



Research Brief

The Commonwealth's Official Source for Population and Economic Statistics

November 20, 2009

Thanksgiving Day –November 26, 2009

PENN STATE HARRISBURG –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 11.5 million turkeys were raised in Pennsylvania in 2008, an increase of 4.5 percent from 2007. In 2008, Pennsylvania ranked ninth in the nation and accounted for about 4.2 percent of all turkeys raised. Minnesota was the nation's largest producer of turkeys, raising an estimated 48.0 million head. The turkeys produced in the commonwealth in 2008 weighed in at 216 million pounds and were valued at more than \$138 million, an increase of almost \$33 million over 2007. The price per pound rose by 12 cents during this period. The commonwealth's poultry processing industry as a whole employs more than 5,000 people in 19 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 124 million pounds of sweet corn for the fresh market in 2008. Sweet corn on the fresh market averaged \$35.40 per one hundred pounds in 2008, a high over the past 5 years. Over 11.8 million bushels of wheat were produced in the commonwealth in 2008, a figure that has increased over the last 3 years. In 2008, Pennsylvania ranked third in the nation in butter

manufacturing. The commonwealth produced approximately 77 million pounds of butter during the year.

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 2008, more than 2.5 million Pennsylvanians reported their first ancestry being of German descent, by far the largest of any group. In fact, the three largest ancestral groups*, German, Irish, and Italian, accounted for 41.2 percent of the total ancestries tallied.

Spending Time with the Family

In 2008, 4.9 million occupied housing units were reported in Pennsylvania, all potential gathering places for people to celebrate the holidays. There are more than 3.2 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 5.9.

"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 46,328 retail establishments employing 682,414 people (as of 2007) 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 30th through December 12th. According to the Pennsylvania Game Commission, 926,892 hunting licenses were issued in 2008; up slightly from 2007 when 924,448 licenses were issued. Deer harvests, which totaled 335,850 in 2008-09, have increased by approximately 4.0 percent since 2007-08.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2009 *Pennsylvania Abstract*, Pennsylvania Game Commission, The Franklin Institute Online

Notes: *Not including "other" ancestry or "unclassified."

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.