

# WEST TEXAS Country Trader



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The Slatonite  
The Tulia Herald

## Ratites becoming specialty at A&M vet school

By GORDON ZEIGLER  
AgReview Writer

COLLEGE STATION — A growing interest in ratites that matches the current boom in Texas ratite raising is evident at Texas A&M University's College of Veterinary Medicine.

In fact, A&M's zoological service comprised of four ratite specialists is fast becoming a "source of first resort" for ratite owners needing to solve health problems of the birds.

"We get at least ten calls a day about ratites," said Dr. David Phalen of the zoological medicine service.

In addition, the research effort at separate A&M facility is being boosted by the success of a unique ratite raising project on the 16-acre Wildlife and Exotic Animal Center, which now boasts 56 ratites including emus and ostriches on premises.

"There is no other university in the U.S. with as many ratites," commented Dr. Alice Blue-McClendon, a D.V.M., PhD candidate and researcher at the WEAC.

"The only other exception might be the University of California at Davis which has more different types," she said of current programs around the country.

Another feature that makes the A&M center at the vet school so unique is that it is cashing in on the high demand, and high



A&M is among several U.S. schools breaking new ground in ratite research.

price for chicks to help further its own programs. By selling part of the hatch, the center gains funds to sustain the research effort, Dr. Blue-McClendon said.

Phalen predicts that if ratites make it to a commercial market scenario, the research

being done on the birds will become even more important.

"Before the ratites can be sold for meat, the USDA must know things like 'How long after a certain injection can they be consumed?' All those things are known for

beef or sheep, but it has not been investigated at all in ratites," Phalen said.

Phalen said the American Ostrich Association has been especially well organized in efforts to stimulate a market for the animals.

"If anything will make this market take off, the American Ostrich Association will have be helping," he said.

Dr. Blue-McClendon said it is her personal opinion that ratites will gain their place one day as a consumable meat product.

"I think with ostrich that they are a viable livestock," she said. "They are extremely efficient utilizers of space."

She said that the current breeder market reflects a time of "very skewed" prices, but she said there is a belief that potential is there for commercial success if prices come down.

"Assuming a slaughter market, if a single hen produces 20 chicks surviving to one year of age, then the value of them at that time could be around \$450 to \$500 each, figuring the value of meat and hide, with a minimal value of feathers," she said. "If you got 20 chicks from one hen, and have that kind of value from a 12-month-old chick, that's \$10,000 from one bird."

A mother cow would have to produce a

See A&M, Page 4



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The Rough Riders Band of Nazareth and the Smo-

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A 2,400-sq. ft. dance floor will be in the park, along with concession stands.

The German Festival will include an arts and crafts show at 10 a.m. in the school cafeteria; a German sausage meal from 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. in the Community Hall; and raffles, children's barrel train and tractor pull, and other games.

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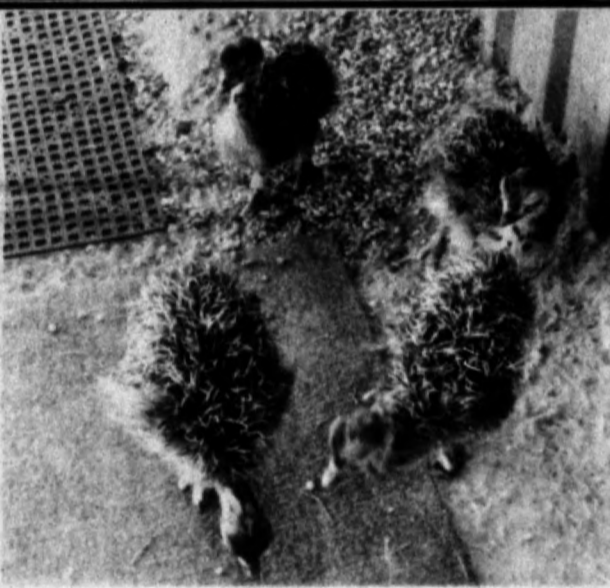
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What began as a hobby for the retired couple is now a full time business. The Tates have four grown pair of full blood "blues". "I treat 'em just like babies," Jean says, referring to raising chicks... "Sometimes they'll get colic and cry. I'll take them in the house, give them some medicine and calm them down 'till they quit crying," she explains. Looking over the Tate's stock, all that tender loving care seems to make for healthy ostriches.

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**USDA, from Pg 7**

production begins between 18 months and 3 years of age, and birds are not usually slaughtered before reaching 18 months of age.

Most birds have thus far been raised for breeding purposes, and their prices are high, reflecting this use and, in some cases, yielding substantial profits to owners. An important question for current and potential bird owners is at what point the number of birds will be large enough that their price becomes tied to the value of the products these birds yield.

Domestic production is the primary source of ratites. South Africa, the only country which ever exported substantial numbers of ostriches, has prohibited the export of ostriches or ostrich eggs since 1959. And while the U.S. has allowed the import of ratites since 1990, quarantines are required. Although eggs can also be imported from approved overseas farms, hatchability has been low.

Ostrich farming has largely been a speculative venture for the last 100 years. In the late 1800's, wild flocks in South Africa were hunted nearly to extinction, due to the popularity of ostrich feathers in European and American fashion. By the end of the 19th century, ostrich farms were established in northern and southern Africa, Australia, southern Europe, and the U.S. to supply this fashion item.

Ostriches were introduced into the U.S. in 1882. Numerous ostrich farms were started in the late 1800's and early 1900's, mostly in Arizona and California. The number of birds in the U.S. peaked in 1914. South Africa exported a record 1 million pounds of feathers in 1913-14, from about 1 million birds on 1,300 farms. There were an additional 20,000 birds in the Northern Hemisphere.

However, the demand for feathers plummeted when World War I began. Ostrich farming became primarily a novelty in South Africa, the U.S., and a few other countries.

The number of South African farms dropped to 52 by 1945, and annual feather exports by South Africa dropped to 3,000 pounds by the 1960's. In the U.S., bird numbers dropped to as few as 200-300 by 1920.

