

## Dairy &amp; Livestock

# Birds are this farmer's business

By HARLEY BUCHHOLZ

**T**HE sign along the road between Wyocena and Pardeeville says "Butch's Birds." It doesn't quite prepare first-time visitors for the variety of poultry scattered around the 10 acres that are home to Airling "Butch" Gunderson's 11 breeds of geese, 14 breeds of ducks, five breeds of turkeys, 20 breeds of large chickens, 10 breeds of bantams and two breeds of pea fowl.

A former dairy farmer, Gunderson has had an interest in poultry since the age of 8. "That's kind of where it started," he says. "We always had chickens, ducks and geese on the farm."

After attending the University of Wisconsin Farm and Industry Short Course and serving a stint in the Navy, Gunderson says he picked up where he left off and mixed poultry with his dairy herd. In the early 1980s, a down time in the dairy industry, he sold his cows and bought the 10 acres in Columbia County to go full time into the bird business.

"It doesn't make a difference if it's poultry, dairy or what," Gunderson says. "If you come home with ideas [after meeting with other breeders], you try to implement them. I'm still building Butch's Birds."

## Bird expert

Gunderson buys and sells breeding stock, and sells eggs, hatchlings and cull birds for meat — particularly ducks and geese, which go to Madison area restaurants. He's also a national — soon to be international — poultry judge.

He exhibits his birds at state and national shows, last year claiming his first grand champion of show with a young male Cayuga duck. For several years he's been first or second in class with Brown African and American Buff geese.

Gunderson is a director and licensed judge with the American Poultry

## Key Points

- Butch Gunderson has up to 1,000 birds on his farm at peak times.
- Gunderson has judged poultry at fairs across the U.S.
- He plans to run for vice president of the national poultry club.

Association and works with more birds — wild pheasants — as an employee at the state game farm at Poynette.

He enjoys working with young people in 4-H and FFA programs and occasionally conducts pre-fair seminars on raising, feeding and preparing poultry for show. He's also been known to loan starter birds to young exhibitors.

Gunderson is president of the Wisconsin International Poultry Club and for four years was a district APA director for a multistate area. Now he's planning to run for vice president of the national organization. He also belongs to International Poultry Breeders, a waterfowl organization.

Brown African geese are his favorite breed of fowl. "It's the one I've worked the hardest on and the one I like the most," he says.

But after working with his own birds, Gunderson enjoys judging poultry best. While he shows his poultry as often as he can, he says "judging seems to have taken center stage," noting he's judged "from Boston to California and Washington to Florida and in between." Next year he's been invited to judge Plymouth Rock chickens at Australia's national poultry show.

"I've only been doing it with APA for four years," he notes. "I do a state fair a year and a number of shows around the country besides the county fairs. I've done them for 15 years. That progressed to getting licensed by the APA. The word is, I do a pretty good job, so demand is



**'BIRD BRAIN':** Butch Gunderson mingles individual breeds of ducks and geese, one flock of each, in outdoor pens.

good. When people are happy with your judging — feel you've done a credible job — they ask you back.

"When I show and win, it helps me sell and helps me judge," Gunderson continues. "I raise a number of birds so I know how they act [at various ages]. As a judge, it makes me aware of certain things you might not see otherwise."

He's heard another breeder at a sale say, "If I see Butch stop and take a long look at a bird, if he doesn't buy it, I will."

"I think that's the best compliment I can get," Gunderson says.

Type, color and condition: Those are the three primary tools of showing and judging, he notes.

## Learning the ins and outs

"I had good teachers," Gunderson says. "You talk to other breeders at shows. There are dos and don'ts in breeding, things to watch for. You need this type of bird in your breeding program to get this [result]. ... Then you have to know how to feed them to have them in top condition."

For instance, Gunderson advises feeding Plymouth Rock chickens a diet high in corn to bring out yellow leg

color, "but don't feed it to Cayugas or Leghorns because you don't want those birds to have excess weight."

