

## AGRICULTURE

# Thanksgiving: Then and Now

Thanksgiving Day, the traditional American holiday, is not all tradition. Research has brought about changes in growing vegetables and in breeding turkeys.

By BENITA TALL

► ONCE, a modern American housewife roasted her traditional Thanksgiving Day turkey and then later spooned out a well-cooked plastic bag of giblets along with some stuffing. In a sense, this housewife symbolizes something that is happening all along the food front at this holiday time.

Scientific research has stepped into the picture so that now science and tradition both determine what we eat and how we prepare our food.

Today when an American family prepares to celebrate and give thanks for an abundant harvest, turkey will be the main meat dish just as it was at the first thanksgiving in 1621. But there will be some big differences.

For the last ten years, for example, the bulk of the turkeys coming to market have been frozen. The new style is to put the giblets in a plastic bag and slip the bag inside the bird.

Actually the turkey season for the grower begins in August and continues on through November and December. Millions of turkeys are sent to market ranging in size from a bird small enough for the oven in an efficiency apartment to one big enough to fill the black cave of an oven in a farm kitchen.

Except for the problem of thawing the frozen turkey, this takes approximately 36 hours and is best done in the refrigerator, and remembering to remove the bag of giblets, the new style of turkey marketing has won customer approval.

## Better Turkeys

In addition to better ways of marketing, scientists have also developed better turkeys.

"Bred to order" might be the most accurate description of the Beltsville White, a small, broad-breasted turkey designed to meet the small American family's taste for better and juicier holiday bird.

U.S. Department of Agriculture poultry scientists developed the Beltsville White, named after the research center in Maryland, to supply the demand for a smaller bird. Along with small size, however, they bred a better-looking bird.

In developing the Beltsville Small White turkey, USDA breeders crossed standard varieties, principally the Bronze and White Holland, with admixtures of the Black, the wild and the White Austrian.

The live weights of these Beltsville birds are about nine pounds for hens and 15 for toms at 24 weeks of age. They also, aside from their good looks and good eating qualities, mature early and hatch well, two

characteristics helpful for the turkey grower.

When the Beltsville turkeys first appeared in 1948 they were broad-breasted, short-legged and "round." Contrary to the commonly held picture of the Beltsville, they have just as much dark meat as do other types.

Recently the Beltsville turkey has had competition in filling the Thanksgiving Day platter. Developments in poultry breeding have led to the broiler turkey, a bird that "doubles" as small or large depending upon demand and how old he is when marketed.

USDA home economists and marketing experts predict that this year's turkeys, no matter which type or size, should be unusually low in price. There is a record crop of 81,000,000 birds, five percent more than 1956, with a record poundage. There is enough turkey to provide six pounds for every man, woman, and child in the United States.

Scientists have even come up with a better way to carve the turkey. The USDA, in cooperation with the industry, studied the problem and evolved the "side style" technique for carving the holiday bird. The drumstick is removed first, enabling the server to slice off broad pieces of meat.

Not all the changes from the traditional Thanksgiving Day dinner concern the turkey, however.

Just as the men of the town no longer

go out to get wild turkeys, the women are no longer serving only the classic holiday vegetables. Diet, advances in marketing, and agricultural products research have caused most of these changes.

Today we eat less sweet and white potatoes, although they still remain an important item on the holiday menu. Incidentally, turkey, nutritionists report, is a low-fat, protein-type meat.

## Diet Affects Dinner

Fewer storage vegetables as a whole are eaten at the modern Thanksgiving Day dinner in comparison with 25 or 30 years ago, says Dr. Victor Boswell of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. We are eating more perishable vegetables, those that used to be considered luxury foods. This is a reflection of the great increase in warm season vegetables and fruits shipped from the South. Citrus fruits have become part of our daily diet, although not too many years ago they were a special, holiday food.

Some foods that were once "everyday" have come up in the gastronomic world and are now luxury foods. Apples are a fruit that is relatively more expensive today than a quarter of a century ago.

Broccoli, unknown on the Thanksgiving Day table of 1927, is a popular vegetable today along with the perennial favorites such as beans and squash. Three or four times as many mushrooms, served either in stuffing or alone or in combination as a vegetable dish, will be eaten today compared with that earlier holiday.

## Traditional Trimmings

Tradition is still strong when it comes to the "trimmings." In this day of frozen, canned, dehydrated and otherwise processed ready-to-cook foods, the homemaker at holiday time will usually begin at the beginning when preparing things like the stuffing and cranberry sauce. The marketing experts detect a trend toward buying and using processed trimmings, but the old-fashioned way is going strong.

Since the turkey constitutes the biggest part of the Thanksgiving Day dinner budget, economists urge the cook to consider both the price and the weight of the bird. A little scientific reasoning may save money.

There is a price break between the so-called small and large birds. Because the smaller bird costs the grower more, the increase is passed along to the purchaser. In this case, it may be wiser and thriftier to buy a larger turkey.

The difference in price, which goes according to size, has also helped support the idea that hen turkeys are better than toms. There is no difference in quality, as long as they are both young birds. The only difference is that the hens are usually smaller.



**NEW AND OLD STYLE TURKEYS**—At the left is the Bronze, one of the principal birds used in breeding experiments to get the Beltsville, and at the right is the new-type small turkey, the Beltsville White. John C. Hammond, poultry biologist, holds the turkeys.

A tape measure can become a useful scientific tool when it comes to buying a turkey. Bring one to market, along with the dimensions of your oven jotted down on a slip of paper, and you will be able to choose just the right size turkey.

Whichever it is, a six-pound broiler type bird or a 25-pound gobbler, the turkey at the Thanksgiving Day table is more than the main dish. It serves as a link between Americans today and those first Americans who joined in giving thanks for the bountiful harvest of good things in this land.

Science News Letter, November 16, 1957

ENGINEERING

## Carburetor Can Reduce Harmful Auto Smog

► THE MAJOR factor in automobile exhaust air pollution can be almost eliminated if motorists are willing to pay more for their driving, two General Motors Corporation research engineers have reported.

A new "maximum performance carburetor" that eliminates 90% of the smog-producing nitrogen oxides in auto exhausts was described at the Pittsburgh meeting of the Industrial Hygiene Foundation by George J. Nebel and Ralph W. Bishop.

The price for reducing the smog problem would be about \$70 per year for the average motorist. The engineers reported the maximum performance carburetor reduced gasoline mileage about 26% in driving tests in cities and suburbs.

Nitrogen oxides, primarily from auto exhausts, have been pinpointed as the major contributor to smog and related types of air pollution. The nitrogen compounds, as well as carbon monoxide and other undesirable or dangerous gases, result from imperfect combustion of fuels in the automobile engine.

Although the new carburetor greatly reduces nitrogen oxide output, it also increases carbon monoxide content of exhaust fumes.

The engineers suggested smog from automobiles could be eliminated completely by combining the special carburetor with a catalytic converter that would burn the exhaust fumes by chemical reaction. However, they indicated that putting the idea into practice would require considerable future engineering development.

In driving tests, the maximum performance carburetor cut gasoline mileage from about 16 miles per gallon to about 12 miles per gallon in 2,500 miles of city and suburban driving. The loss of approximately four miles per gallon amounts to a \$70 per year increase in gasoline costs to the average motorist who drives 12,000 miles.

Science News Letter, November 16, 1957

## RADIO

November 23, 1957

"Adventures in Science" with Watson Davis, director of Science Service, over the CBS Radio Network will not be broadcast November 23, due to scheduled football game.

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