Transcript Podcast- Episode 31- A Christmas like no other? The outlook for the turkey market this festive season

0:00:00.620,0:00:05.150
[Music]

0:00:01.950,0:00:05.150
[Applause]

0:00:07.680,0:00:10.160
Hello.

0:00:08.320,0:00:11.599
I'm Aled Jones and you're listening to

0:00:10.160,0:00:14.080
episode 31

0:00:11.599,0:00:16.640
of Ear to the Ground, a podcast brought

0:00:14.080,0:00:18.800
to you by Farming Connect.

0:00:16.640,0:00:19.920
Now Christmas is just around the corner

0:00:18.800,0:00:21.680
and the turkey is

0:00:19.920,0:00:23.119
traditionally the centrepiece of the

0:00:21.680,0:00:25.039
festive spread

0:00:23.119,0:00:26.560
but there's been some concern amongst

0:00:25.039,0:00:28.800
turkey farmers this year

0:00:26.560,0:00:30.560
about the impact of Covid restrictions

0:00:28.800,0:00:33.520
on the demand for turkeys

0:00:30.560,0:00:35.600
and the size of bird being ordered that

0:00:33.520,0:00:37.600
led to a group of turkey farmers coming

0:00:35.600,0:00:38.960
together to form an Agrisgop group

0:00:37.600,0:00:41.040
through Farming Connect
to exchange information and provide
support to one another.
In particular, the group wanted some
support with marketing
and were offered an insight into
consumer trends and the outlook for
Christmas 2020
by the food and farming consultant Myrddin Davies.
Christmas 2020 is going to be a
Christmas
like no other. The
sort of consumer insight data that's
available
suggests that Christmas this year
needs to make up
for everything else that's happened
in 2020 and it's an occasion that we
are all sort of gearing up for more so
than previous years. Spend
in relation to Christmas 2020 has
started earlier
and is focused to be higher than
previous years as well.
We'll be hearing more from my
interview with Myrddin later on in the
podcast
but first, I met one of the Agrisgop
group members to find out more about his
turkey business
and how he's preparing for this year's
Christmas market.

Hello, my name's Malcolm Thomas. I run a
mixed
family farm near Mold,
beef, sheep, arable and a very important
turkey business
enterprise on the farm is turkeys
which is what I believe we're going to be talking about today.

Yes, indeed and I know it's a very busy time of year for you Malcolm so we're very grateful that you've spared some of that precious time to talk to us today about your turkey farming business.

When did you start rearing turkeys for the Christmas market and what made you get into it in the first place? Well my parents started the turkey side of the business in, I think it was 1960-ish possibly, so we've been going a long time.
increased our numbers to a peak quite a few years ago now and we come down a little bit now in our numbers.

And talk us through the farming year because getting turkeys ready for Christmas, it starts months in advance?

Yes. It starts with the previous year's orders because that's what I've got to base my chick order for which is usually placed in February March time.

Following on from the previous Christmas I will start to look at the numbers sold, the weights sold and then order accordingly.

The way you get the different weight, all our turkeys come in
on the same day of the year
and the way we have the different
weights from 10 pound to 35 pound
is by different breeds. So, we have six
different breeds of turkey.
They all need to be put into their
weight categories and
sort out their needs for the year for the
following year.
And talk us a bit more about those six
different breeds, so you say there's
different breeds for different sizes and
that's
how you prepare for the orders
you're likely to get at Christmas?
Yes, that’s it. We buy from a hatchery
in
Lincolnshire called Holly Berry and
they have their breeds of turkeys,
small whites which gives

us

very small turkey and then

we go up through to

the very imaginatively

named

H/B 91s, H/B 92s, 92s give us the next size

the 91s give us the following size of

turkey

and then we move on to the Wirral

Supreme which

is the next size and then

T5 which is the next size, have I missed

one out I've lost count

there now? I think you've covered them

all there, any differences

in the tastes between the different

breeds?

Not at all, no, the breeds seem to be
very consistent indeed

with the taste.

You can get your traditional,
what they call heritage breeds, which I do think have a different flavour,
but the flavour then comes from the management, the age, the food. There are other circumstances which dictate how well they eat. And what is the diet you'd feed them then and how does that have an influence on how the meat tastes come Christmas day?

