breeding, laying and meat pur-

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poses. "Out of 12,000 chicks about 5,000 are set aside as breeders," Wheatley said.

The birds must be at least 36 weeks old before they are even considered for commercial purposes, Wheatley said.

During this pre-commercial stage, the birds' beaks are clipped and one of their wings is cut off, Wheatley said. "I've seen the birds take to running after being scared by something, start flapping their wings and fly right out of the pens. We only cut one wing so as to off-balance them," Wheatley said.

"The reason why we clip their beaks is that they naturally and instinctively peck at each other and in so doing draw blood. I don't know what causes this but when a bird is pecking the others will kill it. They're sort of like cannibals," Wheatley said.

After 24 weeks the birds are given shots for a variety of diseases. "The birds take a lot of shots," Wheatley said. "They are so susceptible to diseases in the air and from the ground," he said. "This is another reason

we clip their beaks is that they contact diseases from the ground by pecking."

As the 32 weeks roll around the birds are separated into different categories, Wheatley said. The breeders denote the

choice birds and are used solely for this purpose. "For the first six months, 110 percent of all the hens are laying, the next five only 85 percent and then the next four and a half, 70 percent of the hens are laying," Wheatley said. As the laying percentage slowly decreases, many of the birds are butchered, he said.

To increase profits, Wheatley has had to pay careful attention to the breeding birds so that they cannot brood over their eggs. "We receive money for each egg we ship to Viewpoint Hatcheries. Since the birds don't know how to take care of their young after being hatched, we are losing money by the inevitability of the chicks' death," he said.

To contain this problem, Wheatley said that they have had to install 260 one hundred watt lightbulbs around the pens so that the birds will not brood over the eggs. "The birds won't brood in the daylight so we've installed these lights for this purpose. This acts as a shock treatment on the birds and forces them away from brooding,

and outside to where it's cold. The body temperature of the brooding hens increases as they brood over their eggs and thereby forcing them out of the breeding pens," Wheatley said.

When many of the turkeys become no longer useful as breeders or layers, they are shipped to Norbest Inc., for butchering, Wheatley said. "Many turkeys besides the layers and breeders have been raised solely for meat purposes," he added.

Wheatley said that the breeder birds are a little tougher eating but are fat, which creates a juicier bird. The

birds are on an average of two-and-a-half years old before they are sent away for butchering, he said.

"Before, we have had problems with the turkey market plants in that they preferred the big meaty birds over the small birds which we mostly have. But many times the consumer only wants to eat turkey for a couple of days and therefore the small bird becomes more practical," Wheatley said.

Wheatley said that the market for turkeys is currently quite good. "A little while back, when beef prices rose con-

siderable, the turkey plants felt obligated to increase their prices in comparison to the escalating beef prices. This was really stupid on their part," Wheatley said. "As soon as beef prices receded, the market for turkey at that high cost shot the bottom right out of our boat."

"We could have still sold turkey during this time at the same price per pound, met our expenses and lived comfortably," he said.

Wheatley said there is more to that turkey on your table than meets the eye, and that it has been a carefully raised and looked after bird.



## Tidy tax system needed

By Kelly Laughlin  
Of The Print

When the legislature convenes in January, property tax relief is expected to head the lawmakers' list of concerns. But what any potential tax relief package would mean to the College budget remains in question.

Whether great or small tax changes are drafted, the college's financial status will be affected. Ideally, according to President John Hakanson, "if a system was worked out in February, we might have some indication as to how much money we'll have to work with for the next year."

"There is no question that the legislature will be addressing the tax problem early," said Edward Linquist, state representative for District

26. "The problem we'll be faced with is getting an effective system going much earlier than June."

"A tidy, or at least more appealing, tax relief system is needed," Lindquist added. "We will be looking at systems from other states and locales to get a program that best suits Oregonians. If we didn't act on it immediately, the people may put a measure together that's even more damaging than others previous."

If a tax proposal were drafted just before the College budget time arrived, "It would be difficult to finalize a budget," said Hakanson. "We would just have to get as close as possible to what we think we would receive in revenue. It's been done before, but never with a tax issue pending."

What are the possibilities, then, of overspending? Not likely, according to Hakanson. "We would simply not spend, or at least reduce any additional spending."

Lindquist said, however, it's very likely, that "we'll give some lead time, in order for local governments to work out their finances, before the effective date occurs. We're not about to let schools and community colleges go. They're our main responsibility," he said.

Although the property tax issue rests high on the legislative agenda, it appears that putting a measure into effect too close to the budgetary process would cause great uncertainty, and possibly additional problems could arise as a result.

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