Beginning about 1960, South Africa's industry started to expand again due to increased world demand for ostrich leather. It has now revived to a profitable level, with 450 farms and around 225,000 birds. These farms supply meat, leather, and feathers to domestic and foreign markets. In addition, some ostriches provide tourist attractions.

In the U.S., the ostrich industry began to expand again around 1985. Currently, there are 40,000-60,000 ostriches in the U.S., with about 4,000-5,000 established breeder birds. Most ostrich farms are located in Texas and California, but there is at least one farm in every state. Estimates of emu numbers in the U.S. range from 75,000 to 100,000 on 5,000 farms, located mostly in Texas.

**High Prices Reflect Breeding Value**

Recent trade articles have stressed the profitability of ostrich and emu farming in the U.S., along with claims of the health and nutritional benefits of the meat. Breeding pairs have reportedly sold for \$50,000 or more during the past year. Breeding pairs typically lay 50 to 60 eggs a year, and over half of them will likely hatch, resulting in about 30 birds per pair, each bird valued at \$7,500.

These prices reflect breeding value and are much higher than the value of the meat and other products from the bird. A Pennsylvania State University study found that at these prices, producers can claim a \$3,300 profit if a male and a female are sold as a breeding pair, but could realize a \$16,000 loss if they are sold for slaughter.

The ostrich and emu industries are now in the breeder phase of development, with primary atten-

tion focused on expanding the number of birds to a level which would eventually support commercial production. In this phase, the price paid for birds reflects expectations of continued high prices based on the sale for breeding stock rather than for value of meat, hides, feathers, or oil, estimated to be about \$1,000 per ostrich. Consequently, only cull birds are generally slaughtered, providing a very small supply of salable products.

It is likely that at some point a market will develop for ratite products which will be large enough to support commercial slaughter of adult birds. How large an industry could be supported can only be conjectured at this time.

As more producers enter the breeding stock business, prices are driven up. But at some point, when a sufficiently large number of breeding animals is developed or new investors are no longer available, breeding stock prices will decrease. Prices should eventually drop to the level reflecting the slaughter value of the animal.

The large birds are currently so valuable that some have been

stolen. As such, it is fairly common to insure them against theft and death. The annual insurance premium for an ostrich may be 10-12 percent of its value, driving up the cost of production.

**Ratites Provide Feathers, Hides, & Meat...**

Although ratites are currently used mostly for breeding stock in the U.S. they can provide feathers, hides, and meat as well. Emus also produce an oil that is used for medical and cosmetic purposes.

Feathers were an important ostrich product many years ago for fashion and ornamentation, and they are currently being used in the electronics manufacturing process (since they are static free). An ostrich produces about 1.25 pounds of plumes every year, and about 24 pounds of feathers when slaughtered.

The current supply of feathers has a market. Feathers have been sold to designers for as much as \$150 per pound. Wing, tail, and back feathers, and those on the chest, can be used for feather capes. Emu feathers are somewhat less valuable than ostrich feathers, and ostrich and emu feathers are

currently worth less than hides.

Ostrich hides are highly prized for making cowboy boots. The leather is unique, covered with bumps from the quills, and is reportedly 3-5 times more durable than cowhide. It can also be used for briefcases, handbags, and many other luxury and high-fashion items with high retail prices.

Each bird may provide 12-16 square feet of hide, selling for \$400-\$600 in the U.S. However, prices in the international market have been reported much lower, partially because of trade barriers. At least one industry source estimates that as more ostrich hides become available, prices in the U.S. may drop to \$200 or less per hide. Emu hides have uses similar to those of ostrich hides.

The fat from an emu's back can be reduced to an oil which currently sells for \$12-\$20 per ounce. The oil purportedly treats a variety of conditions from arthritis to burns, and is also used in cosmetics. An adult emu can yield 5-6 ounces of fat at slaughter.



Ostrich is being raised on a New Mexico ranch.

**A&M, from Page 1**

\$10,000 calf to equal that, she added.

Through the work being done at A&M, the vet school's ratite specialists are beginning to serve as a real lifeline to the ostrich raiser whose birds are sick.

So, when an ostrich or an emu is sick, or chicks' mortality rates are climbing dangerously on a ratite farm, calls come in to the on call veterinarians like Dr. David Phalen.

"At least 50 percent of our time is spent looking at ratites," said the zoological service specialist. "We get on the average of six to eight bird cases a week."

Besides their reputation for helping cure the birds, A&M's Zoological Medicine's "ratite emergency room" attracts from as few as eight to as many as a dozen calls a day — all types, ranging from emergencies to simple inquiries from bird owners or the news media.

These calls come from all over the United States, Phalen said.

Phalen characterized the distribution of the exotic birds around the Lone Star State.

"We have a lot of emus in East Texas, and we have a lot of ostriches pretty much all over," he said. "They are especially common in Central and West Texas. So far, we see the fewest numbers of Rheas, compared to the others."

In a typical week, the A&M vets might work

with farms as big as 100-bird ranches. They deal with situations like chicks in the hospital with a need to diagnose and treat the malady.

Much of the work involves diagnosing diseases.

A&M's role in ratite care has grown enormously over the past couple of years, Phalen says.

"We started out with almost nothing," he said.

He admits that veterinarians are a long way from building a complete body of knowledge so far as infectious diseases and nutrition needs of the birds.

It is Phalen, who is studying normal blood parameters of chicks, and his many colleagues at A&M and elsewhere who are breaking new ground for the industry.

Dr. Blue-McClendon's interest has been in the area of ostrich reproduction and physiology, and in studying nutrition, growth rates and feed conversion, along with skeletal development.

Feed conversion theories — some claiming dramatically high rates in ratites versus beef — are yet to be corroborated by hard scientific facts, but researchers are working on that issue.

Studies even more vital to the industry at present are the ones delving into the cause of chick mortality.

Other areas getting attention, Phalen said, include yolk sack

absorption.

So far, programs at A&M have been underwritten by the American Ostrich Association and other industry groups. Very minimal funding has come from donations, however. Many birds at the wildlife center have been loaned, and others donated, by private breeders.