Well, all the turkeys are reared in barns, they are not free range, so all our food is brought-in food except for some
towards the end where we feed our own wheat just so that maybe under some certain circumstances to slow them down a little. But sometimes the food is supplied by our rep from For Farmers. They will sort out a feeding programme for us with the starter feeds, the grower feeds and the finishing feeds and these feeds and timing of them will give us our finish and quality of the turkey. And do you do all the processing on farm, the slaughtering and the getting of the meat ready and stuff?

Yes, everything's on-farm so they actually have zero farm miles once they're on,
food miles rather, once they're on the farm. They're here to the very end until people or butchers pick them up as an oven-ready turkey.

And you mentioned right at the beginning that your family has been involved in the turkey business since the 60s, has the market changed a lot in that time and the consumer trends, have they adjusted over the past few decades?

For many decades I think it remained very stable but they are trends that are changing now.

There is a trend for, as a lot of people are getting used to oven ready things where as in they're just taking out the packet and
put it in the oven, a lot more move towards
turkey breasts, turkey crowns
these sort of things which unfortunately are very difficult to compete with
on our scale. And the way we produce,
they tend to be the more on the mass-produced end of the line
and they can be produced to a much cheaper cost.
And what do you anticipate to be the impact of Covid on the demand for turkeys this year because we've seen some of the headlines, they're quite striking headlines,
along the lines of farmers putting turkeys on crash diets and slaughtering them early to avoid them getting too big because of smaller family gatherings this year?
Is that a true reflection of what's
happening on the ground?

I hope not, from what I've been speaking to the butchers we supply now and from the orders that have come in so far to the farm,

we seem to be at the moment people are hoping to have a normal Christmas as they'll be allowed to. Christmas does seem to be coming a more important day to be aiming for because of what they've had and what they haven't had the opportunities throughout the year for family family meals together, things like this.

And we do seem to have more talk now about people wanting that extra bit special for Christmas so we're hoping that that will be the case? It's
very much in the air at the moment

as you’ve mentioned

we’ve heard about people wanting smaller turkeys which is a very difficult thing
to adjust once that turkey is growing

without ruining it

because at the end we want to sell a quality turkey and you can only do that if you feed them accordingly.

You cannot put these things on diets,
you ruin the shape and you will ruin the confirmation of them.

So what you've got sometimes is what you've got, you can play a little bit as I mentioned with feed at the end just to slow them down a touch but you cannot do anything drastic
with them so
what we've got from the day those turkeys arrived
is what we're going to end up with, near enough.
It is a little bit of a worry but I still think how the markets are supplying the people, butchers, the people we supply, Hopefully, won't be too far out from what they normally have each year.
There's always some adjustments, and every year families go away for Christmas, families take it in turns to have their family around. For me also, there's always a little bit of adjustment up and down but that is going to be a problem if we have the restrictions come in where
very tight restrictions for Christmas
day or Christmas period.
That is a little bit of a concern at the moment but hopefully
what we've got is what we've got and
we'll be able to fit it into our orders. And I suspect you get a lot of repeat
custom each year? That's what we rely on, yes.
Well in the 90s repeat custom each year so we're not having to
look fortunately, we always
lookout for new orders, we've had a new butcher
who has signed up to us this year for supplying
and we're always on the lookout for
increasing a little bit because

there's always going to be a slight downward trend in the orders we're finding of whole turkeys

and we don't target any breast or crown market at the moment. We will do it but what we tend to do is sell the people a whole turkey and we will crown it

or do whatever they want with it but we've got no market for the other bits of the turkey

but we will cut the crown or breast for turkey for them if they want us to.

And given all the uncertainties this year I understand you've joined together
with a group of other turkey farmers

through a Farming Connects project called Agrisgop to try and share your best practice, share ideas and to try and collectively prepare for Christmas and what is quite challenging circumstances around Covid this year. Tell us a bit more about the Agrisgop group that you're a part of?

It's been set up by Farming Connect’s Gwen Davies and she's managed to get together, from around Wales, a group of turkey producers.

At the beginning, we thought, well what we're going to talk about
and then

0:11:54.880,0:11:59.200
it's one of those things you have to get

0:11:56.560,0:12:02.240
into and then the ideas come along

0:11:59.200,0:12:05.440
and it's been exceptionally good.

