



Is Ground Turkey Something To Be Thankful For?

Are you having roast turkey with all the trimmings for Thanksgiving dinner? Millions of Americans are. But how about the rest of the year?

A group of Mizzou researchers is working to increase turkey consumption year-round, mainly through the use of ground turkey. The Bird Burger may challenge Big Mac yet!

Five grocery stores in Columbia are now selling ground turkey, and it's available in some stores in other parts of Missouri. Ground turkey made its debut in California more than a year ago. It was introduced in Columbia in June. Now one store reports that it sells a ton a week!

The advantages are numerous. In the first place, ground turkey is made from the dark meat on the thigh and drumstick. This meat was formerly surplus. The white breast meat is America's favorite and is used for turkey roasts, in TV dinners and in "boil in the bag dinners." Drumstick meat used to be hard to strip from the bone, but now there's a machine that can do it. Turkey producers are delighted to be able to make a profit on the part of the bird that formerly was useless.

And there are advantages to the consumer too. Ground turkey is higher in protein and lower (6 percent) in fat than hamburger. It's low in saturated fat (does not increase the cholesterol level in the blood). It's rich in the vitamins riboflavin and niacin. It's cheaper than ground beef

(69 to 79¢ a pound in Columbia). Dieters love it, because it's got only half the calories of hamburger.

Joseph Vandepopuliere and Walter Russell, College of Agriculture poultry scientists, have done some of the first consumer acceptance tests of ground turkey in the country.

They fried up some turkeyburgers and some hamburgers and fed one of each to about 200 supermarket shoppers, who said they liked the turkeyburgers as well as the hamburgers. Then the researchers gave 51 housewives 1½ pounds of ground turkey and two recipes and asked them to try a new dish for their family's supper. Turkeyloaf was popular, and nobody could tell when turkeyballs were substituted for meatballs in the spaghetti.

It's funny though: The supermarkets don't report any drop in hamburger sales so ground turkey isn't really competing with hamburger. Russell wonders if people are eating the turkey products rather than the more expensive "solid" cuts of meat, but he doesn't know for sure.

"We are competing for space in the human stomach," Russell says. "Americans eat only 8½ pounds of turkey a year but they eat 55 pounds of ground beef."

Professor Ruth Baldwin and instructor Bernice Korschgen of food science and nutrition in the College of Agriculture, have been doing taste tests on ground turkey extended with soybean product. About 40 paid student volunteers nibbled dishes made with 100 percent turkey and compared them with entrees made with 20, 30 and 40 percent soy extender.

When the dish was highly flavored, such as sweet and sour turkey, turkey chow mein, and turkeyloaf, the tasters didn't mind even 40 percent soy.

"It's a better product with 10 percent soy than 100 percent turkey," Russell says, "and the same is true of beef. There is less shrinkage and the consumer gets a wider variety of amino acids. You don't even know the soy is there."

Will ground turkey become popular nationwide? The researchers hope so. They've sent the research results to all turkey processors in the United States. The product is available in Minnesota and Iowa now. Russell has met with the people in charge of Missouri's school lunch program and with people from hospitals and nursing homes. Potential markets are large.

Missouri is fourth in the nation in turkey production. Last year Missourians grew 10.3 million birds. The Missouri Turkey Merchandising Council cooperated with the Mizzou Extension Division to produce a brochure of recipes, some of which were developed by Mrs. Korschgen. Many stores are giving the recipes away with a pound of ground turkey. The brochure is entitled "Try Ground Turkey Meat—You'll Love It!"

What does it taste like? Well, it doesn't taste like roast turkey. Some people say it's a little bit like pork. It tastes like. . . something new, and good.—*Anne Baber*