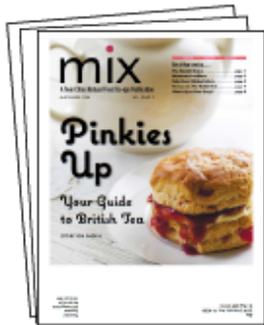


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RECENT TWEETS

Farm to Table: Family-Owned Ferndale Turkey Farm

By: Nancy Crotti



From left to right: Dick, Katie, Jane, Maren, Erica, and John Peterson.

John Peterson's turkeys have been known to stop traffic. The free-range birds get the run of several pastures during warm weather on Ferndale Farm near Cannon Falls, Minn. Sometimes

CO+OP DEALS



[Check out the current specials!](#)

EVENTS CALENDAR

Raw Food Demo

Location: Valley Natural Foods
Demo Kiosk
Date: March 13, 2014
Time: 3:00pm
[View Calendar](#)

Gluten-Free Day

Location: Valley Natural Foods
Date: March 20, 2014
Time: all day

 **Valley Natural Foods** 55m
@ValleyNatural

What a line-up
[@sewardcoop](#). Butternut Squash Enchilada Verde? Sounds like a winner!

Expand

 **Valley Natural Foods** 1h
@ValleyNatural

It's the [@MNFoodShare #MarchCampaign](#). Help us reach 1500#s of donations for [@360Communities #foodshelf](#). YellowBins standing by at store exit

 **Seward Co-op** 1h
@sewardcoop

Join us for lunch today:

Butternut Squash Enchilada Verde;
Jerked Chicken;
Veracruz Rice;
Catalan Roasted Vegetables;
Cuban Black Beans

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POLL

What is your favorite winter warmer?:

- Hot cocoa
- A steaming mug of tea
- Homemade soup
- Anything spicy

that means they're right down by the road.

The turkeys even follow the shade of trees on the farm, settling perfectly within the shadows cast by the leaves on hot days. It's an amazing sight, according to Greg Dick, who has toured the farm as multistore meat manager at Lakewinds Natural Foods in Minnetonka and Chanhassen.

The Petersons have raised their turkeys naturally from the beginning, eschewing antibiotics that conventional turkey farmers use to stimulate growth. Ferndale turkeys are naturally processed without additives at a USDA facility and are available year-round as whole birds as well as other turkey products.

Peterson's farm has been in the family since John Peterson's grandfather, Dale, bought it in 1939 specifically for its sandy soil—great for turkey farming, but not for crops. Dale Peterson grew up on a wheat farm in southeastern North Dakota and studied poultry science at North Dakota State University. As a bachelor farmer, he shared the small farm house with the birds, living in half the space and using the other half for incubators.

"A few years later, when he met my grandma, you can imagine that didn't go over so well," John Peterson said. His grandmother, Fern, had grown up on a turkey farm.

Dale Peterson worked on the farm until he died in 1989. Fern continued to do bookkeeping and other farm work, passing away in 2005. John Peterson's parents, Dick and Jane, worked alongside Dale and Fern and now do the same with John and his wife, Erica, who also teaches English at Dakota County Technical College and Normandale Community College.

John met Erica at Augustana College in Sioux Falls, S.D., working there in admissions for five years while she finished her graduate degree at the University of South Dakota. Erica had grown up on a cattle farm in Edgerton in southwest Minnesota, but neither was sure they wanted to return to farm life.

"My family has always been very supportive of everyone going in their own direction (with) no pressure or expectation that we would come back," John Peterson said. "I'm really thankful for that because it gave my wife and me the freedom to think about it more broadly."

When they returned in 2008, John and Erica Peterson and John's parents turned part of a former hatchery into an on-farm store and began selling directly to colleges, corporations and to the food co-ops, including doing in-store demonstrations.

"We are really, really big fans of John Peterson," said Greg Dick of Lakewinds. "He and his products are just like a dream for us. He's accommodated us in every way as far as providing friends and family members to run demos. It's a really good fit."

Sometimes Dick and Jane attend the demonstrations. "Last Thanksgiving, a customer asked my dad if he was the farmer, and this person said, 'I just want to thank you and shake your hand,'" John Peterson said. "That meant so much to my dad, that somebody was appreciating what he has given his life doing."

[View Calendar](#)

Juicing -- A tasting/cooking demo with Sheryl

Location: Valley Natural Foods

Date: April 5, 2014

Time: 12:00pm

[View Calendar](#)



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Receiving such gratitude from a customer is rare for a farmer, according to Dick Peterson. Changing gears in middle age to market directly to customers and stores also seemed unusual to him.

“You kind of think, ‘Well, this isn’t making life easier when you get to the stage of life when you think you should be slowing down,’” said Dick Peterson, who is 60. “It’s really a totally different challenge that we’ve had. We still have the old challenges, but it is exciting.”

Until five years ago, the family hatched their own poults (young turkeys) on the farm until that became too inefficient. Now hatched in Willmar, Minn., the poults are delivered to Ferndale when they’re one day old, and spend their first month in a 95-degree brooder barn. The birds are moved to a barn with indoor-outdoor access for another month before being sent out on the pasture. They move to a different pasture each week during warm months, following along when Peterson or one of his employees pulls their shelters along behind tractors to provide a safe place for the turkeys to spend the night.

“Turkeys are insanely curious. They want to know what’s going on,” John Peterson said. “They also get into this routine. They see us coming with the tractors and they think ‘Oh, this again.’ If their shelter is moving, they’re certainly smart enough to go along.”

Peterson supplements their outdoor pickings with corn and soy meal that he feeds them in the winter when the birds are indoors, and also brings them water when they’re on pasture.

“We believe you can taste the difference with our turkeys in the way that they’re grown,” John Peterson said. “There’s no reason for us to alter that flavor in anyway.”

Nancy Crotti is a freelance writer and editor based in St. Paul.

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