0:12:02.240,0:12:07.360
We've had experts talk to us about

0:12:05.440,0:12:09.440
marketing, about health and safety,

0:12:07.360,0:12:11.440
even with the Covid situation, the

0:12:09.440,0:12:14.880
rules and regulations how to

0:12:11.440,0:12:16.720
manage those restrictions and

0:12:14.880,0:12:19.200
social distancing and all those sort of

0:12:16.720,0:12:21.600
things.

0:12:19.200,0:12:23.120
And the marketing and talking about

0:12:21.600,0:12:26.959
social media

0:12:23.120,0:12:29.920
and the other online marketing

0:12:26.959,0:12:31.680
e-mailing websites, these sorts of things

0:12:29.920,0:12:33.519
and it's all been very good

0:12:31.680,0:12:35.519
to talk, to be able to speak to other,

0:12:33.519,0:12:36.160
people who are in the same similar

0:12:35.519,0:12:38.480
situation

0:12:36.160,0:12:40.000
to bounce ideas together to
see what they do. It's surprising how
different we all are
and how everybody has a different idea
of a little bit of tweaks
that you can make to your business. From
going
t ideas from other people,
it's actually coming into
its own. Also, I think
it's something that possibly needs
to be
looked at throughout the year almost so
that you know
a lot of these things now we're getting
a little bit late in the season to be
implementing them, but they're all for
the future as well
and it's
definitely that those experts are
definitely proving their worth
and it's having that ability to share
and talk through your businesses with
other people in similar circumstances
which is such a key advantage of the
Agrisgop project model. But in terms of
preparation for this Christmas, and
we're recording this podcast about a
month away from Christmas,
what additional measures have you had to
put in place in relation to the
distribution
of your turkeys? Well that's actually
what we're
looking at the moment. We're
sorting out
our workplace at the moment to give
as much
social distance as we can. We've sourced masks, visors lots of gels, we're putting in more water heaters for hand washing things like that,
better facilities for those sort of points while we're actually working but the biggest challenge we see at the moment is going to be the social distance for the break time.
We can't break in small groups a few at a time.
The whole thing works as a production line in effect and so everyone will have to be taking the breaks at the same time just trying to sort out where they can have teas, coffees and
lunches and things like this
to keep all safe and comply with
the rules and regulations
that we've been given at the moment.
But I'm hoping we will get around it and
it'll work.
It is an exceptional year isn't it and
and these things, you know, 12 months ago,
we wouldn't have
dreamt of that we had to adjust to such
an extent
to try and manage people's safety. And
interestingly do you then sell directly
to the consumer
and do you have customers calling at the
farm to purchase their turkeys or is it
all directed through
local butchers? No, quite a lot go through
people calling on the farm and that
again is going to be a challenge.

We are looking at addressing that at the moment.

Unfortunately, the situation of the farm, there's a long single track driveway to the farm so that doesn't give us many options for having a one-way system and as far as that goes but at the farm yard, we're trying to look into a way.

One suggestion we're looking at is having somebody having maybe a radio, so as the people come into the yard they radio through the order for the turkey.
Then as the people turn around it's ready for them to pick up and take payment. We're looking at the card payment machine which we haven't done in the past because we've always found people pay checks, cash so we haven't had that problem. So, we're looking at making arrangements for card payments and contactless will be a bit of a problem because of the limit contact payment but this is things which we hopefully will get in place and make picking up as safe as possible for the customers and ourselves. I think it's what people will expect to see.
we have
sweets,
mulled wine, bits and pieces like this but
all those sort of things will have to be
stopped I should imagine this year and
we'll just have
the bare minimum and just hope that
people keep safe, get their turkey safely,
and get back to normal as of
next year.
And have you had to
adjust the way
you market your produce this Christmas?
No, we haven't. It's something
I'm
looking at for the future but as they
say,
we actually covered earlier,
it's a lot of repeat orders for ourselves so we do very little advertising. I think we need to start now and I think social media, Facebook etc is going to be a very important piece of advertising. We talked to the butchers a month or so before Christmas before December and get an idea of how they're thinking. They seem quite positive that they're going to sell. They've obviously all had exceptional years this year because of the lockdown. Butcher's and local shops has really had a boom especially
in the

0:18:17.039,0:18:24.080
food side of things so

0:18:20.880,0:18:27.600
everyone's talking providing, there's no

0:18:24.080,0:18:30.480
issues that can complicate it

0:18:27.600,0:18:31.840
that we're going to get as normal as

0:18:30.480,0:18:34.880
possible orders.

