

Which comes first, the

BY KAY SNYDER



Photo: Iowa Poultry Association

For Iowa, the answer to the age-old question is BOTH! With nearly 59 million laying hens, producing approximately 16 billion eggs annually, Iowa far outpaces other states in both categories. Add to that the 12 million turkeys that are raised annually in Iowa, and you can see why Iowa is a poultry powerhouse. Another interesting fact is that Iowa's electric cooperatives contribute significantly to this industry domination, not only by powering farms and companies but also in recruiting and supporting existing poultry businesses and operations.

Thirty-five years ago, amid the farm crisis and major recession, Iowa electric cooperatives came together in the spirit of cooperation to develop the unified economic development organization, Iowa Area Development Group (IADG). At that time, Iowa ranked in the bottom 25 states for poultry production and produced only about 18 million eggs per year.

Industry research tapped to guide this economic development effort gave high priority to the value-added agriculture industry and identified access to raw materials for feed as a significant factor setting Iowa apart

from other states. Based on the reports, IADG and partners focused on growing Iowa's egg and poultry industry, as well as expanding the supply chain and processing facilities. Fast forward 35 years, and Iowa is the industry leader in poultry and egg production. IADG and Iowa's electric cooperatives remain active partners providing reliable electric power and supporting the farmers, suppliers and businesses that make up Iowa's value-added ecosystem. ⚡

Beyond production to processing, West Liberty Foods – Two decades of growth

In 1996, the Louis Rich turkey plant (owned by Kraft Foods) in West Liberty announced it was closing. Swiftly, 47 turkey growers formed the Iowa Turkey Growers Cooperative, purchased the plant from Kraft and named it West Liberty Foods (WLF). Though turkey prices were volatile for the first couple of years, a purchase agreement with Kraft helped keep the company in operation. In 2003, WLF purchased an Access Energy Cooperative speculative building and opened a further processing facility in Mount Pleasant, complete with the nation's first Clean Room Food Processing Systems. Two years later, they expanded and added a state-of-the-art quality assurance laboratory. Today, WLF has six locations in three states and employs over 2,900 people. In addition to Iowa plants in West Liberty, Sigourney and Mount Pleasant, WLF operates in Utah, Illinois and Arkansas. IADG honored WLF in 2000 with the Value-Added Agriculture Venture Award. ⚡

Hatcheries Feed Markets



Select Genetics Hatches Turkeys in Osceola

In 2011, Valley of the Moon, as part of Aviagen, built a state-of-the-art hatchery in Osceola. The 87,000-square-foot hatchery can set 50 million eggs per year and hatch about 800,000 turkeys per week. As a result of a 2018 merger, the company is now Select Genetics. The company continues to supply commercial turkey poults to the U.S. market. Clarke Electric Cooperative is the electric provider for Select Genetics and also nominated them for an Iowa Venture Award in 2011.



Hy-Line North America

In 2016, Hy-Line North America opened a 95,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art egg production facility – its largest hatchery – on a 25-acre site in the Wilton Industrial Park. Hy-Line North America delivers high-quality, day-old chicks to customers across the U.S. and British Columbia. The Wilton hatchery is capable of producing 150,000 chicks per day. Eastern Iowa Light & Power Cooperative serves the Wilton Industrial Park and nominated Hy-Line North America for a 2015 Iowa Venture Award. ⚡



chicken or the egg?



Photo: Iowa Poultry Association

Diversifying farm operations with a new opportunity

Four years ago, Costco announced it was investing \$400 million in a new poultry complex in Fremont, Nebraska, to supply its stores with chicken. The plant started operating in 2019, and an estimated 120 new broiler sites were needed to meet the demand for chickens. The barns need to be within a 100-mile radius of Fremont, making three Iowa counties eligible. Currently, about 10-15 percent of the farmers are in Iowa. Lincoln Premium Poultry provides the chicks, feed, technical expertise, veterinary services, base pay with a performance bonus and other support. For many, this offers an opportunity to diversify their operations, be a full-time farmer and not require off-farm employment.

Harrison County Rural Electric Cooperative spearheaded this western Iowa initiative, hosted several information meetings and now serves 52 chicken barns, with four more under construction. Each barn is 640 feet

by 63 feet, longer than two football fields. Additional barns in Iowa include four served by Western Iowa Power Cooperative and another four coming online soon.

