

The Commonwealth's Official Source for Population and Economic Statistics

November 18, 2005

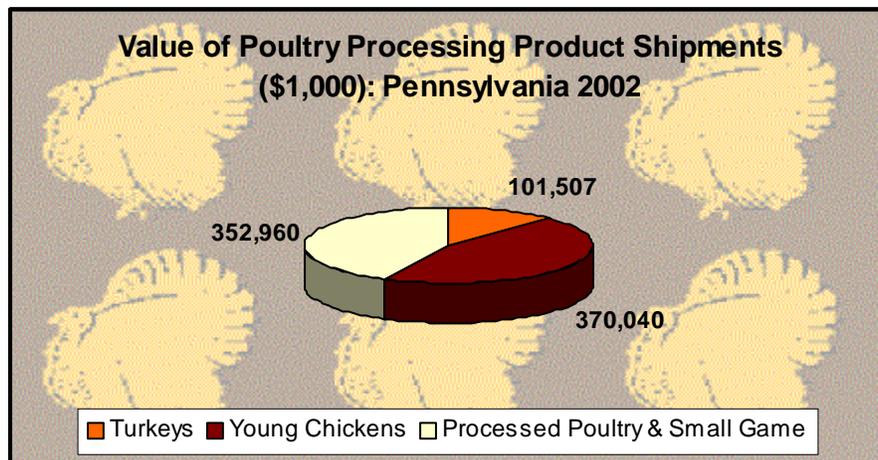
Thanksgiving Day –November 24, 2005

MIDDLETOWN, Pa –What many regard as the nation's first Thanksgiving took place in December 1621 when the religious separatist Pilgrims held a three-day feast to celebrate a bountiful harvest. The day did not become a national holiday until 1863 when President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday of November as a national day of thanksgiving. Later, President Franklin Roosevelt clarified that Thanksgiving should always be celebrated on the fourth Thursday of the month to encourage earlier holiday shopping, never on the occasional fifth Thursday.

Pennsylvania has contributed its share to the development of Thanksgiving tradition. The turkey, which has become the symbol of the holiday, was championed by Benjamin Franklin as an alternative to the eagle as national bird. In a letter to his daughter Franklin laid out his position: *"For my own part I wish the Bald Eagle had not been chosen the Representative of our Country. He is a Bird of bad moral Character ...too lazy to fish for himself ...the Turkey is in Comparison a much more respectable Bird, ...He is besides, though a little vain & silly, a Bird of Courage, and would not hesitate to attack a Grenadier of the British Guards who should presume to invade his Farm Yard with a red Coat on."* In recent history, Pennsylvania can lay claim to the nation's oldest Thanksgiving Day parade. Macy's parade may be the best known, but Gimbel's department store in Philadelphia began the tradition in 1920, four years before Macy's.

"Turkey and All the Fixins"

An estimated 10.8 million turkeys were raised in Pennsylvania this year, down 10.0 percent from