0:18:31.840,0:18:36.799
Obviously we cannot guarantee,

0:18:34.880,0:18:39.200
there's always going to be some

0:18:36.799,0:18:42.320
element of uncertainty there

0:18:39.200,0:18:44.320
in the circumstances. And

0:18:42.320,0:18:45.840
finally Malcolm, what would be your

0:18:44.320,0:18:47.440
advice to others

0:18:45.840,0:18:49.600
looking into setting up a turkey

0:18:47.440,0:18:51.360
business?

0:18:49.600,0:18:52.799
The first thing you need when you're

0:18:51.360,0:18:54.080
setting up a turkey business is

0:18:52.799,0:18:56.480
customers

0:18:54.080,0:18:58.400
and you've got to make sure that you

0:18:56.480,0:19:00.960
have got a demand,

0:18:58.400,0:19:02.400
a market, out there.
It's something which you start nearly 12 months previous looking at what you need in sizes, numbers, so you have to be well prepared for that. Aware of what you need and what you know you're going to sell. It's very difficult to sell turkeys last minute if you haven't got pre-orders.

This year for instance the livestock auctions won't be happening because of social distancing so there won't be poultry sales going on. It's these outlets for this year for surplus turkeys are going to be very restrictive. So your marketing is the thing, get that started and then start looking
at the rules and regulations,

the fridges, the

the labour, equipment you need.

You need licenses for slaughtering, you

have to have the premises, have to be

inspected by the environmental health.

There's a lot to think about

before you even

start ordering. Don't just order and then

think,

Right, I better get on with selling these

or I better get on with....

get these things in place before you

do anything else.

Yes, some fantastic pieces of very wise

and sound advice there Malcolm. Well

thank you ever so much for joining us on

Ear to the Ground. It's been

fascinating to learn more about your
business and indeed
the challenges that Covid has posed this year and how you're intending on tackling those and may I wish you all the very best with your turkey sales this Christmas.
Thank you very much it's been a pleasure talking to you.
I'm Myrddin Davies, a food and farming consultant and working largely with Welsh food businesses and I was invited to meet with the Agrisgop group to talk about some of the consumer trends that we are seeing this year and how that impacts the turkey market for Christmas 2020.
And what's your take on Christmas 2020?
What's going to be the outlook for the market this year? So, first of all, I think it's important to think really that Christmas 2020 is going to be a Christmas like no other. The sort of consumer insight data that's available suggests that Christmas this year needs to make up for everything else that's happened in 2020 and it's an occasion that we are all sort of gearing up for more so than previous years. Spend in relation to Christmas 2020 has started earlier and is focused to be higher than previous years as well.
So Christmas 2020 is a Christmas that we are going to be spending more and it will, for a lot of people, be an event which is sort of trying to make up for everything else negative that's happened during the year and that feeling of nostalgia is very clear and people as you say are trying to make a big effort to celebrate Christmas this year. But what do you make of some of the headlines we've been seeing over the past few weeks and months around turkey farmers putting turkeys on crash diets to try and reduce their size because of
smaller family gatherings this Christmas?

Do you think that's going to have a big impact on turkey sales and and the nature of the demand? I wouldn't think so.

It's a trend that we have seen in the turkey market over a number of years is that the size of the turkey is actually going smaller and smaller every year, but what we are also seeing is an increase in the demand for things like boneless turkey breast, turkey crowns, so parts of cuts if you like a turkey where customers are also looking for sort of more convenience in terms of how that
Christmas dinner

is prepared and I suppose that is

the challenge this year

is to meet the needs of consumers,

whether gatherings will possibly

be smaller

and how the turkey can actually

be

positioned to meet those customer

needs.

We're seeing supermarkets, we're seeing

butchers able to offer

crowns, boneless breasts and so on so

sort of responding to

to their consumers requirements and

I'm sure farmers can do the same.

And to what extent does this marketing

have a very important role

to play in that, in terms of
communicating with the consumer
and trying to respond to the consumer
demand
and buying patterns in that respect and
trying to make sure the messages are
shared from turkey businesses that they
can supply a slightly different
range of products this year?
Yes communication is key
Aled. As part of marketing it is
informing potential customers as well as
eexisting customers.
Seasonal turkey production
will have quite a loyal customer base
but it's important that
those customers are well informed about
this year's
proposal that their circumstances may well
change and they may think that
the traditional

large turkey that they've had every year

isn't suitable for them this year.