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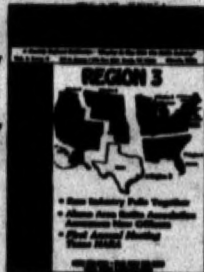
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# Texas ratite paper is world's largest

**BOWIE** — To go along with Texas' claim to be one of the major ostrich ranching states in the nation, this North Texas town also boasts that it is the home of the largest publication in the world dealing with the Ratite industry.

The Ratite Marketplace, owned by Judy and Lynn Morgan and edited by Joe Haid, is only four years old and is published every two weeks. It hits 13,000 subscribers around the world and its voluminous issues top 300 pages in size.



In its four year history, the publication has seen its size and circulation grow way beyond its publishers' expectations. Twice a week, the newspaper is circulated to 13,000 subscribers in the U.S., Canada, Europe and elsewhere. It now has separate editions targeted to five different regions of the country.

"We are the largest in the world," explained Mrs. Morgan.

The publication was launched after a local ostrich rancher suggested there was a need for such a publication to serve the industry.

Since Texas is said to have more ostrich ranches than any other state, locating an industry publication such as Ratite Marketplace here made a lot of sense.

Giving Texas even more credibility as a leader was the establishment by The American Ostrich Association of its headquarters in Fort Worth. The National Emu Association has since located its offices in Dallas.

The Morgans, then publishing the Montague County Shopper, decided to take the plunge and entered the industry with an initial 16-page publication. After growing steadily, it now is devoted to thousands of inches of advertising plus informative articles concerning all aspects of the exotic bird and animal industry.

"Randy Reeves, a local ostrich raiser and owner of Breezy Hill ostrich meat company, was the instigator," explained Mrs. Morgan. "He just thought there was a need for a more frequently published periodical pertaining to ostrich raisers."

The publication has widened its appeal somewhat since its inception.

Now, it focuses on ostriches as well as emus and rheas (all members of the same Ratite family), plus it has expanded to exotic animals including llamas. In today's market, ostrich raisers are diversifying into other animals.

Many advertisements help link buyers and sellers of the birds.

"Many of our ranchers are raising both Ratites and exotics," explained the publisher.

The latest rage in exotic animals is raising hedgehogs, and the Ratite Marketplace recently published a separate issue devoted strictly to the hedgehog market, and it totaled more than 60 pages.

"Right now, the big thing is exotic pets," Ms. Morgan explained. "The hedgehog is getting hot . . . and others like the sugar glider, bush babies and wallabies. There is also big interest in miniature donkeys, zebras, pot-bellied pigs and llamas."

Advertisements in the Marketplace range from specialty services like ostrich hauling to sale of equipment like incubators, hatches, legbands, identification microchips.

"The list goes on and on," explains Mrs. Morgan. "Mainly, the ostrich market is a breeders market right now. The advertisers are appealing to that."

To stay tuned into the industry, the Morgans take their publication on the road to trade shows. They attended the annual American Ostrich Association Convention in late February in San Diego, an event that drew more than 2,000 convention-goers and more than 200 exhibitors.

This year's focus was a continued emphasis on all facets of production of chicks for the breeding market.

"Their ultimate goal is the slaughter mar-

ket, but until enough birds are available, that is not going to happen for several years down the line," Mrs. Morgan explained.

The Ratite Marketplace will also attend the convention of the American Emu Association in Nashville in early August.

Emus, a cousin of the ostrich, are becoming more popular. There is currently a growing demand from the cosmetic industry for U.S. birds to provide a sought-after oil produced by a oil gland. American growers would ultimately compete with Australia,

which has a well developed ostrich and emu industry.

A second major specialty publication of the Bowie firm is the Antique Trader.

Subscriptions to Ratite Marketplace are available for \$30 per year for 26 issues in the continental United States. The publication's phone number is 1-800-972-7730. They accept both Visa and Mastercard. Mailing address is PO Box 1613, Bowie, TX, 76230.

Insurance available for small business

## OSTRICH, from Pg 7

tion of ostrich and ostrich products, and information and referral services for breeders and related operations. The AOA also supports research into ostrich breeding and raising, the benefits of ostrich products and potential markets for ostrich through the American Ostrich Foundation.

From a membership of 400 in 1988, The American Ostrich Association has grown to nearly 3,000 members. AOA members are located from coast to coast and range from owners and managers of traditional livestock ranches to lawyers, doctors and other professionals seeking entry into this exciting new industry.

The association's professional staff is led by Executive Director Chuck Ball, who came to the AOA in October 1993. Ball brings a background in the beef cattle and other traditional livestock industries to the task of developing the U.S. ostrich industry.

AOA policy and budgets are guided by 16 voting members of the board of directors.

The American Ostrich Association was founded in 1987. The association holds two major meetings per year. OstrichFest, the AOA's annual convention, is held in February. The AOA Mid-Year Meeting is held in June.

### THE ASSOCIATION:

The American Ostrich Association offices are at 3840 Hulen St., Suite 210,

Fort Worth, Texas 76107. The association can be reached at (817) 731-8597 or via FAX at 731-8446.

The American ostrich industry is relatively new compared to that of South Africa, where ostrich have been raised and slaughtered commercially for a century. The ostrich is the center of a multimillion-dollar industry in South Africa.

Ostrich breeding was established in the U.S. in the 1980s. Currently, the U.S. is home to a breeder market, in which ostrich raisers sell their birds to others seeking breeding stock. A goal of the AOA is to prepare the domestic ostrich industry for transition to a slaughter market, in which birds would be processed at the age of 12 to 14 months for their meat, hide and feathers. The transition from breeder to slaughter market will take place over time as the U.S. ostrich population grows and markets for ostrich products expand.

### HISTORY OF INDUSTRY:

The ostrich has been raised commercially for more than a century, first for its feathers, now also for its hide and low-fat red meat.

Ostrich are considered ready for slaughter at the age of 12 to 14 months and generally will produce 75 pounds of meat, 14 square feet of hide and two pounds of feathers.