Harrison County Farm Bureau President Mike Dickinson built four new broiler barns and saw this as the opportunity of a lifetime. Dickinson grew up on his family's farm. He knew he wanted to join the operation but also needed to support his family of five. He became a nurse, which provided him the opportunity to work three 12-hour shifts while earning a salary and benefits, leaving the other four days to support the farm. Today, Dickinson operates four broiler barns, raising 168,000 chickens at a time. He expects to raise six flocks per year. The houses remain vacant for two weeks between flocks to allow time for maintenance and prep work for the next flock. His father, David Dickinson, was a Harrison County REC board member for approximately 25 years. ⚡

COVID-19 unintended consequence

It turns out that in addition to toilet paper and hand sanitizer, people have also been panic-buying chickens. The Murray McMurray Hatchery of Webster City was featured in a *New York Times* article discussing that their inventory of chicks was completely sold out for several weeks in response to the coronavirus outbreak. Farm stores that carry chicks also report long lines of people who are hoping to buy chicks. Many are first-time owners, and their motivation is two-fold. Food security is one benefit. Many people feel that if they are going to be at home for several months, this can provide time to begin a new hobby and nurture the chicks as they grow. ⚡



IADG and member electric cooperatives promote Iowa at trade shows.

What is an Iowa Venture Award?

On behalf of its member utilities, IADG annually honors distinguished Iowa companies and entrepreneurs with the Iowa Venture Award. This award recognizes outstanding businesses for providing leadership, capital investment and employment opportunities for rural Iowa. ⚡

Crack open the benefits – May is National Egg Month

BY KAY SNYDER



As you reach for your next egg, pause for a moment and reflect on the importance of Iowa's egg industry. Iowa leads the nation in egg production, caring for nearly 59 million laying hens producing approximately 16 billion eggs. Iowa's egg farming families achieve this incredible level of production by being

committed to raising healthy flocks; producing safe, healthy, affordable eggs; and protecting the environment for future generations. In addition to producing more eggs than any other state, Iowa egg farmers process more eggs than any other state in the U.S., with the eggs being made into frozen, liquid, dried or specialty egg products. ⚡

Iowa's poultry and egg industry

Iowa ranks No. 1 in the nation for egg production, caring for nearly 59 million laying hens producing nearly 16 billion eggs per year, and No. 1 in egg processing.

- Iowa produces enough eggs to provide an egg-a-day for all Americans for 47 days.
- Iowa produces almost 1 out of every 6 eggs in the U.S.
- Iowa's chicken layers consume 55 million bushels of corn and 504,500 tons of soybean meal annually.
- Iowa "breaks" an estimated 42% of the eggs further processed in the U.S.
- Iowa's egg producers contribute about \$2.4 billion in total sales, some 8,825 jobs and nearly \$22.8 million in state tax revenues.
- One large egg is just 70 calories and provides six grams of protein and all nine essential amino acids. ⚡

Egg crystallization facility experiences growth

Nutriom is a growing, family-owned company from Washington state that invented a technique for drying eggs to keep their fresh flavor, nutrition and functionality. The Iowa Area Development Group made contact with the leaders of Nutriom at a trade show. Nutriom was planning to expand and an Iowa location would put them closer to a steady egg supply.

They began operation in a 29,000-square-foot existing building in Panora. The company has experienced steady growth and has completed the construction of a 9,000-square-foot pasteurizing facility, allowing for increased capacity and quality control. Guthrie County REC, Farmers Electric Cooperative in Greenfield, Central Iowa Power



Cooperative, Panora Communications Cooperative and Aureon were among seven organizations that supported this recent expansion through their respective Revolving Loan Funds.

Nutriom's product is called OvaEasy Egg Crystals. Through an innovative drying process, the egg maintains the flavor and functionality of the original egg product without adding chemicals,

preservatives or any other additives. They have been using their food dehydration technology since 2003 to produce unique egg products that solve otherwise serious logistic, shelf life or storage problems.

Nutriom was honored with a 2018 Iowa Venture Award. Nutriom is a customer of Panora Municipal Utilities, a wholesale electric customer of Guthrie County REC. ⚡