But, as long as those consumers are kept informed of what the offer is, there is an alternative that could be offered to meet their needs.

And on marketing as well we've seen that since the beginning of Covid one of the trends that is said to be here to stay is e-commerce in relation to food and drink where more food and drink is actually bought online so considering really the web-based presence be it on social media
or sort of on a website
and how that is incorporated
into your business,
is that a means of communicating
with the customer base that you're
effectively targeting? Some might
feel that
online sales could be a threat to small
local businesses but we've seen this
year haven't we within
quite a lot of local businesses
successfully adjusting to online sales and
that's been a big success.
Yes, and I think it's been in response to
changing consumer needs and I suppose
that's the first thing to acknowledge
is that consumer needs and our customer
needs are actually
changing. How consumers are looking to
buy food and drink

is changing and online is becoming a major factor in that

cashless purchasing is also a big factor that we've seen this year where cash transactions are much much less now than what they were let's say in February.

We've seen a lot of change being forced upon all sorts of businesses this year,

do you think some of these changes, actually positive changes, are going to put businesses in a much better position going forward?

I think small businesses are in a better position because they are able to respond quicker to
changing consumer needs and we've seen

that happening

this year where small businesses have

been able to adapt

and change their offer quite quickly to

meet

the changing needs of consumers,

and you know, we are making Covid an

opportunity

as opposed to a challenge to a small

business

is really important and I think it's

part of the mindset really

in how one looks at sort of changing

the business and making those changes

fit

for the future. And finally Myrddin, what

would be your

main pieces of advice notice to help

turkey businesses with their marketing
0:28:08.559,0:28:13.840 this year?
0:28:10.720,0:28:18.159 I think marketing really needs
0:28:13.840,0:28:21.760 to identify and respond
0:28:18.159,0:28:25.279 to the needs of the consumer.
0:28:21.760,0:28:27.440 So first of all, it's letting customers,
0:28:25.279,0:28:30.240 current and potential new customers, know
0:28:27.440,0:28:34.159 that you are doing turkeys this year
0:28:30.240,0:28:36.640 and inform those customers of
0:28:34.159,0:28:37.360 what the offer is. So what are you
0:28:36.640,0:28:39.919 Offering?
0:28:37.360,0:28:40.559 Is your offer slightly different this
0:28:39.919,0:28:44.559 year
0:28:40.559,0:28:47.600 because of changing consumer needs?
0:28:44.559,0:28:48.720 Think about how easy is it for your
0:28:47.600,0:28:51.760 customers to
0:28:48.720,0:28:54.159 contact you and buy.
0:28:51.760,0:28:55.039 Could they think about
0:28:54.159,0:28:57.520 online
0:28:55.039,0:28:58.080 in that respect as well to sort of help
with making it easy for customers to contact them? And I suppose think about how, especially those farms where customers are actually coming to collect their turkeys, think about the wider offer. Think about the experience that you're giving to potential customers who are, as part of their Christmas, are actually coming to collect the turkey and is there an opportunity to capitalize on that? And I suppose just communicate in a way that the customer thinks or offers solutions for the customers in how you market your 2020 turkeys. Well Myrddin, you've shared some really valuable advice this
year in the run-up
0:29:47.840,0:29:52.559
to Christmas 2020
0:29:50.960,0:29:54.240
like no other as you mentioned right at
0:29:52.559,0:29:54.880
the beginning. Thank you very much Myrddin
0:29:54.240,0:29:57.520
for joining
0:29:54.880,0:29:57.520
our podcast
0:29:57.919,0:30:00.960
and there we are, we've reached the end
0:29:59.279,0:30:02.559
of episode 31.
0:30:00.960,0:30:04.320
Don't forget to hit subscribe on
0:30:02.559,0:30:06.240
whichever platform you use to keep
0:30:04.320,0:30:08.640
notified of all new episodes
0:30:06.240,0:30:10.640
of War to the Ground. So on behalf of the
0:30:08.640,0:30:11.279
team at Farming Connect, and myself Aled
0:30:10.640,0:30:14.060
Jones,
0:30:11.279,0:30:19.100
thank you for listening and good bye.
0:30:14.060,0:30:20.840
[Music]
0:30:19.100,0:30:23.840
[Applause]
0:30:20.840,0:30:23.840
0:30:25.390,0:30:30.320
[Music]
0:30:32.320,0:30:34.399