

Incredible, edible Easter eggs

**Gemperle Farms
near Hilmar produces
more than 1 million
eggs each day**

by Kimberly Horg
TURLOCK JOURNAL

Where does the Easter bunny get all his eggs? Probably from Gemperle Farms, the biggest egg farm in Northern California.

Gemperle Farms has approximately 1 million chickens which produce more than 1 million eggs a day. About four pounds of feed is required to produce a dozen eggs depending on the size of the bird.

Around this time of year, Gemperle Farms is really busy.

"Easter brings very high sales in eggs," said Steve Gemperle, co-owner of Gemperle Farms. "The farm plans to produce as many eggs as possible. If we can't produce the number of eggs that are needed to go to the stores, we purchase eggs from other farmers."

During Christmas and Thanksgiving, eggs sales are also high, because many seasonal dishes call for egg products, Gemperle said. This time of year, sales are driven by traditions of hunting and coloring the fragile orbs.

Gemperle has cage-free eggs where the birds are free to run around. The farm also features organic eggs, which requires the birds are fed certified organic ingredients.

Have you ever wondered why some eggs are brown while some are white? The answer is simpler than one might think. Brown eggs come from brown and red chickens.



TURLOCK JOURNAL PHOTO BY DIANE STEVENSON

Arturo Martinez, of Gemperle Eggs, loads cartons of eggs onto a pallet to prepare for shipping.

and white eggs come from white ones, Gemperle said.

"Some people think that brown eggs taste better. This might be because brown chickens eat more chicken

feed," Gemperle said.

The feed is balanced so that the hen gets the correct amount of protein, fat, carbohydrates, vitamins and min-

SEE EGGS, PAGE A11

Saturday, April 10, 2004 PAGE A11

EGGS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A14

erals. The eggs are laid by the chicken then collected automatically and a conveyer belt takes the eggs to the packaging area where they are placed in cartons after they are inspected. A computerized machine checks the eggs to see if any of them are cracked and a light is shined on each of them to see if the egg is good quality. The machine packages over a hundred thousand eggs an hour. They are then stored in a large room at 45 degree temperature until they are picked up by a truck and sent to a store. The eggs have a fast turnover time of two days. The eggs that go to the store are not touched by human hands, Gemperle said.

A trick in telling if an egg is fresh is to see if the egg has a thick upstanding white and a spherical yolk. During time, the egg white thins and the yolk is enlarged because of water that is passed from the white through the yolk membrane into the yolk, according to the American Egg Board.

Gemperle buys its chickens when the chicks are one day old. They are delivered from a hatchery to another farm. When they're ready, they are taken to a lay farm to lay eggs. When the hens get older, their egg quality declines, around 18 to 20 months of age.

Nobody is allowed in the area where the birds are kept because of health and safety reasons. In the past, people could tour the area but it is too big of a risk to do that now, he said. Gemperle is the second youngest out of seven kids. He has been working there for more than 15 years, not including the time he spent there as a child helping out his dad. Four members of the Gemperle family have taken over their father's business and the original founder of the company still works there part time. Gemperle Farms opened more than 50 years ago by a Swiss immigrant who always had an interest in eggs and poultry.

"My father, Ernie Gemperle, came to America from Switzerland in the 1950s and as a kid he always wanted to be a poultry farmer," Gemperle said.