### MEAT VALUE:

The newest and most promising ostrich commodity is its meat. This low-fat red meat already is in demand in Europe and the Pacific Rim and finds a home on the

tables of some of the nation's finest restaurants. High in protein, ostrich meat is lower in fat than beef, chicken or turkey, yet is satisfying for red-meat lovers.

A promising alternative to beef for health-conscious Americans, ostrich meat has a flavor and texture similar to beef, about the same protein content of beef, but less than half the calories. Like beef, its red color is provided by iron content.

### HIDE:

The distinctive quill pattern and suppleness of ostrich hide make it a leather much in demand by western bootmakers, shoe manufacturers, and makers of wallets, belts, briefcases and other accessories.

### FEATHERS:

Ostrich were first raised for their feathers used either in fashion or for feather dusters, since ostrich feathers attract dust without generating static electricity. This unique quality now makes the feathers useful in a variety of contemporary applications, ranging from auto manufacturing to the computer industry.

### A GREAT ALTERNATIVE:

The ostrich, *Struthio camelus*, is a member of the ratite family of flightless birds. It is indigenous to Africa, where the ostrich has been raised commercially for more than 100 years.

The ostrich grows to a height of seven to eight feet and can weigh more than 400 pounds. It is highly adaptable, requiring less acreage than other livestock and relatively modest amounts of food and water.

its natural habitat is, after all, the African desert.

There are several subspecies and varieties of ostrich, North African and East African or Masal Ostrich, also known as "red-necks," are rare in the United States outside of zoos. The bird is named for the reddish tint of the skin of its neck and legs. The red-neck ostrich also is distinguished by its bald or partially bald head.

The Somali and South African subspecies are known as "blueneck" ostrich, due to the blue cast of skin on the neck and legs. These ostrich also are rarely found in the U.S.

The domestic ostrich, known in the U.S. as the "African Black," is a hybrid of the redneck and blueneck ostrich. Originally bred in South Africa, the African Black ostrich is known for its feather quality. It is the smaller of the three subspecies.

Which type of ostrich is best? That depends on the type of products that the breeder wants to produce. Experts recommend selecting birds that can deliver a high-quality product, regardless of their type.

### WHY RAISE THEM?

Ostrich were first raised for their feathers, and contemporary markets have developed for its hide and low-fat red meat.

### DOMESTICATION:

The ostrich was first domesticated in South Africa in the mid-19th century. Its first commercial product was its feathers, used in fashion and costuming, as well as for feather dusters. After

World War II, ostrich leather and meat became viable commodities. A cooperative marketing system for South African producers formed in 1959, and that nation controlled the market for ostrich products until recently. Ostrich breeding nested in the United States in the early 1980s. The American Ostrich Association, formed in 1987 to support this new U.S. industry, has grown to a professional association with nearly 3,000 members.

### OSTRICH INDUSTRY:

Members of the American Ostrich Association are located from coast to coast, breeding their birds on farms and ranches from California to Florida. South Africa currently produces most of the world's ostrich.

Approximately 150,000 birds per year are processed in South Africa as part of a multimillion-dollar industry. Ostrich also are raised commercially in Israel, Zimbabwe and East Africa.

### GETTING STARTED:

Ostrich may be purchased as proven breeding pairs, chicks or as eggs. Incubators are necessary for hatching ostrich eggs, as are pens for growing birds and adult ostrich.

Ostrich begin breeding at the age of two-and-one-half to three years, and pairs may breed for as long as 40 years. Breeding pairs will produce 30 to 100 eggs per year. Chicks hatch 42 days after incubation. About 10 inches in height when hatched, they grow approximately one foot per month.

(Courtesy the American Ostrich Association.)

**EMU, from Pg 7**

ies in the country this year. "The whole key is diversification," says Ms. Tisdale, whose fellow members of the Texas Emu Association include a number of farm and ranch operators.

"We consider ourselves the new diversified ag industry," she said. "Nearly anyone can raise them. Put them on small plot of land. They can supplement existing cotton, cattle operations. It is something you can do and keep a fulltime job. But I also know those who quit a fulltime job to go into birds full time."me

"The hail may come, the winds may blow and the rain may not fall, but you can still raise these birds," she says.

Tisdale got into the Emu business after working in the retail industry at a South Plains Mall outlet for several years.

A director of the Texas Emu Association, she is currently active in efforts to have Texas Tech University study the market potential for emu. She operates WestTex Ratite ranch as well as Kalaya [Aborigine for Emu] Enterprises, which markets emu based products.

She believes Texas is a logical place to concentrate the industry. Of the 4,500 members of the national emu association, half are located in Texas.

The Lubbock business woman also pushes the potential for selling emu meat.

"Everyone can benefit from a heart healthy red meat low in cholesterol, calories and fat," she says.

She cites the benefits of subcutaneous fat from the back of the emu, which is used as a skin moisturizer.

Other Texans now pushing the emu include Ardell Nelson, a San Antonio businessman who has store devoted almost solely to emu products — jackets to boots and leather goods.

Tisdale herself is involved in emu breeding and sales, the marketing of her own line of emu oil cosmetics and is active in boosting her industry.

"I've been doing this a little over four years," she explained. You have to understand, I have no background in agriculture."

Currently working on a master's degree at Texas Tech in counseling, she says she got interested in the Emu because of its many market potential that weren't being developed.

Her own interest in getting involved in developing emu markets first hand led her to introduce a new cosmetic product whose ingredients include emu oil.

The result of a product put together in cooperation with a Lubbock dermatologist, Alexander Zemtsov, is a product called "Beauty Skin by Alexander."

There are several distributors selling it across the United States, plus it is available Caprock Pharmacy at 50th and Boston in Lubbock. She hopes to break into markets like Nieman Marcus, a store which is handling other emu products, she said.

"Our particular product has no competition," she

said. "It is the only one that combines emu oil, which is a deep penetrating lipid with the benefits of alpha hydroxyl acid — a natural chemical made from natural acids."

"Everyone that has used the product just loves it," says Ms. Tisdale. "They report significant improvement of appearance and texture of the skin. Ours is the only dermatologically-formulated and tested and approved product on the market."

Operator of WestTex Ratite Ranch, Ms. Tisdale has been impressed with the profit potential of the bird breeding business.

