

Jarvis firm has plenty of chicks

By Larry Crandall
Staff Writer

JARVIS — Some 5 1/4 million chicks are hatched each year at Bray Chicks Ltd. on Highway 6 here but according to manager Jeff Dale "chicks are about the last thing you'll see when you visit a hatchery."

As soon as a batch of eggs hatch the chicks are taken out of the incubator, vaccinated and packed away in boxes for shipment. They may be sold locally or sent as far away as Tokyo or South America.

In fact, said Mr. Dale, chicks sent to Tokyo go CP Air and arrive sooner and usually in better shape than chicks sent by bus to Owen Sound or Welland.

The hatchery produces chicks to be raised for meat consumption. A large portion of the chicks end up in Kentucky Fried Chicken outlets, others in southern Ontario grocery stores.

Bray Chicks purchases eggs from area farmers and even owns its own farm near Nelles Corners, RR 2 Hagersville. Some eggs even come by truck all the way from the state of Georgia.

When the eggs arrive at the hatchery they can either be placed in the incubators right away or stored for up to 30 days, at the proper temperature. However, the longer they are stored, the lower the hatch rate will be.

It is also costly to store eggs. Said Mr. Dale, "if we hold them seven days we lose their value. Every day

you keep them they are worth a little bit less."

Bray can store up to about 20,000 eggs at one time but obviously prefers to keep that number down. In the incubators themselves, they can have almost 400,000 eggs at a time, and another 65,000 in the hatchery itself.

Because the operation is not set up to keep a large number of chicks running around for any length of time and for reasons of common sense, the operation is geared to produce a certain number of chicks on a given day to meet the orders they have taken.

Because it takes 21 days for the eggs to hatch, give or take a few hours, Mr. Dale can plan very carefully how many chicks to produce.

"Chicks don't hatch on Sunday," he said. Every other day they do, except Christmas and New Years Day. But no long weekends and shutting down for three days, the eggs in the incubator have to be tended, and new eggs started. Otherwise, three weeks after Christmas there would be a day without chicks.

The hatchery produces an average of about 105,000 chicks per week but not all eggs incubated hatch. In fact, the hatch rate Bray aims for is about 80%, though they don't quite reach that according to Mr. Dale.

Ten years ago, the hatch rate was acceptable if it was anything above 70% in

heavy meat breeds of chicks. The improvement in hatch rate and the increase that has also taken place in the rate of lay are the major improvements Mr. Dale has seen over the years.

Mr. Dale lives in Simcoe and bought Bray Chicks in partnership with Bill Tugby of Hamilton in 1962. The actual building itself used to be a bowling alley. Running the incubators to keep the eggs at a steady 99 1/4 degrees Fahrenheit

and in the proper conditions with respect to oxygen, carbon dioxide and humidity, requires heaters, insulation and fans. Most of the heat used is generated by the eggs themselves.

There are alarms to signal a breakdown of any equipment but once both the equipment and the alarm failed to operate properly, the eggs overheated and 10,000 were lost.

One batch brought up from Georgia came from a farm where the hens had been given shots of an anti-biotic but accidentally too much of the medication had been given to them. When the eggs hatched in Jarvis the hatch rate was alright "but the chicks just keeled over and died," said Mr. Dale.

Production of meat chickens is handled by a customers are mostly local producers and Brays delivery is more than 100 miles away because it takes too much time," said Mr. Dale.

The chicken business is expanding as the population grows, but per capita consumption of chicken has not significantly increased over the past couple of years. Canadians continue to eat more beef than chicken, and Americans eat more chicken per person than we do.

the market. Production has been very regular since the marketingboard took over," said Mr. Dale. "Sometimes I don't agree with them on a particular decision, but there hasn't been a bad time when producers couldn't pay their bills."

Chicks used to be marketed by mail order, but now go mostly to area growers by truck. Customers are mostly local producers and Brays delivery is more than 100 miles away because it takes too much time," said Mr. Dale.