MINNESOTA TURKEY

Gobbles

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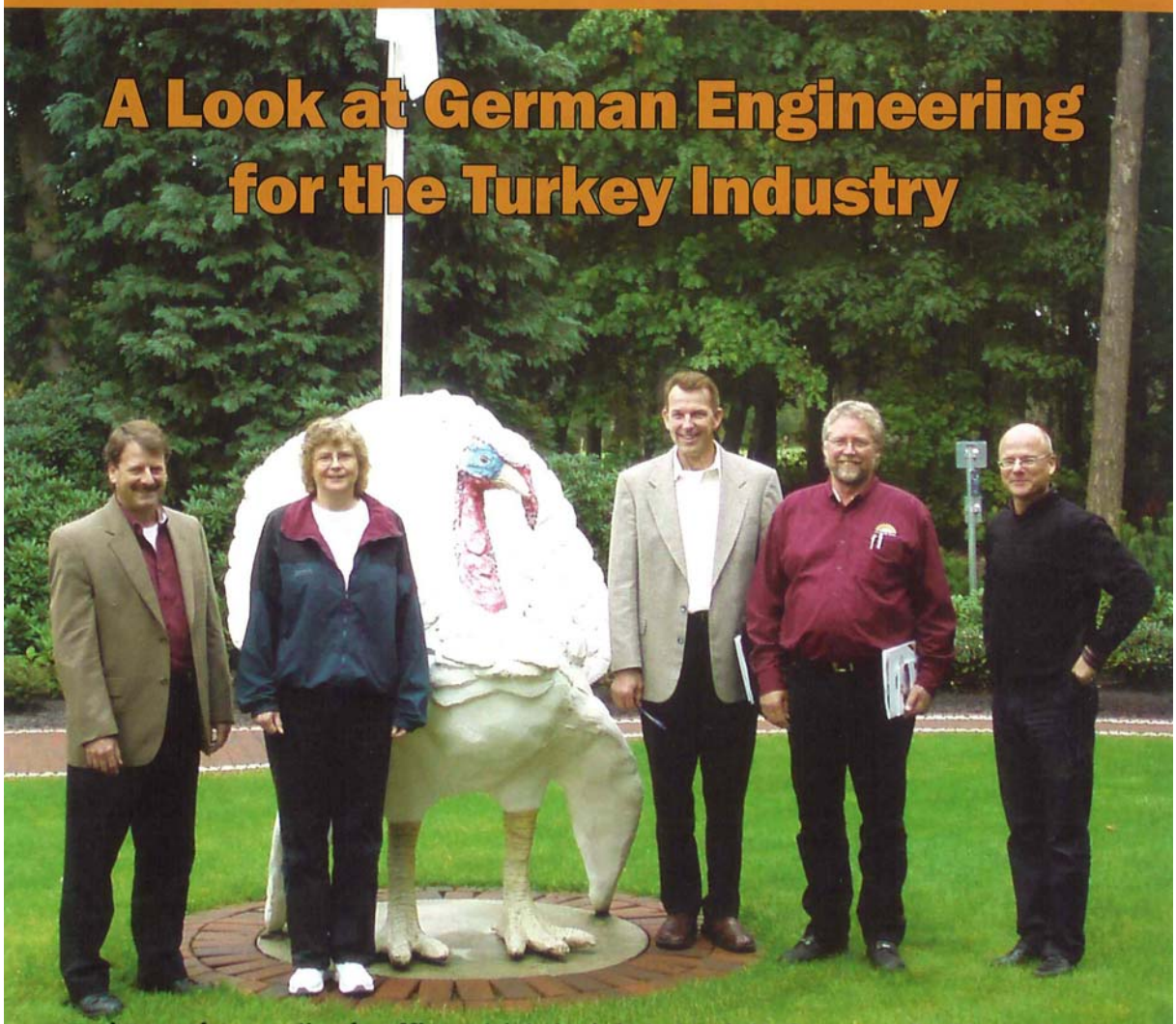
A Look at German Engineering for the Turkey Industry



A group of representives from Minnesota's turkey industry traveled to Germany earlier this month to tour several state-of-the-art turkey research facilities and farms. Pictured above, at Kartzfehn in Bösel, Germany, are MTGA-MTRPC Executive Director Steve Olson, Dr. Sally Noll of the University of Minnesota, MTGA-MTRPC Vice President Rahn Annis of Jennie-O Turkey Store, MTGA-MTRPC President Kim Gorans of Gorans Brothers and Dr. Hartmut Meyer of Kartzfehn. (Not pictured: MTGA Allied member Peter Gruhl of Hybrid Turkeys, who helped organize the trip and served as the "tour guide".)