"I know several breeders who have raised cotton for 40 to 50 years and will tell you right off the bat they make more with birds than they can with cotton," she said. "I am not slamming cotton, it is the basis of our existence out here, but this is something you can supplement with, look forward to the future."

What has attracted many is the small number of acres needed to raise emus.

Tisdale notes that most raisers she knows are in it for the long haul, not as a

novelty item.

Ms. Tisdale is a member of the board of directors of Zone 6 of the Texas Emu Association, which includes about 150 members concentrated in the Lubbock area or spreading out from there to the New Mexico and

Oklahoma borders and east to Wichita Falls.

Its northern region meets regularly in the Sunray/Dumas area. The Lubbock region meets monthly. Darlee Foster of Lockney is the current zone vice president.

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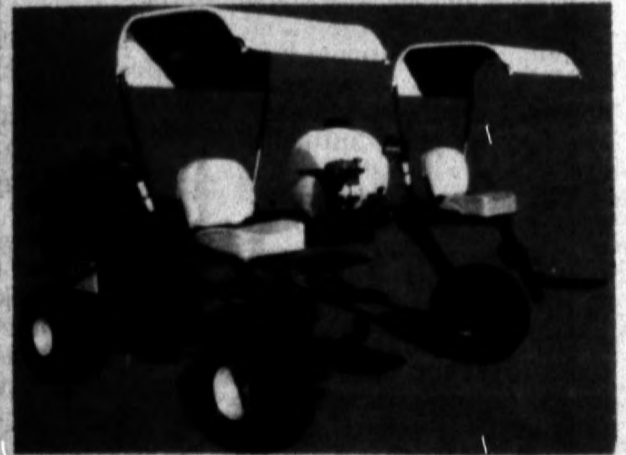
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# AgReview



**Try it, you'll like it!**

## Ostrich raisers treat Amarilloans to free ostrich steak-on-a-stick

**AMARILLO** — Two weekends ago, the Southwest Ostrich Breeders Association made history by serving up ostrich steaks to the public.

Anyone wishing to try them did at the first ever free public feed to acquaint Amarillo residents and others to the first ever free public ostrich steak dinner.



**IT'S OSTRICH!** — Palate pleasing ostrich is served in Amarillo.

"This is the first time we have offered this free to general public," explained Teri Roberts, wife of SWOB. A vice president Terry Roberts.

Doing the barbecuing up right was L.E. Owen of Red Creek Marinade who served up the meat from an open smoker. In addition, Southwest Ostrich Breeders Association have booths, arts and crafts items.

The purpose of the event was simple — simply pushing the taste of ostrich and its qualities as a lean, edible meat.

"We want the people to know what we are about," Mrs. Roberts said. "People don't understand ostrich is red meat, like beef. We want to get a taste out to them, let them know that is what this industry is about."

She said breeders want the public to see that their industry is not about making a big buck in a hurry, it is slaughter market. We want to get this meat out to the people, and get the people interested.

"Ostrich raising, it's not a scam, a pyramid money making scheme," claims Mrs. Roberts. "everything on a bird is marketable — the leather, it has an oil, the meat, the feathers."

She claims the meat is healthier than most any meats. On a weight gain ratio it is one pound of feed to three pounds of gain on an ostrich, compared to beef, which has only a one to one weight gain ratio.

Meat served Saturday was all donated by breeders in the Panhandle area — all quite busy right now in the middle of March through October laying season.

This big feed is the second big function of the year for the SWOB, organized several years ago to serve the needs of breeders in the Texas, New Mexico and Oklahoma area. Estimated membership in SWOBA is just over 220 at this time. Officers are Kathy Holland of Truscott; Roberts; Jane Jacobs of Pampa, secretary; and Fran Duncan of Gruver, treasurer.

Saturday's event follows one of the first tastings in the Panhandle in the fall of 1993, in Canyon, called "one whale of a turnout."

Ostriches have become an important industry in the Panhandle. At the present time, many of the new chicks are going east. Earlier in the industry's history in the area the birds were being shipped mainly to the west.

"Now we are spreading out in all directions," she said. "Someone's selling birds every day."

## Ostrich Capital

**Texas leads nation in sheer number of birds being produced**

**F**ORT WORTH — Texas is home of the American Ostrich Association, which provides leadership for the American ostrich industry and is laying a foundation for its future in the Lone Star State and elsewhere.

And it just so happens that a big portion of the ostrich breeding activity in the United States at this time is centered in the Texas-Oklahoma-New Mexico area, hence the reason for location of the headquarters in this Texas ranching center.

The association supports the ostrich industry through work with government agencies and the media, promotion.

See **OSTRICH**, Page 5

## South Plains developing as prime hub of emu raising

**L**UBBOCK — Emu raisers like Carrie J. Tisdale of Lubbock are talking up their industry as one of the keys to future diversification of South Plains agriculture.

She likes to talk about big dreams for the future, like location of value-added processing industries in the West Texas area, dedicated to the processing of emu and ostrich leather, extraction of oils for cosmetics and other allied industries.

There has been talk of building tanneries in West Texas in the event this becomes a hub of emu production.

Dr. Ginger Eberspacher at Texas Tech's Leather Institute is one of the researchers looking into the potential for emu leather goods. Members of the emu organizations have agreed to donate birds to be used in the study.

But all these dreams will depend on expansion of emu growing, and continued research by entities like Texas Tech, which is launching one of the first emu marketing studies.

See **EMU**, Page 6



Texas Panhandle ostrich chicks . . . Woody Williams/Canyon News

## USDA recognizes exotics' impact

By **GORDON ZEIGLER**  
AgReview Writer

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** — In what some industry boosters say was bound to occur sooner or later, the ostrich/emu/rhea industry gained the attention of USDA in a big way in June.

That's because the nation's ag department featured exotics in their "Commodity Spotlight" in the current issue of the USDA's *Agricultural Outlook Report*.

**Outlook Report.**

In its attempt to size up the industry, the USDA did a lengthy piece, which follows in its entirety:

The "Exotic" Sector: Ostriches & Emus. Raising flightless birds that are not native to the U.S. is still considered an exotic agricultural enterprise in this country. But the raising of these animals for feathers, hides (leather), and meat is growing.

