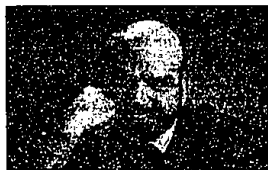


MONDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 1994

# TASTE

B

## TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JONES

### Specialty birds get highest marks in poll

**N**ow that I think back on it, we were born and raised on chicken and ground stew beef, except of course, on Fridays when we ate macaroni and cheese.

For all around cooking, you just can't beat a good ground stewing beef, and it's available just about anywhere. But when it comes to making great chicken, some of the birds I've purchased at my local grocery store left much to be desired.

In September, "Cook's" Magazine conducted a very unscientific test on America's number one meat. Chicken is numero uno because consumption has doubled over the past 20 years. Each and every man, woman and child in the U.S. eats somewhere in the neighborhood of 70 pounds of chicken per year. What "Cook's" did was pit four of the top-selling supermarket chickens against some of the most widely available premium chickens.

You guessed it, out of a field of nine entries, the supermarket chickens took fifth, sixth, eighth and ninth place.

#### Premium chickens

The top four birds were specialty brands. "Because chicken is so perishable, until fairly recently it was a local product," said Jack Bishop the author of the article, who along with some of the best known chefs and foodies in the country, judged the contest.

For the uninitiated, what makes a poor-tasting chicken deals with everything from the feed it is fed to their temperature after processing and during shipping. When a bird is rushed to market the way the "big boys" do it to keep costs down, the consumer usually suffers the consequences. But what makes a really great chicken? The folks at Bell & Evans (rated numero uno by the taste testers at "Cook's"), says that in addition to formulating the best feed, Bell & Evans ships their chickens loose on ice in 40 pound boxes and not prewrapped.

The folks at the oldest chicken company in America claim that problems begin to arise when prewrapped birds cannot "weep" - a natural process whereby blood and fluids slowly drain from the birds. Problems in taste and texture happen when the bloods and fluids from the birds coagulate and freeze in the chicken, something you can actually taste when comparing chickens.

#### Taste comparison

I located one of their highly touted birds and put it up next to a whole chicken from a metro Detroit grocery store that cost only 69 cents per pound. The differences in appearance, texture, taste and aroma were astounding. Bell & Evans chickens, priced at about \$1.59 per pound are available locally at: Byrd's and Martin's Butcher Block in Livonia, and at the Long Lake Market in West Bloomfield.

The chicken receiving second place honors went to the folks at Empire Kosher who market a fresh young broiler at about \$1.99 per pound. You can locate these chickens at all Shopping Center Markets in Southfield, West Bloomfield and at the Food Emporium in Livonia.

Folks in search of a more healthy chicken will certainly appreciate the positive third place showing of the D'Artagnan Fresh Free Range Chicken available via their catalogue for about \$2.95 per pound plus shipping and handling. All D'Artagnan chickens are raised without antibiotics, growth hormones or stimulants and are fed only organically raised grains.

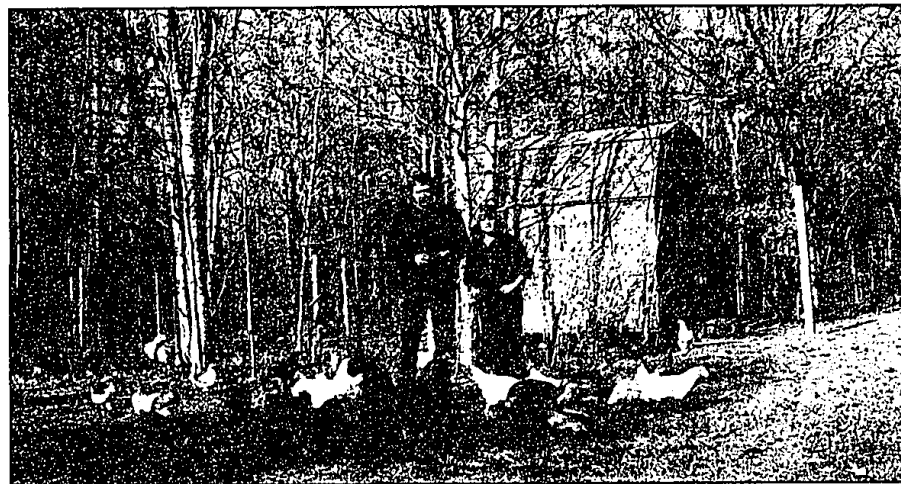
Even if you don't like chicken, request their catalog. It's one of the best for mail order specialty foods. You can reach them at 1-800-327-8246. Sandra John, general manager of The Good Food Company in Canton, said that just because a brand advertises "Asian" type chicken doesn't necessarily mean that the bird is free range. The Good Food Company sells only Frankemuth chickens which are naturally free range. The Good Food Company also is in Troy.

If you are relegated to purchasing chicken that might not be the best that money can buy, it's good to know that while birds freeze better than cut up birds. Look for a broiler, fryer or a roaster and save the stewing hens for chicken soup. Fresh chicken will keep in the refrigerator for 2-3 days. If you have to purchase frozen chicken, watch for "frozen burn," that brownish skin area that is evidence of dehydration or improper storage.

## LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Food is an important part of the "Festival of Lights."
- Chef Larry Jones takes the worry out of cooking Thanksgiving dinner.



