

Thai duck meat exports on the rise

While not the world's largest duck meat producer - number three after China and France - Thailand is set to be the "winner", with production and exports rising to unprecedented levels.

By Joyce Rainat, Bangkok

Saroj Tarikachorn, president of the Duck Breeders, Trading & Exporters Association, is all smiles these days. Thailand's exports of duck meat this year are forecast to rise to 12,000 tonnes (t), up about 8% over last year, with higher demand coming not only from Europe, but also Japan and China. The reasons, he says, have to do with circumstances outside our control: "In Germany, the Netherlands, Britain and Belgium, consumers are still worried about mad-cow disease, and this is the reason for more orders coming in for Thai duck meat. Japan, after the bird-flu virus hit China's poultry industry and the SARS epidemic earlier this year, have also turned to placing more orders for Thai duck meat. The same goes for China, where sanitation concerns are affecting local consumption." Though China is the world's largest producer, consumer and exporter of duck meat, it is also a major importer, and is definitely the "first" to suffer, with exports dropping and imports rising, as hygiene fears have become increasingly widespread.

Not so for Thailand, he says, where duck meat producers and exporters are experiencing unprecedented interest and orders. "I believe this reflects an important change in the whole agro-industry. We are no longer able to isolate ourselves from the rest of the world. What happens in Europe, Asia, Africa, North and South America, has an impact and influence on what we do, and if the year 2003 has taught us a lesson, it is definitely this," says Saroj.

Number three producer

Duck meat exports from Thailand have increased and it is number four with 9.6% of the market share in terms of the world's duck meat exporters, behind China (20.8%), Hungary (20.8%) and France (12%).



Consumer demand for duck meat is steadily rising in many parts of the world

When it comes to duck meat producers, Thailand is number three, behind both China and France, but ahead of Vietnam, USA, South Korea, Malaysia, UK, Germany and Hungary, with an estimated 3.36% share of the world's 3,300 metric tonnes (mt) of total duck meat production, far below China's 66.67% and not too far behind France's 7.15%.

Of Thailand's duck meat production, estimated at 111,000 t in 2003, up from 108,000 t the previous year, 12,000 t are exported and 97,000 t are consumed locally. The export price per unit for duck exports is now a high value item, says Saroj, adding that the future for Thailand's duck production and exports is very good. But, he readily admits, it didn't come easy; "Ducks are very difficult to raise because of climate conditions and they need water. They are definitely a 'high value product' more so than chicken. It is certainly a premium food."

Further export growth

In 1992, Thailand introduced further duck meat processing, adding ingredients and herbs before refreezing for export. By the year 2002, exports of frozen duck meat amounted to 8,934 mt while further processed duck meat totaled 2,189 mt. 2003 estimates are that exports of further processed duck meat will increase 53% to 4,000 mt, while exports of raw frozen duck meat will drop 67% to 8,000 mt.



Thailand has become one of the largest duck producers in the world.

Asian countries - led by Japan, Singapore, China, Hong Kong, South Korea and Malaysia, - are the biggest importers of frozen duck meat as compared to cooked duck meat, while further processed duck meat exports to Europe - Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, France, UK and Belgium - are definitely preferred.

Two companies, Charoen Pokphand's Bangkok Farm and Bangkok Ranch are Thailand's leading duck meat producers and exporters. A total of 3,770,602 kgs of duck meat were frozen and 1,426,080 kgs further processed, for the period from January-June 2003.

Estimates for the year 2003 place local consumption at 97.0 mt with exports of duck meat amounting to 12.0 mt, earning a total of 1,444 million Baht (1 million Baht = US\$ 25,325.00 approx). Looking to the future, Saroj, who is also vice president of Bangkok Farm, says; "I am sure that Thailand's duck business will be very positive, especially in Japan and the EU market, because we have already received increased orders for the remainder of the year 2003, and the forecast for 2004 is very good." ■