Ratites are flightless birds having a

flat breastbone instead of the keel-like ones common to most flying birds. Two ratites of particular importance in the U.S. are ostriches and emus. Ostriches, native to South Africa, grow to 7 or 8 feet tall, and weigh as much as 450 pounds. Emus, the Australian cousins of the ostrich, are slightly smaller than ostriches, but still grow to 56 feet and weigh 110-130 pounds. These two ratites' egg production

See **USDA**, Page 4

# Fritch ostrich raiser tells how he got started

By **SETH SCHEIDER**  
Guest Columnist

**QUESTION:** What do you do with an ostrich?  
**ANSWER:** Ride him down to the mail box and impress all the neighbors!

After moving to the country in the mid-1980s and setting up housekeeping, we began looking for a way to make our land pay for itself. We looked at conventional livestock such as swine, goats, sheep and cattle. With 10 acres of land available, these options were just not practical.

We began studying exotic livestock such as llamas, ostrich, emu and pot bellied pigs. Every exotic animal we looked into struck out, except for the ostrich. Given the potential production numbers from a producing female, this seemed a good way for us to go, given the small amount of land we had to work with. We purchased two pair of chicks in 1988, and raised these birds to breeding age, when we began selling chicks. We let the birds pay for our facilities as we built our

herd and we began taking profit in the third year.

Sexually mature females lay anywhere from three to 100 eggs per year and once again breeding tells. Most females start laying between their second and third year. A single male can cover multiple hens, but most folks just run pairs or trios.

Most ostrich raisers feed their birds a pelleted ration prepared by a growing number of feed companies. The protein in these feeds vary between 18-26 percent. Another interesting fact is that these birds are grazers and will basically eat anything green. Some tales out of Africa relate that ostrich there are grazed on alfalfa patches.

There are many ways for folks to get started in the ostrich industry. The least expensive is to purchase chicks at three to six months of age or older birds who will become breeders sooner, but the cost will be higher. The third alternative is to buy proven breeders which is the most expensive option of all,

but you will have the quickest return on your investment. There are pro's and con's to take into consideration and that will depend upon an individual's situation.

Starting with chicks was the way to go for us, because when we started, I had never seen a real live ostrich and had no experience with them. Another problem was lack of information available on ostrich. Today, thankfully, that is a different story. There are publications which deal with ratite (flightless birds) management and husbandry techniques. Another good source of information is your local breeders association or your neighbor who is raising big birds.

One thing a lot of folks don't realize is that these birds are insurable. This means that it is possible to secure a loan for the purchase of these birds. The only catch is that you have to locate an understanding and progressive banker to do business with. Insurance will also let you sleep better at

night, knowing that if you do suffer a loss, you haven't thrown your investment out the window.

One thing my wife likes about the ostrich industry is that it lets her stay home and still contribute to the family income. Lots of gals; feed, water, collect eggs, incubate, and hatch chicks. In fact, most of us fellows, couldn't raise these birds without our better halves help. I know of one lady who was able to quit her city job and move back to the farm because she got "Ostrich Fever" and purchased big birds.

At this time we are selling into a breeders marketing and working toward a smooth transition to a production market. The meat is being marketed to various restaurants, such as the Huntington, located at the Galleria Mall in Dallas. There is enough demand for the meat that it is being imported from Africa, on ice, for an outfit in California. There are two production facilities in Texas that I know of, located in Floydada and Booker.

Only time will tell when the supply will meet demand, but I feel safe in saying it will be awhile yet.


The people who are raising ratite at this time are pioneers. Pioneers are in a new alternative agri-business industry. We are laying the groundwork for the future production market. Eventually, the breeders market we are now experiencing, will give way to the production market to provide an alternative low fat, low calorie, red meat. As an added bonus to the ostrich rancher, there is a ready market for the hides and feathers. One of the benefits of raising ostrich is the number of potential chicks out of

each laying pair and the feed to weight gain conversion. On growing chicks, it takes less than three pounds of feed to gain one pound of weight. In the production market this will be an important consideration.


There's good money to be made in the ostrich industry, whether in the breeders market or the production market. Take the time to learn the facts, because diversifying with big birds might just be the ticket for you! If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the Southwest Ostrich Breeders Association or myself at 806-273-7306.

(Seth Scheider is a potential chicks out of Fritch ostrich raiser.)

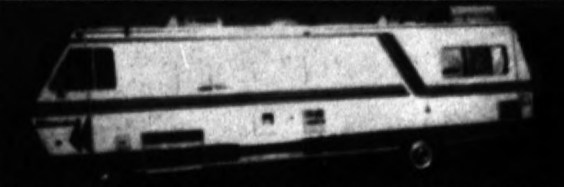
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# Ostrich 'barbecue' proves memorable for reporter

By **WOODY WILLIAMS**  
*The Canyon News*

We get phone calls requesting attendance at variety of functions some are "the usual"; others a little out of the ordinary.

This month, a call from the Dancing

Cowboy Ostrich Ranch fell in the later category.

A Sunday evening invitation only Ostrich barbecue is not the usual weekend activity in Canyon. However, the phrase "Free Food" always gets our complete attention...we

decided, "What the heck!"

Arriving at the ranch just as the thermometer hit an even 100 degrees, a friend who agreed to be our culinary guinea pig jumped out of the truck to unlock the gate, then stopped and pointed toward the lawn. It was our first surprise of the evening.

Two 6 - 7 month old Ostrich chicks were sprawled on a patch of grass in the cool splendor of rotating sprinklers. Our opinion of Ostrich intelligence jumped a notch or two.

Driving toward the smoke (always a sure gauge of where the barbecue action is) our truck was surrounded by a group (covey? gaggle? flock?) of Emu. These Emu were curious and walked right up to look us over from about 6 inches away. My opinion of Emu intelligence dropped a notch or two.