On the farm: Christopher and Trizi Schmitt of Farmington Hills with a flock of chickens at the farm in Milford. They purchased the Frankemuth Poultry Co. in April.

The Frankemuth Poultry Co. is a family-owned business. Their chickens are grown naturally on family-owned farms.

BY BRIAN LYBAGHT  
SPECIAL WRITER

From his office window in Milford, Christopher Schmitt can look outside to see a flock of his chickens.

"You learn a lot watching chickens," said Schmitt, a Farmington Hills resident who owns a successful engraving components company that sits amid the birds on 27 acres in Oakland County.

Schmitt and his wife, Trizi, this year bought a chicken processing plant. They are now working hard to market their Frankemuth Poultry Co.'s low-in-fat chickens.

The Schmitts may be on to something. Their chickens, which are finding their way into Detroit-area supermarkets, average 3.25 grams of fat per serving when cooked, compared to 15 grams for most other supermarket chickens.

Their chickens are regularly inspected by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to insure Frankemuth Poultry's healthier bird claims are true.

Schmitt said his plant is the smallest chicken-processing plant

## Company hatches LEAN chickens



Dinner: The Schmitt family gathers for Sunday dinner, (left to right) Sandra Schmitt, her friend, Marc Bourgeois, Trizi and Christopher.

in the country. Its output of 6,000 chickens a week compares to industry-leader Tyson, which produces over 20 million per week.

The secret, said Schmitt and the company's marketing director, Joe Bosse, is in the feed. It includes a molasses-based product, along with corn, cracked soy and alfalfa.

"We don't use any antibiotics, hormones or meat by-products," said Bosse. The drugs are used by many farms to produce a meatier and healthier chicken faster.

Frankemuth Poultry chickens are raised on farms within 30 miles of the plant and are "free range" birds - though they live indoors on concrete floors they can walk outside.

Frankemuth Poultry's feed produces a less-fatty bird. The

chickens are grown slower - eight weeks compared to the 38 to 42-day average elsewhere in the industry.

"We're the only ones in the U.S. where you can see 'extra-lean' on the label," said Schmitt. "That's of 54 poultry processing plants."

Schmitt bought the farm from Les Dale who experimented on feed improvements as part of his doctorate studies in poultry science at Michigan State University. Dale, who earned his doctorate degree in poultry science from MSU has over 15 years experience. Dale produced a feed that lowered a chicken's body fat to less than 10 percent. The Schmitts, with help from Dale, lowered that to less than five percent.

The chickens taste better and are more healthy, Schmitt said. It produces less grease on the barbecue or in the oven, Bosse said. The challenge is to make their chickens available to more consumers and to make some money doing it.

"They taste different altogether than the chicken you're used to," said Tom Shatter, 67, who runs the meats counter at The Roadside Market in Plymouth. "These taste like the chickens I used to have when I was a kid, and I'm almost 70."

Shatter said his store sells

See CHICKENS, 2B

## Court reporter lays down the law for dinner

BY RENEE SHOGLUND  
SPECIAL WRITER



Bob and Debbie Beebe of Canton measure their commute to work in feet rather than miles. They each have offices in their home. Debbie is a freelance court reporter, and Bob is a veteran sales manager for Alberto Culver.

"I go the basement at 9 a.m. and come up at 6 p.m.," said Bob, who spends half of his time of the road, servicing accounts in Michigan, Indiana and Ohio.

"Debbie goes to her office at 9 a.m. and comes out at around 4 p.m. to start dinner."

"Five, I usually come out at 5 p.m.," Debbie corrects. She acknowledges the advantages of freelancing out of her home. "I can knock off a bit earlier, come in the kitchen and start something, then go back to my office," she said.

However, like her husband, Debbie also spends time "on the road." There are many long afternoons spent in lawyers' offices taking depositions. "It's not a set schedule," she said.

The Beebes are a blended family, with two out of their four adult children living with them. Debbie's daughter, Melissa Lenzner, is a 21-year-old senior at the University of Michigan who recently returned from a year's teaching assignment in France.

Bob's son, Steven, also 21, is a competitive weightlifter and senior at Eastern Michigan University. Although members of the Beebe household go their separate ways during the day, they strive to come together at the dinner hour - whenever that may be.



BILL DEERLE/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

"Sometimes we might not eat until seven o'clock, but I feel it's an important thing for a family to sit down and eat together. We've done that since we got married," said Debbie.

She uses only fresh ingredients, doesn't prepared and freezes any dishes ahead of time, and seldom uses a Crock-Pot. What's her working woman's secret to producing well-balanced weekday dinners?

"There's no way to say how I manage," she said. "I just do it. When I get home from work, I make dinner. When dinner is ready, we eat."

The Beebes have a business agreement when it

Workday meal: Debbie Beebe (left to right) serves Shrimp Au Gratin to her hungry family, daughter, Melissa Lenzner, Kevin Henderson (Melissa's fiancé) and husband Bob.

comes to preparing the main meal. "She cooks, and I clean," said Bob. "Ninety-nine point nine percent of the time, Bob does the clean-up," Debbie confirms.

However, shopping is 100 percent Debbie's responsibility. She limits it to once every two weeks.

"I write a grocery list. I have a menu plan for the following two weeks. I get exactly what I need, and hope I don't have to go back in between."

A key strategy to providing a daily family din-

See REPORTER, 2B