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# Larkins Poultry Turkey Grinder

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in the green*



**Canada** 

## Poultry processor finds innovative way to prevent good meat from going to waste

When it comes to finding local solutions to Canada's food waste problem, an Island poultry producer and processor is talking turkey.

Larkin Farms expects to save about 11,000 kilograms of turkey meat from ending up in the waste over the next year by using a machine that goes over hand-trimmed bones a second time to remove tougher-to-reach meat.

The company installed the MDM (mechanically deboned meat) grinder in its Crapaud processing plant earlier this year with support from PEI's Agriculture Research and Innovation Program under the federal-provincial Canadian Agricultural Partnership.



Larkin Farms Co-Owner Harvey Larkin says the MDM grinder is speeding up the company's plan to expand its value-added production.

Co-owner Harvey Larkin says the machine is doing more than just helping the company get more good meat from its turkeys. It is also moving up its expansion plans for its line of value-added products, which currently represents about 30 per cent of the business.

"It's amazing how much meat we can recover," says Plant Manager Lincoln Key. "We add some of this additional meat to our sausages and burgers, and we are working on some product development ideas and recipes for some new value-added products and snacks."

Larkin Farms raises approximately 13,000 turkeys annually for sale on the Island at its family farm

in New Glasgow. In 2018, it bought the Crapaud plant to butcher and process its own birds. They also offer a service to butcher and bag poultry for owners of backyard flocks around the Island.

In addition to selling its own poultry to retail outlets, restaurants and food service establishments on PEI, Larkin Farms also produces a line of products under its brand that includes sausages, burgers, kabobs, meatballs, pot pies, and ground turkey and chicken.

Larkin Farms uses only its own turkeys and chickens in its value-added products. The birds are raised in a cage-free environment, fed vegetarian diets, and are never given hormones, medications, or antibiotics.

"We believe that happy meals start with happy turkeys and chickens on the farm," says Co-Owner Rosemary Larkin.

She says it is this attention to quality that a business consultant zeroed in on when the company hired him two years ago to look at ways to tackle rising costs and increase business at the processing plant.

The consultant concluded that one of the best steps the company could take was to make sure it was recovering as much of that high-quality meat as possible during processing.

"He recommended the grinder and it's making a huge difference," she says.

The MDM grinder goes into action after the plant's workers have used their knives to cut the meat off turkeys destined for value-added processing. The bones are fed into the grinder, which uses an auger to push the bones through grinding plates.

The ground meat is then pushed through a stainless-steel plate with tiny holes just two hundredths of an inch wide.

“There is no way a bone fragment can ever get through with the meat,” says floor supervisor Jordan Liantzakis.

The hand-cut meat ends up in either the plant’s traditional grinder, which produces a hamburger-style grind, or in its German-built VEMAG machine, a high-volume processing machine that turns meat and seasoning into burgers, sausages, and meatballs.

Now, up to 20 percent of these value-added products include meat recovered from the MDM grinder.

Liantzakis says the equipment’s efficiency at getting extra meat from the turkeys enhances the efforts of the Larkin Foods’ line staff.

“All our staff are quite skilled with a knife in hand but certain parts of the bird carcass, like the neck, are too difficult and time consuming to really scrape the entire thing clean. The MDM machine allows us to be more cost-effective.



Larkin Farms Plant Manager Lincoln Key with the mechanically deboned meat (MDM) grinder that is helping the PEI poultry producer and processor get more meat from its turkeys and preventing it from going to waste.

“With the MDM, we are able to get back between 40 and 60 per cent of the raw material that goes into the machine. Before then, this meat was ending up in the waste, so it’s quite an asset.”

Key says it is not a case of automation taking jobs away from staff, which includes six full-time positions, up to a dozen part-time positions, and up to 30 more workers before the busy Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays.

“At no point is it about making our staff size smaller,” he says. “With labour shortages on PEI,

it’s hard enough finding people. This is about letting our staff work more efficiently.”

Harvey Larkin agrees.

“With the rising cost of things, we know it’s not going to get any easier, whether it’s next year or 10 years from now,” he says. “So, automation and new ideas are huge for us, from how we raise our birds to how everything is processed.

“Any time we can save somewhere or be more efficient, it’s very important.”

He says programs like PEI’s Agriculture Research and Innovation Program play a huge role in the company’s ability to adapt to changing market conditions.

“A couple of other people process birds on PEI, but they are not our size and they do not work year-round. We are vital to the poultry industry here, but we are also still a small business, especially when you compare us to other poultry operations across the country.

“Without programs like this to help us make changes, it would be harder to keep the doors open as costs rise.”

The idea that the grinder is contributing to the fight against food waste is a bonus, he adds.

During Food Waste Action Week in March 2022, Federal Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Marie-Claude Bibeau noted in a statement that Canada is wasting over half of its food supply during the stages of harvest, storage, processing, manufacturing, retail sales, food service, and at home.

“It feels great to know that we are keeping good meat out of the waste stream,” says Larkin.

Liantzakis says staff respect what the MDM grinder can do.

“They spend up to 40 hours a week deboning with a knife, and they have a good eye for the task,” he says. “They are pretty amazed and impressed to see what more can come off.”