



Research Brief

The Commonwealth's Official Source for Population and Economic Statistics

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Thanksgiving Day – November 25, 2010

PENN STATE HARRISBURG – Thanksgiving Day is rooted in the tradition of the many harvest festivals celebrated throughout history. In the United States, Thanksgiving is popularly traced to a 1621 feast shared by English Pilgrims, who founded the Plymouth Colony, and members of the Wampanoag Native American tribe. The celebration gained greater prominence when President Abraham Lincoln, longing to unite the country during the Civil War, proclaimed a national day of Thanksgiving to be held in November 1863. In 1939, President Franklin Roosevelt declared that Thanksgiving should always be celebrated on the next to last Thursday of the month to encourage earlier holiday shopping. Two years later, Congress established an official federal holiday to be celebrated on the fourth Thursday in November.

Pennsylvania has made many notable contributions to the celebration of Thanksgiving in America. While meeting in the town of York, Pennsylvania in 1777, the Continental Congress issued the first national proclamation of Thanksgiving following the American victory at Saratoga. The proclamation urged all state executives to observe a day of appreciation. Pennsylvania is also home to the nation's oldest Thanksgiving Day parade. Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade may be the most famous, but Gimbel's department store in Philadelphia started the tradition in 1920, four years before Macy's. Over the past century, football has become synonymous with Thanksgiving, as annual "turkey day" games have gained popularity. The annual Thanksgiving Day contest between Easton High School in Pennsylvania and Phillipsburg High School just across the Delaware River in New Jersey is the oldest interstate "turkey day" game in the nation, dating back to 1916.

"Turkey and All the Fixin's"

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, an estimated 9 million turkeys were raised in Pennsylvania in 2009, down 2.5 million birds from the previous year (a 21.7 percent decline). Pennsylvania ranked eighth in the nation and accounted for about 3.6 percent of the total turkeys raised (see Figure 1.). North Carolina was the nation's largest producer of turkeys, raising an estimated 35.5 million head. The turkeys produced in the Commonwealth in 2009 weighed in at 181.8 million pounds and were valued at \$99,990,000, a decline of more than \$38 million compared to 2008. The price per pound rose substantially during this period (\$1.00 in 2009 compared to \$0.64 in 2008). The commonwealth's poultry processing industry as a whole employed 4,927 people in 22 establishments across the state in 2007, according to U.S. Census Bureau's 2007 Economic Census.

Where to Feast?

Pennsylvania is the perfect place to enjoy the big meal: Cranberry Township, Butler County and Cranberry Township, Venango County, which share the name of the popular Thanksgiving Day dish, were home to 27,560 and 6,774 residents respectively, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2009 Population Estimates. Plymouth Township, Montgomery County (16,415 residents), along with Plymouth Township (2,068) and Plymouth Borough (6,051), Luzerne County, evoke thoughts of Plymouth Rock, the fabled landing place of the first Pilgrims in 1620.

Figure 1. Turkey Production, 2009

Rank	State	Number Raised (thousands)
1	North Carolina	35,500
2	Arkansas	29,000
3	Missouri	18,500
4	Virginia	17,000
5	California	15,000
6	Indiana	15,000
7	South Carolina	11,900
8	Pennsylvania	9,000
9	Ohio	5,200
10	South Dakota	4,500

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture National Agriculture Statistics Service

Planes, Trains and Automobiles

The 1987 comedy film, *Planes, Trains and Automobiles*, chronicles a business man and his well-meaning, but accident prone travel companion's struggle to make it home in time for Thanksgiving. With any luck, Pennsylvanians navigating home for holidays will experience a much more pleasant trip. Holiday travelers heading to Pennsylvania have a number of travel options, including access to 15 commercial service airports. Travelers hoping to avoid long lines at the airport may opt for passenger rail service: Amtrak operates 11 long-distance and intercity passenger routes on four railroad corridors serving 24 stations across Pennsylvania. For those making trip by vehicle, there were 39,838.8 miles of highway under the jurisdiction of the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation on which to drive in the commonwealth in 2009.

Spending Time with the Family

The commonwealth's 5.5 million housing units rank it 5th among the states, according to U.S. Census Bureau's 2009 Population Estimates, and offer plenty of possible gathering places for people to celebrate the holiday. Many Pennsylvanians will enjoy the feast in the charm of an older house: 36.5 percent of all Pennsylvania homes were built prior to 1950, according to 2009 American Community Survey. Because the meal takes hours to prepare on only minutes to munch, the nearly 3.2 million family households in the commonwealth will have plenty time to relax and reconnect with one another. If all the family time becomes too overwhelming, Pennsylvanians can find an empty room to rest in: the median number of rooms in Pennsylvania housing units is 6.0.

Buck Fever: A Pennsylvania Tradition

The 277,264 people who moved to Pennsylvania from another state or abroad in 2009, according to the 2009 American Community Survey, maybe surprised by the excitement stirred up by the beginning of the statewide rifle-hunting season for antlered and antlerless deer, which takes place this year from November 29th through December 11. According to the Pennsylvania Game Commission, 948,323 hunting licenses were sold in 2009, an increase of 2.3 percent from 2008. Deer harvests, which totaled 308,920 for the 2009-2010 season, have declined, down by 8.0 percent from 2008-2009 season.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau Annual Population Estimates, 2009 Vintage; 2009 American Community Survey; 2007 Economic Census; U.S. Department of Agriculture National Agriculture Statistics Service 2009

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.

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