"Feed is specific to the breed," he points out. "There are times I'm feeding seven different kinds of feed because of different stages of development."

Gunderson has 800 to 1,000 birds at peak time from April to June, and he's usually with his birds until after dark after putting in a full day at the game farm. When he's on the road he gets help from a Pardeeville FFA member. His wife, Mary, cares for the baby birds as they come out of the hatchery. That hatchery is located inside a building that's been called the Taj Mahal of poultry barns. It houses breeding pens that open to outdoor pens and an incubator room.

Gunderson's flocks are part of the National Poultry Improvement Plan, which means they reach the highest health standards necessary to nationwide showing.

"I buy and sell birds all over the country," Gunderson says. "If I don't have a specific bird at a specific time, I know someone who does."

Learn more at [www.butchbirds.com](http://www.butchbirds.com).  
Buchholz writes from Fond du Lac.

# Too much milk continues to vex industry



## Dairy Outlook

By JOHN OTTE

**F**EEED prices appear to be moderating a bit from last year's highs.

Still, both corn and soybean prices will remain above the five-year average. Forage prices likely will follow grain prices, moderating into 2010.

"While welcome, lower feed prices alone will not restore profitability for dairy producers," says Roger Hoskin, USDA economist. "The recession has reduced demand. Lagging product movement will keep dairy product prices below year-earlier levels through 2009. The result is continued pressure to remove cows from production."

With help from the Cooperatives Working Together program, the U.S. dairy herd is expected to contract 1.5%

## Key Points

- Moderating feed prices should improve dairy prospects.
- Recession-induced demand weakness will keep milk profits elusive.
- Tighter supplies and economic recovery should lift 2010 milk prices.

in 2009 from 2008. Another 2.6% contraction is expected in 2010.

"Yet some of the decline in cow numbers is offset by continued gains in milk per cow," says Hoskin. "In 2009, milk per cow per day is up 1%. It's expected to climb nearly 2% in 2010."

## Cuts should help

USDA projects 2009 milk production at 187.6 billion pounds. Next year's production is forecast at 186.4 billion pounds.

"This leisurely decline is encountering a recession-weakened domestic market, which limits price lift," says Hoskin.

Dairy product exports both this year

and next are likely to be well below the totals for the past two years. USDA forecasts exports at 3.8 billion pounds of milk equivalent, fat basis, in 2009 and 3.9 billion pounds in 2010. Whey is the exception to the export slump.

"Whey exports, mostly to Mexico and China, have made the skims-solids exports numbers appear stronger," says Hoskin. "Those exports are forecast to total 19.9 billion pounds this year and 23.1 billion pounds next year."

## Weak milk prices to persist

Dairy product price expectations presage weak milk prices this year. Hoskin sees only modest improvements.

He expects Class III prices to average \$10.45 to \$10.75 per cwt. in 2009 and \$13.90 to \$14.90 per cwt. next year.

The Class IV price is projected to average \$9.95 to \$10.35 per cwt. in 2009 and \$12.45 to \$13.55 per cwt. in 2010. The all-milk price likely will average \$11.85 to \$12.15 this year, improving to \$14.85 to \$15.85 per cwt. in 2010.

## Dairy product prices stay low

**P**RODUCT prices likely will remain low in 2009. Cheese prices are projected to average \$1.21 to \$1.24 per pound; butter prices are expected to average \$1.18 to \$1.24 per pound. The outlook for dry products also forecasts low prices for the year, with nonfat dry milk averaging 82.5 to 85.5 cents per pound and whey averaging 24 to 26 cents per pound.

Prices are expected to recover in 2010 but not to their previous levels.

Cheese prices are forecast to average \$1.53 to \$1.63 per pound in 2010. Butter prices are expected to stage the strongest recovery and average \$1.44 to \$1.57 per pound. Nonfat dry milk is expected to average 99 cents to \$1.06 per pound and whey 28 to 31 cents per pound for next year.