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MTGA President's Corner

By
Kim Gorans
President

Earlier this month, I traveled to Germany with MTGA Vice President Rahn Annis, University of Minnesota's Dr. Sally Noll, Hybrid's Peter Gruhl, and MTGA Executive Director Steve Olson. The purpose of the trip was to tour a variety of state-of-the-art turkey research facilities in order to get a better sense of what we need to be thinking about when it comes to relocating the University of Minnesota's turkey research facilities, currently housed at UMore Park in Rosemount.

One of the initial observations I had was that everything in Europe is smaller ... smaller houses, smaller roads, smaller vehicles, smaller meal sizes, even the people look smaller. Whenever we had a cup of coffee, it was this tiny little cup that couldn't be more than 1-½ by 3 inches in diameter – quite a difference from the big travel mugs we walk around with in this country.

For all that is smaller, however, the turkeys themselves are bigger! Generally, they were 7-8 pounds heavier than ours at the same age (depending on the geographic area we're talking about) and the liveability was about 7 percent higher than ours. I have to tell you, that was definitely surprising to see.

Another surprise was the cost of feed per pound to raise these birds – while it was higher than in the U.S, it wasn't as high as I expected. After converting Euros to kilograms to cents/pound, I estimated that the cost in Europe was about 50 cents/pound versus about 40 cents/pound here. I would've guessed it would be double, but when I factored in the weight gain per day and the liveability, the costs were more competitive.

We toured several different facilities:

- One research farm and two grower farms owned by Kartzfehn
- A tour and presentation of Big Dutchman facilties
- A research farm and processing plant owned by Heidemark
- An independent poultry health laboratory owned by AniCon

To get a sense of how Europeans think longer term, all the houses we saw were built with brick and clay roofs. They just seem to keep rebuilding the same buildings – even in Amsterdam, for instance, they reface the front of the building and go on. One of the farms we toured has actually been farmed by the same family for 500 years. In fact, they still have a couple of original walls in their barn – they just build around it. When you see that and their connection to history, it definitely gives you a different perspective.

Here in the U.S., we build for 20 or 30 years, then we tear down to replace. In Europe, they build for 200 years. When I first walked into one of the barns, I knew I saw quality materials because the tile flooring was the same tile I have in one of the bathrooms in my house! All the livestock buildings we saw looked similar (50 x 250 or 300 feet long) with concrete floors, cement footings down to the frost, side walls and end walls built from brick. Instead of rafters like we use, they use a 4x12" full length wood beam every four feet for the roof support. They ventilate out the peak, and they have a 4-foot curtain or door on the side walls to let air in. They know if they build with the right materials, their barns will last for hundreds of years. Even the roofing material lasts 50 years before they need to replace it.

In looking at all of this, it definitely made me curious to find out how much more would it cost in the U.S. to build something that would last for 100 years versus what we currently build (or what we built in the 70s). Would it be double the cost? Triple the cost?

One of my priorities for this trip was to get a clear sense of whether or not building a high-tech turkey research farm in Minnesota – as a replacement to the UMore Park facility in Rosemount – could be doable. While in Germany, we saw a couple of systems for pen research trials, which

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convinced me that there are good systems out there that offer environmental controls, bird weighing/ bird scales, feed delivery and weighing systems, environmental rooms with web cams, etc. If we build a research facility here in Minnesota with the latest technology, I think it's possible that we might see a system where the vast majority of the research interaction on the research farm would be over the Internet. It would be important, though, to make sure we have the technical expertise and know-how to back up all this technology. We would need to have people on board who can keep it operating.

With the certainty that Rosemount research facilities will be relocated, I think it's important that we pull in the state-of-the-art technology and keep in mind the different kinds of research we're going to want to do in the next 20 or 30 years and beyond. Is it doable to get really high-tech? The short answer, it seems, is – yes. The bigger answer involves figuring out what we want to do for the long-term and how to make it a reality.