

# Turkey popularity increasing



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**Turkey production has a bright future in Morocco but improvements need to be made. Increasing consumer awareness about new products would encourage a regular market demand.**

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Turkey production is not new to Morocco. Reports indicate that turkeys were probably introduced to the country around the time that Columbus brought them to Europe from America.

Reports from the 1950's stated that the bronze turkey has always been a part of local backyard operations. Populations of nearly 245 to 380 thousand breeder hens were counted in the late 1970's by the Ministry of Agriculture. Until 1983, this traditional sector was the only provider of turkey meat to the population. Flocks of 10 to 20 hens were mostly fattened to feed the local growers in all regions of the country, with a particular concentration on the coastal plains where feed resources were abundant.

In the early eighties, "Betiboul" breeder flocks were imported from France to the Skikima station, where the Ministry of Agriculture initiated an extension pro-

gram aiming to show interested producers turkey rearing techniques and how to produce day-old poults. At that time, a few commercial flocks were raised but all the producers faced tremendous difficulties in selling the finished birds.

In 1997 a turning point was observed in turkey production; new private businesses were initiated, farms were regrouping and slaughtering plants and further processing units were increasing.

## Current infrastructure

Although still in the embryonic stage, the Moroccan turkey sector is currently as follows;

- 15 turkey poult importers. (Respectively 8 in 2001 and 6 in 2000.)
- 4 feed mills that produce commercial turkey feed (most others provide feed on special orders)
- one hatchery with a capacity of 657,000 poults/year
- six farms were counted in 1997 with a total yearly capacity of 880,000 birds.
- five slaughterhouses and 22 small cutting plans are currently processing turkey carcasses either on an exclusive basis or as a part their business. Most of the growers work closely with the cutting and further processing plants.

Current hatching capacity has been estimated at 75,000 eggs/week in the only existing hatchery having a breeder flock at this time. Imports of poults increased from 65 to 243 thousand respectively in 2000 and 2001. The two first months of 2003 registered imports of nearly 600,000 poults. All the poults are currently from France - BUT (T9) is the strain imported.

## Production

Although precise statistics are currently lacking, about 88,000 birds/year were grown in 1997 providing 704,000 tonnes of turkey meat. In 2000 - 3,000 tonnes were produced, 5,000 in 2001 and nearly 15,000 in 2002. As in the broiler production sector, traditional and industrial sectors coexist supplying respectively bronze and white turkeys.

Attracted by the apparent easy profits to be made, several broiler growers are raising flocks of turkeys on a trial basis at their existing facilities. The parts of about 4,000 turkeys are placed on the market daily to supply local industry as well as directly to the consumers.

Starting from a poult cost of about €1.25 and a rearing density of 6 birds per square meter, production costs have been reported to be around €1/kg. Males are kept until 120 days having roughly reached a weight of 12 to 13 kg whereas the female slaughter age runs at 90 days with a weight of 6.5 to 7.0 kg.

Feed efficiency in these straight run flocks is about 2.3 to 2.5 with a mortality rate of 5% and with a yield of 10 kg per bird.

## Feeding programs

Most of the feeding programs are based on five phases consisting of a starter diet (0-4 weeks) followed by two grower (5 to 8 and 9 to 12 weeks) and two finisher diets (13 to 15 weeks and over 16 weeks). All the feed is in granulated form. (Table 1)

The availability of fishmeal, vegetable oil and other ingredients encourages their utilization in turkey diets. All of the

# in Morocco



markets and in the villages.



A variety of new turkey products are being introduced to stimulate consumer interest.

feed used for turkey production is commercially made and no feed is mixed on farms.

## Disease

Three quarters of the diseases encountered are of infectious origin, 24% of metabolic origin of 4% of no specific causes. In the Casablanca area 85% of the diseases encountered were reported to be of respiratory origin. Other reported diseases were necrotic enteritis, colibacillosis, etc.

## Consumption

Although consumption levels seem to be very low – 0.24 kg/per/year in 1997 and 0.50 in 2002, turkey meat is not new to Moroccans, nor does it have any religious limitations social constraints.

Turkey has a tremendous potential for growth, especially now that a growing number of Moroccan are becoming more health conscious and are having a closer look at what they eat. Turkey meat has the image of a healthy and nutritious source of safe meat.

## Marketing

Backyard raised birds were traditionally sold at rural markets and in the villages. Intermediaries were supplying city shops with bronze turkeys which were in high demand particularly in the holy month of Ramadan and during religious holidays. Toms of about 5 kg and hens of 3 kg were sold at € 8 – 16 (10-20 USD) per bird on these occasions.

Now butchers and poultry shops purchase directly from farms or whole-

Table 1- Typical feeding programs for commercial turkeys in Morocco

Diet weeks	Starter 0-4	Grower 4-8	Finisher 8-12	13 Æ Slaughter
Metabolisable energy (kcal/kg)	2750	2900	3000	3100
Crude proteins (%)	27.5	25.0	23.0	20.0
Lysine (%)	1.75	1.65	1.30	1.20
Methionine (%)	0.75	0.62	0.52	0.52
Methionine + cystine (%)	1.10	1.02	0.88	0.80
Threonine (%)	1.08	0.95	0.85	0.78
Tryptophane (%)	0.36	0.32	0.27	0.22

salers to supply the consumers (hotels, schools, restaurants) and supermarkets.

A variety of turkey products are now available, from escalops to turkey ham and turkey kebabs to sausages.

New turkey products that look like “pork” but are halal are appreciated by a growing number of consumers. These value added products represent a new challenge to producers.

A new association of turkey producers was created to defend the interests of the growing number of turkey farmers in 2002. This new “umbrella” federation of associations has regrouped several poultry operators. Recent innovations by the Ministry of Agriculture were the establishment of new regulations for the import of poults and hatching eggs as well as the implementation of sanitary rulings for the production and commercialisation of poultry products.

There is a definite need for a professional information campaign about turkey products to stimulate consumption and increase the number of consumers.

## Looking to the future

Turkey production has a bright future in Morocco, but given the relatively high levels of investment required, only a few producers are expected to embark on this venture. Turkey producers must run professional operations in order to maintain or increase consumption levels. Large consumption groups such as schools, hotels and hospitals are expected to be the most important users. There is also tremendous room for growth at the fast food levels and this is progressively improving. Significant efforts must be made by the various operators in the turkey sector such as feed mills, technicians, veterinarians, equipment suppliers, etc., to develop knowledge of local turkey data. Extensive efforts must be implemented to prevent turkey diseases, adapt existing equipment, improve biosecurity measures, etc. Numerous producers are interested in making turkey meat a component of daily menus for Moroccans but substantial improvements need to be made in informing consumers about new products made from an old bird to encourage a regular supply of the market. ■