Talking Turkey For More Than 60 Years: Iowa Turkey Federation and Iowa State University

Ed Adcock
This year Iowa turkey farmers are on track to raise a record 10.5 million birds. Overall, Iowa is ninth in turkey production and fifth in processing nationwide.

Iowa State University has been a partner with the industry from the beginning, according to Gretta Irwin, Iowa Turkey Federation executive director and home economist.

In 1941, W.R. Whitfield, an Iowa State poultry extension faculty member, wrote an article titled “WHY ORGANIZE? Growers Benefit by Group Action” in a publication of the Iowa Turkey Growers’ Association, the precursor of the Iowa Turkey Federation which was founded in 1948.

Several Iowa State faculty members currently do turkey research and actively interact with the federation and its members.

Darrell Trampel, Iowa State University Extension poultry veterinarian, provides educational presentations, diagnostic services, influenza surveillance and applied research for turkey farmers throughout the Midwest.

Mike Persia, assistant professor in animal science, works with the feed industry and farmers on nutrition related questions. Persia is the official Iowa State University liaison to the Iowa Turkey Federation.

Persia joined the faculty two years ago specializing in poultry nutrition. He says the close relationship between Iowa State, the federation and its members helped seal his decision to accept the position.

Since starting his work, Persia has been impressed by the talent and dedication displayed by turkey farmers.

“Having people here to talk to and ask how they are doing things keeps my research program up-to-date. The industry is moving very quickly, responding to input costs and adapting new technology to deal with day-to-day demands,” he says.

Irwin says Persia’s nutrition work is helping farmers. “Feed is the number one cost in raising turkeys, so managing feed costs is essential for profitability. Feed also plays a major role in keeping the turkeys healthy. You have to have safe and nutritious feed to raise healthy turkeys.”

The relationship built during Iowa State’s long-time involvement goes beyond research and extension.

“We bring a lot of students to turkey farms, exposing them to how farmers care for their turkeys,” Persia says. “I think we’ve worked very effectively together to promote an understanding of poultry production in our students.”

Irwin agrees attracting future members of the turkey industry is a benefit of collaborating. In this way the long-lived partnership between Iowa State University and the Iowa Turkey Federation is sustaining its future.