

Providing Turkeys for

“The growers didn’t build Dakota Provisions for themselves, but for their grandchildren.”

by Brenda Kleinjan

THIS HOLIDAY SEASON, AMERICANS WILL GOBBLE up millions of pounds of turkey.

However, those quintessential turkeys gracing millions of holiday tables will not come from Dakota Provisions east of Huron, S.D.

“When people are thinking a turkey plant, they think of a turkey in a bag, but that’s not what we’re doing here,” said Rebecca Rodgers, the company’s sales and marketing manager.

In fact, many a home holiday cook would find preparing the 40-pound birds that journey through the company’s state-of-the-art plant a challenge. Face it: standing approximately 36-inches, a 40-

pound bird is one big critter.

Dakota Provisions has its sights set on the ready-to-eat market and on the raw tray pack and ground turkey markets. The ready-to-eat turkey products coming out of this eastern South Dakota plant are destined for deli counters and homes where speed and ease of preparation are essential.

The Dakota Provisions campus east of Huron, S.D., on U.S. Highway 14 is one of the newest commercial members of Dakota Energy Cooperative. In fact, it’s the only brand new turkey plant constructed in the U.S. in the last 20 years.

In addition to the 120,000-square foot production facility, the 112-acre campus boasts a



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12,000-square foot headquarters building.

Dakota Provisions is owned by 43 growers in a four-state region. Most of the growers are Hutterite colonies. The headquarters building is a showcase of South Dakota-made products. The colonies did much of the interior work from the desks and office furniture to the marble surfaces.

The plant features two sides: a raw side and a ready-to-eat side. The two sides are kept completely separate – separate air handling systems, separate employee groups and employee break rooms. The only way from one side to the other is through the plant's giant ovens.

In addition to the necessary processing and storage facilities at the plant, the plant has laboratories and kitchens which are used to conduct product research and provide quality assurance.



Above: Sliced turkey meat is among Dakota Provisions' succulent offerings. **Opposite:** Workers inside the state-of-the-art Dakota Provisions turkey processing plant near Huron, S.D., work with packaged meat. **Cover:** Thousands of turkeys come from Dakota Provisions' 43 growers who own the plant. The growers come from a four-state region within 300 miles of the processing facility. Photos courtesy Dakota Provisions

The entire facility is monitored by video camera which can be watched by meat inspectors, company officials and an outside auditing firm.

At the headquarters you'll find a smaller research and development kitchen where Dakota Provisions' nutritionist dabbles with recipes to meet its customers' demands.

One of the products recently developed is an eight-pound turkey roast that looks something like a ham when packaged. Its smaller cousin is about two pounds and looks like a cannon ball or hand grenade. The smaller roasts are currently being sold in California by one of Dakota Provisions' wholesale customers.

Turkey meat products from the plant find their way to New York City, Mexico, Asia and points in between.

Dakota Provisions has developed two labels to market its meat. One, its Prairie Grown brand, will be used as a co-pack label for its wholesale customers.

The second brand, the DP brand, will feature all natural and organic turkey when launched by 2010.

"Because the colonies have set themselves up separately, it's a perfect fit for them to go to the natural and organic stages," said Rodgers.

"The growers didn't build Dakota Provisions for themselves, but for their grandchildren," Rodgers said.

The facility has come a long way since it harvested its first birds in December 2005 when they processed 326 birds a day. By November 2006, the plant was processing 18,000 birds a day.

The on-site storage facility at the plant can hold 8 million pounds of cooked product.

By 2008, all the growers' contracts with outside processors will be complete and the plant will be able to ramp up its production.

Dakota Provisions currently employs more than 400 people. Officials anticipate that workforce will exceed 1,000 by 2011.

For more on Dakota Provisions, visit www.dakotaprovisions.com.