Arriving at the grill (and the cooler) we found L. E. New presiding as Head Cook for the southwest Ostrich Breeders Association. L. E. is a

local manufacturer of marinades and other good stuff to cook with, so he's no novice around a grill

The Association handed out free samples to the public at Old San Jacinto Days on 6th Ave. in Amarillo June 18 - 19. The Bell's (Bill and Donna) along with partners Terry and Terri Roberts offered the facilities at the Dancing Cowboy for L. E. and other interested participants

to use as a "dry run" for the event.

As the potato salad, beans and Ostrich steak disappeared, we began to lose interest in how Ratites might score on a IQ test. We began to focus on who might let us cut in line for seconds... or was it thirds?

The meat is red - not "dark" like Turkey, it's red - like beef. Ostrich tastes nothing at all like poultry. With marinade it reminded us of

venison. The non-marinated steak seemed like mild beef. Either way it was good.

As we stopped to lock the gate on our way out, we talked over the experience. We decided that a trip to Old San Jacinto Days for more free Ostrich steak would be in order. We also thought an Ostrich or two on the lawn, stretched out under the sprinklers on a hot Texas afternoon, made a pretty tasty picture.



Woody Williams/The Canyon News

## Ostrich marinade

An experienced cook plies his trade to ostrich steak.

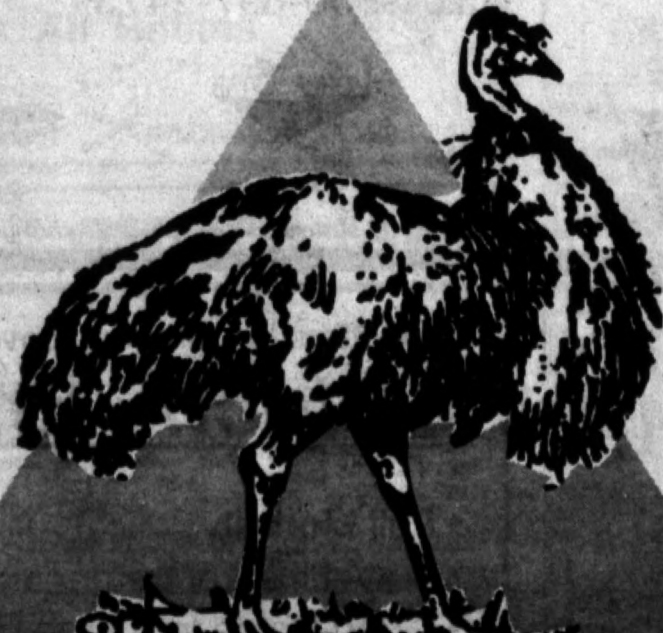


Woody Williams/The Canyon News

## Cool evening on the ranch

Ostrich watch curiously from pens on the Dancing Cowboy Ranch near Canyon.

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# Animal commission sets standards for ratites

Livestock health regulations were adopted for the ratite and equine industries at the April meeting in Austin of the 12 members of the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC).

Adopted were health regulations specifically for ratites, which include ostriches, emus, kiwis and rheas. They also made two changes to regulations for controlling equine infectious anemia, a disease that infects horses, zebras, donkeys, and other equine. The regulations will become effective June 10, 1994.

**Ratite Regulations**  
For nearly a year, the TAHC has worked with an industry committee to develop ratite health regulations, which include the following requirements: \* Ratites must have a certificate of veterinary inspection issued within 30 days prior to entering Texas from any state, territory, foreign country or USDA-licensed quarantine facility. The birds must also have a TAHC entry permit, issued within 15 days prior to arrival. \* Before entering, each bird must be implanted with a permanent electronic identification device called a microchip. Information about where the identifi-

cation device was implanted in the bird, and the individually coded number and device's brand name must be recorded on the health certificate. \* Birds or hatching eggs are to come from flocks with no history of Avian Influenza infection within the past six months.

(Avian Influenza is an infection that can cause a wide range of symptoms.)

Birds entering Texas are to have a test for Avian Influenza and Salmonella Pullorum-typhoid within 30 days prior to be performed in a state-approved diagnostic laboratory in the state of origin.

Birds having a positive blood test for Avian influenza may be admitted if the virus isolation test run on a "swab" sample is negative within 30 days prior to shipment.

These birds also will be quarantined upon arriving in Texas and will undergo a virus isolation retest.

Ratites destined for slaughter only may enter Texas with an entry permit, and a waybill or certificate of veterinary inspection. These birds do not have testing or permanent identification requirements. \* Ratites sold in

Texas through a public or private sale must have a certificate of veterinary inspection, complete with information about the required implanted electronic identification device. The veterinarian must declare the ratites are free of external parasites.

add one/ TAHC Regulations and that the birds have no clinical evidence of contagious or communicable disease. Also, the inspecting veterinarian must state that he or she has no personal knowledge that the birds have been exposed to a contagious or communicable disease. \* Records concerning the microchip number and related information, and the required test results must be maintained for three years by the market, if the ratite is sold through a public sale; or by the buyer and seller, if the animal is acquired through a private treaty.

**Equine Infectious Anemia**  
For the past year, the TAHC has surveyed equine owners, held hearings and appointed an industry advisory committee to write acceptable, yet effective and scientifically based regulations for control-

ling the spread of equine infectious anemia (EIA). This is an incurable disease in which infected equine may exhibit no symptoms or develop severe anemia, bloating, depression, weight loss, and in some cases, may die. More than 4. diagnosed through blood tests in Texas each year. Most cases occur in East Texas, where there is a prevalence of biting

flies, vectors capable of transmitting the virus from infected to "clean" equine.

The TAHC adopted only a small section of the EIA rules at the April session as the commissioners and advisory committee continue to fine-tune language for the major portion of the regulations. The newly adopted language will allow new USDA-

approved testing technology to be used as it comes on the market.

This is in addition to the current tests—the agar gel immunodiffusion test (AGID), known as the Coggins' test, and the Competitive Enzyme-Linked Immunosorbent Assay (CELISA) test. The other change requires

See Animal, Pg 11

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# Ag data base serves nation's farmers

WASHINGTON (AP) —There now are more than 3 million citations of agricultural literature in a bibliographic database called AGRICOLA at the National Agricultural Library in Beltsville, Md., near Washington.

