

AGRICULTURE

Science Preparing the Feast

Thanksgiving menus this year will profit from the work of plant and poultry scientists who have given us small turkeys and improved sweet potatoes.

By MORTON STARK

► YOUR ideal Thanksgiving feast is being prepared now, not by chefs but by scientists at plant and poultry experiment stations.

Some of the scientists' handiwork, like the Beltsville Small White turkey and well-fleshed sweet potatoes, are already available. Others, like bigger cranberries and home-grown chestnuts, are still on the way.

The small turkey, product of years of breeding experiments, was tailored to the needs—and kitchenettes—of the small-size family of today. The market bird averages around 11½ pounds, has a compact body carrying a high percentage of edible meat.

Compact Turkey

The desired compactness, intended for small ovens as well as small families, comes from the fact that the Beltsville turkey does not have the gap that turkeys usually have between the rear of the breast bone and the legs.

The sweet potato that you will find when you go marketing is another product of the plant breeders' skill. Although the varieties on sale don't show the striking modifications of the diminutive turkey, they are improved types.

Improved Sweet Potato

One of the more common, called Orlis (a contraction of orange-little-stem), has been bred as a successor to older less satisfactory sweet potatoes. It is high in carotene content, a vitamin A element. This and other kinds which have been developed by the plant breeder assure the housewife that the potatoes she buys will not be stringy and that the flesh will be firm, moist and of an appetizing color.

Your succulent turkey with its attendant yams will no doubt be garnished in the traditional manner with cranberry sauce and chestnut stuffing. If these fall short of the plant breeders' highest expectation for them, it will not be for lack of trying.

It is a long uphill road from the drawing board to the festive board. Take chestnuts, for example.

Back around 1915 Department of Agriculture scientists started to introduce foreign chestnut trees into this country. Their object at the time was not better nuts, but better trees for timber. Our own trees produced an abundance of excellent chestnuts, which duly found their way on Thanksgiving Day into the very center of the center of interest. Into the turkey, that is.

Unfortunately, the introduced chestnut

trees, mostly from the Orient, brought with them the chestnut blight. American trees were fatally susceptible to the blight, and have been all but wiped out. The market chestnut is an import from Italy or Spain.

New Chestnut Types

In the intervening 40 years since the Oriental trees were first brought in, government scientists have been at work trying to develop a new chestnut to replace the native type. Only a few weeks ago, they announced that they have succeeded. Now that the three new types, with large, sweet nuts, are going out to tree nurseries, it can be predicted that within a span of years American-grown chestnuts may once more be available for their traditional task of stuffing the traditional bird.

Cranberries are another matter. Good domestic cranberries are to be had, and no apologies need be made for them. They too, like the sweet potatoes, have benefited by years of selective breeding for the most desirable characteristics. But the extra big berry with which Agriculture Department small-fruit breeders have been hoping to

tickle the American palate this year is not yet ready.

It looked for a while as though it might be available in time. The type berry has already been developed, but all the experimental work that goes into the launching of a new variety has not yet been completed. After certain trials and crosses now under way have been tallied, it is hoped that this large-size, high-gloss, high-yield berry may be ready to announce in the spring.

There are many things that Americans have to be thankful for this Thanksgiving. It might not be amiss, after the more reverential solemnities, to make a small secular bow in the direction of the scientists who are constantly at work improving the menu's classic ingredients.

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GEOLOGY

Crossing Nile by Dry Land Bridge Impossible Now

► NOT Biblical like crossing the Red Sea, but it is a fact that crossing the Nile on dry "land" was possible up until a few years ago. But the bridge, which was a mass of floating vegetation, was washed away in the floods of 1946.

About a year ago there were reports that



NEW CHESTNUT VARIETY—America's bid to replace her vanished native chestnut, new blight-resistant strains, will not be available in quantity to stuff many birds this year.