



## Geese

Farm Diversification Information Service, Bendigo

*This Agriculture Note provides information on Geese and the industry.*

### Product

Geese are not commonly farmed in Victoria for meat, but there is some demand. In recent years they have become popular with small acreage farmers and organic farmers as “pest controllers” in vegetable and orchard crops. They eat snails, insects, weeds and grass around orchard trees. They also make effective watchdogs as they are very territorial and will hiss and attack intruders.

### Physical Requirements

Housing is not essential for geese, but some breeders prefer shedding their geese at night, particularly in the breeding season. Almost any sort of shed will do and old farm buildings are easily adapted. Geese are very hardy, generally disease free and can withstand cold better than most other breeds of poultry.

When housing is purpose built, an open fronted skillion roof shed is ample. A shed two and a half metres square and one and a half metres at the front will house eight breeding geese.

### Production

The main varieties of geese are Embden, Toulouse and Chinese. The Toulouse is the largest and can weigh up to 15 kilograms. They can lay up to 30 eggs in a season. Toulouse go broody but they are such poor sitters they are classed as non-sitters. Their grey pin feathers detract from the dressed carcass. Embden geese are German in origin, have a pure white plumage and mature to about 12 kilograms. They are slow to mature so they should be hatched early for the Christmas market. They are an ideal table bird as their skin is clear and white like a Muscovy drake.

Chinese geese come in two colours - white and brown. The white is bred mainly for meat and the brown is bred as a display bird. They are excellent layers, laying 100+ eggs per season, averaging 60-70. Young birds mature quickly and carry more condition at an earlier age than the heavier breeds.

Geese are generally selected for breeding purposes on general appearance. It is common for people to use their

whole flock for breeding, but it would be preferable to select primarily from the largest birds. First year birds can be mated as long as they are well grown. Usually one gander is mated to four to six females. Geese are nervous and temperamental, and prefer to be tended by one person. Flock mating is common, but pen mating of individuals allows for performance records to be kept. Good groups of breeders can be kept for five or six years.

Geese do go broody, but hatchability is notoriously poor. Eggs can be artificially incubated or a large hen can cover four or five eggs.

Processed feed is required for the rearing of young goslings and finishing older birds. They should also have access to grazing because geese are excellent converters of pasture. Free range geese can be run at densities up to seventy per hectare.

Young goslings are not difficult to rear as they only require heat for a fortnight. They can then be allowed to roam on grass.

Some breeders claim there is a market for geese all year round, but precise market information is difficult to obtain. They have an unusual flavour and flesh colour, and the only real marketing opportunity is Christmas Time.

Good quality geese will be best achieved by combining pasture grazing with strategic feed supplementation to maximise growth rates and meat quality.

### Marketing

The biggest barrier to geese production in Australia is the relationship of the laying season to the Christmas period. Most eggs are produced in the Spring, and hatched in November. Goslings are sold at four months of age. Birds marketed after Christmas generally sell for a loss. Intensive housing and artificial lighting may provide a means of achieving early season products.

### Financial aspects

The market for geese is so small and specialised that it needs a direct marketing approach. An individual breeder needs to make their own contacts with processors and /or wholesalers.

## Organisations & Contacts

Dandenong Poultry Market  
Mr Bill Duff  
1744 Melba Highway  
Dixons Creek  
Ph. 03 5965 2413

The Game Club of Victoria Inc.  
Barry Bilton: 03 5968 5420  
Michael Ryan: 03 9763 6103

For Equipment and Information -

Bellsouth  
8/5-7 Vesper Drive  
Narre Warren 3805  
Ph 03 9796 7044  
Fax 03 9796 7033

Greg Parkinson  
Senior Industry Officer Poultry  
Victorian Institute of Animal Science  
475/485 Mickleham Rd  
Attwood Vic 3049  
Ph. 03 9217 4200

Poultry Breeders Directory  
Grass Roots  
PO Box 117  
Seymour  
Ph. 03 5792 4000

## Small Poultry Processors -

Central Victorian Poultry Wholesalers  
19 Mayfair Park Estate  
Bendigo Vic 3550  
Ph. 03 5441 7573

Glenloch Game  
Mr Ian Milburn  
Ph. 03 54937383

Tennants Poultry  
Mr M Tennant  
Gold St  
Collingwood Vic 3066  
Ph. 03 9417 4893

## Acknowledgments

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