"This is a historic occasion for the library, since AGRICOLA is the backbone of NAL's collection of agricultural knowledge," Joseph H. Howard, director of the Agriculture Department facility, said in announcing the

recent milestone. "The more records we add to AGRICOLA, the better access people have to the collection."

Howard said AGRICOLA is the most complete listing of agricultural information available anywhere in the world, containing the bibliographic records of books, journal articles, monographs, theses, patents, software, audiovisual materials and technical reports relating to all aspects of agriculture.

Subjects covered include animal production, animal welfare, aquaculture, biotechnology, conservation, ecology, economics,

agricultural engineering, entomology, farm management, forestry, horticulture, hydrology, microbiology, nutrition and food science, plant science, rural sociology, soil science, veterinary medicine and wildlife protection.

The database includes materials in over 65 different languages from 130 countries. About 65 percent of the documents listed in AGRICOLA are in English.

The library's address is 10301 Baltimore Blvd., Beltsville, Md. 20705.

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**Animal, from Pg 10**  
the veterinarian or TAHC authorized personnel to submit a completed EIA test document, called a VS Form committee is to make recommendations later concerning permanently identifying EIA-tested equine, requirements for changing ownership or participating in events, and testing horses exposed to the disease.

Until further adoptions, current EIA testing regulations remain in effect. Out-of-state equine entering Texas must have had an EIA test within the past 12 months.

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# Writer pushes positive aspects of exotic bird raising

By **JOYCE PENN**  
Guest Columnist

## OSTRICH-OSTRICH-OSTRICH

Now that is an interesting word.

It nearly contains the word strike, and it does include the word rich. "O stric it rich".

Our creator put within each of us the desire and ability to do just that. Now each of us may have a different view of what rich is, but ask anyone in the OSTRICH business if they like what they do - and if they would do it again - and the answer would surely be yes, with the exception of old sore heads who haven't had a positive thought in years. However that spirit does not prevail in our industry.

The owning and rearing of these big birds has very quickly become one of the fastest growing agricultural businesses in the North American Continent. Ostrich are being successfully grown as far north as our Canadian neighbors. At this time virtually all over the world the ostrich has gained recognition and respect of folks with an enterprising spirit.

Ostrich are being successfully raised right beside cattle and goats; however, after researching and/or going into the

ostrich business, many cattle ranchers are coming to realize that the big bird has a greater potential than cattle. The following statistics are found in the "Ostrich Primer," a brochure which is published by the American Ostrich Association:

COW		OSTRICH	
Gestation/Incubation	280 days	48 days	
Offspring per year	1	20	
Feed conversion ratio:	5 to 1	2 to 1	
Days to slaughter from conception	645	407	
Pounds of meat	550	2,000	
Square feet of leather:	30	280	

These statistics represent very conservative figures for the ostrich. It is not unusual for one ostrich hen to lay 60 to 100+ eggs; therefore, it largely depends on each individual's success at hatching and rearing the young that determines each grower's income. This might be the appropriate time to add that the ostrich will never take the place of a good T-bone steak, or our breakfast bacon, or Thanksgiving turkey, nor will it try; however, the sausage is very good and one ostrich egg is equal to up to 24 chicken eggs. There is a lot of



Ostriches of South Africa roam the countryside.

good red meat on its way to our public meat counters from the ostrich. The meat is really delicious, has a flavor similar to that of beef, with just about the same protein content and probably about half the calories, it is widely enjoyed in European countries now and is gaining momentum among those who are health conscious because ostrich meat is low in cholesterol and fat. In the U.S. it is presently being served in many fine restaurants including The Huntington Restaurant at the Westin Hotel in Dallas.

All available birds are being purchased from several small slaughter businesses scattered around the country presently the ostrich is bringing \$4 to \$5 per

pound on foot.

The American Ostrich Association is the largest association of its kind in the world. In February of this year, at the semi-annual meeting ("OstrichFest") in San Diego, there were over 2,100 interested persons in attendance. At the "OstrichFest" it was announced that the actual membership had grown to over 3,000. Since there usually is just one membership per ranch, it is noteworthy that then probably represents around 6,000 active interested persons.

At the meeting Dr. Bud Allredge, a veterinarian and ostrich grower from Sweetwater, gave food for thought in his remarks as CEO for the American Ostrich Research Foundation.

He gave a staggering figure on the potential for ostrich as a meat source. He said, "that if ostrich were to garner only 1 percent of the domestic market for meat, the industry would be processing 80,000 birds per week and would require an estimated 160,000 breeding hens." There are really no accurate records of how many are owned in the U.S. at this time, but no where near that many.

Now let's get into the dollars and cents, along with some practical answers. At the time of this writing it is not cost effective to sell the yearlings for slaughter because there is still a strong breeders market. A pair of proven breeders should bring from \$35,000 up to \$70,000. The market for the chicks has not been strongly established for the 1994 season which gets into full swing in mid-summer to late fall, but the prices will range anywhere from \$4,500 to \$7,000 for a three-month-old pair of unrelated chicks. These prices are strictly set by the individual grower., usually by quality, quantity, supply and demand, the good old American way. As has already been mentioned each breeder hen can give you from 20 to 100

chicks depending on a lot of factors. In the breeders realm of the business there are operations as small as two acre plots, probably even smaller. The way one should get into the business is strictly an individual choice, depending on your space and experience. It is not a get rich quick sort of thing and if a person tries to sell you on the idea, go to talk to another person.

These birds are very adaptable to various climates. They are at home on a range so to speak. They are crazing animals and love a lot of space, so one day I believe it will be a common sight for large herds of ostrich to be seen all over the country. We will have to do away with the barbed wire and have a little taller fencing but there is no stopping us now, there are too many of us with the same vision. Raising them isn't for everyone but enjoying their fine by products will be for everyone. These birds can truly help to feed the world.

*(Joyce Penn is co-owner of Penn's Ostrich in Crane At the time of this writing, the author and her husband Kenneth Penn have been raising ostrich since 1988.)*



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