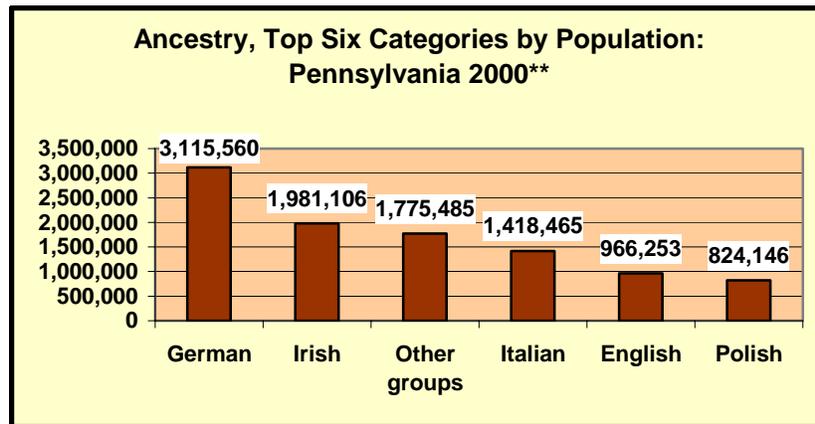


2004. In 2005, Pennsylvania ranked eighth in the nation and accounted for about 4 percent of the total turkeys raised. Minnesota was the nation's largest producer of turkeys, raising an estimated 44.5 million head. The turkeys produced in the commonwealth in 2004 weighed in at 234 million pounds and were valued at more than \$112,000,000, an increase of almost \$11,000,000 over 2003. The price per pound also rose by a penny during this period. In 2002, the value of Pennsylvania's turkey shipments totaled 101.5 million dollars. The commonwealth's poultry industry as a whole employs more than 5,000 people in 21 establishments across the state.

Pennsylvania is not a major grower of some traditional thanksgiving foods, like sweet potatoes and cranberries, but it does produce large quantities of other staples including sweet corn, wheat (the essential ingredient of breads, rolls, and pies), and a cooking necessity, butter. Pennsylvania farmers produced about 139 million pounds of sweet corn for the fresh market in 2004 and nearly 8,000 tons for processing. Sweet corn on the fresh market averaged \$22.10 per one hundred pounds in 2004, down from a peak of \$31.80 in 2002. Over 6.6 million bushels of wheat were produced in the commonwealth in 2004, a figure that has steadily declined over the last 3 years. Pennsylvania ranked third nationally in butter manufacturing in 2004, producing 60,327,000 pounds of butter.

A Pennsylvania Dutch Thanksgiving?

Though Pennsylvania has a proportionally small minority population, it is known for diverse ancestry among persons of European descent. Many of the traditions and foodways of these immigrant groups have been incorporated into today's Thanksgiving observances by their descendants. In 2000, more than 3 million Pennsylvanians reported being of German descent, by far the largest of any group. In fact, the three largest ancestral groups*, German, Irish, and Italian, outnumbered Pennsylvanians of English descent by more than six to one, accounting for 48.0 percent of the total ancestries tallied.



**For People with One or More Ancestry Categories Reported

Spending Time with the Family

In 2000, 4.8 million occupied housing units were reported in Pennsylvania, all potential gathering places for people to celebrate the holidays. However, it is likely that the 84,000 housing units that lack kitchen facilities won't be the site of Thanksgiving cooking. There are more than 3 million family households in the commonwealth, and the 2.7 million Pennsylvanians under the age of 18 in the commonwealth may have to sit at the "kiddie table." Had enough of the

relatives? Find an empty room to relax in: the median number of rooms in Pennsylvania housing units is 5.8.

“Hunting” for that Special Gift

Pennsylvanians will mark the week following Thanksgiving in two very different ways. Thanksgiving traditionally kicks off the holiday shopping season, and in the commonwealth, the more than 47,000 retail establishments employing some 659,000 people (2003) can look forward to a seasonal boost in sales.

The week following the holiday also marks the beginning of the statewide rifle-hunting season for antlered and antlerless deer, which takes place this year from November 28th through December 10. According to the Pennsylvania Game Commission, 1,013,866 hunting licenses were sold in 2004, down 0.4 percent from 2003. Deer harvests, which totaled 409,320 in 2004, have also declined, down by 20.9 percent since 2002.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2005 *Pennsylvania Abstract*, Pennsylvania Game Commission, The Franklin Institute Online

Notes: *Not including “other” ancestry.

The Pennsylvania State Data Center is the commonwealth’s official source for population and economic statistics. It is based at Penn State Harrisburg’s Institute of State and Regional Affairs. The Pennsylvania State Data Center is part of the U.S. Census Bureau’s National State Data Center Program.

Editors: For additional data, contact the Pennsylvania State Data Center’s State Capital Office at 717.772.2710 or for faculty comment on this topic, contact Penn State Harrisburg’s Public Information Office at 717.948.6029.