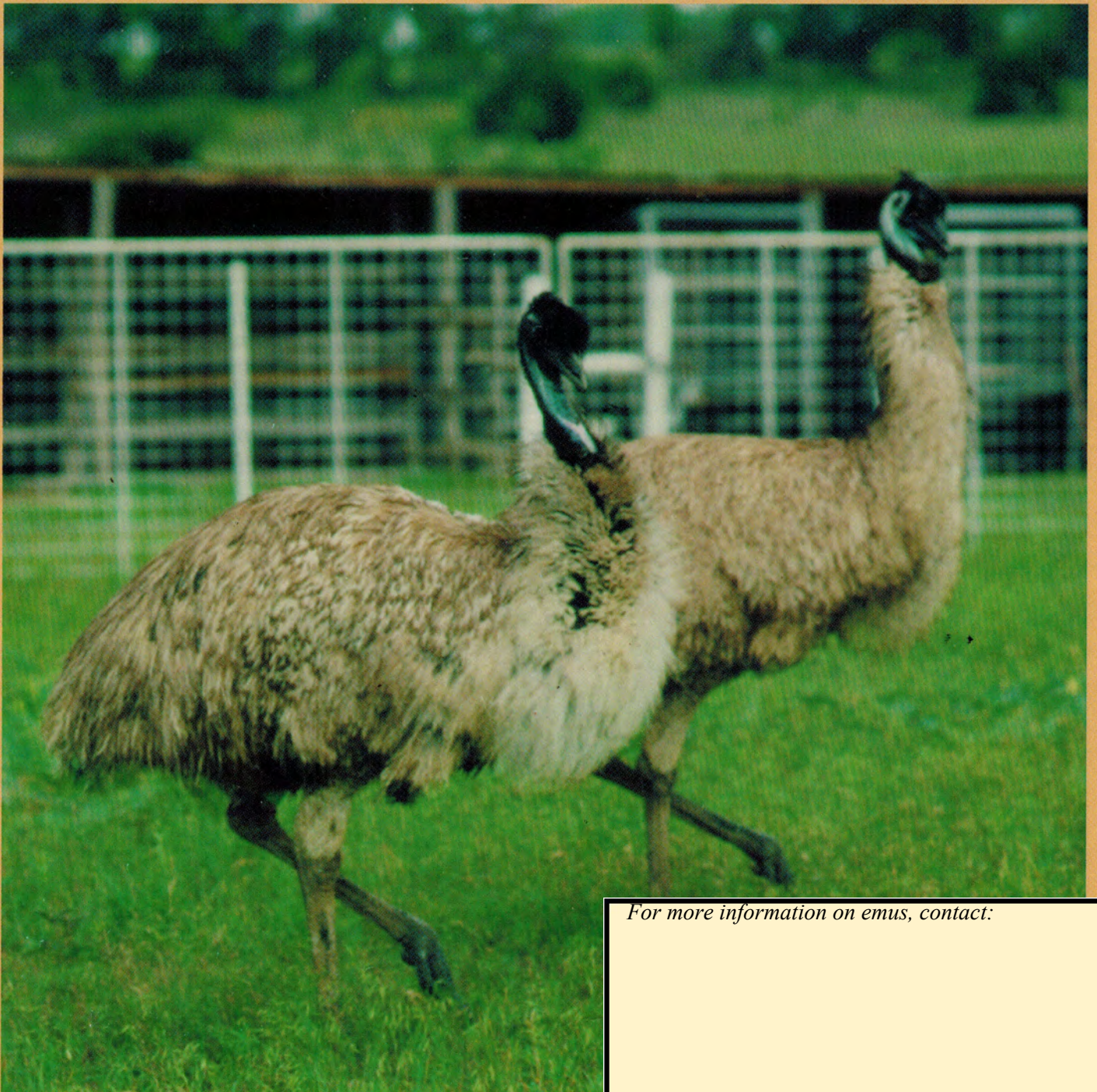


# *The Emu:* *An Evolving Agri-business*











*For more information on emus, contact:*

*Or contact—The American Emu Association  
<http://www.aea-emu.org> Ph: 541-332-0675*



## ***The Emu: An Evolving Agri-business***

During the late 1980's, a developing awareness of the viability of farming emu began to spread across the United States, owing its roots to a few visionary individuals. The attention was merited for several reasons, including:

-  preliminary research results on the oil derived from the bird which indicated a marketable, unique and versatile substance;
-  the growing number of anecdotal claims surrounding the use of this oil;
-  the low-fat, iron-packed red meat;
-  the marketability of both the delicately quilled patterns of the hide and the rugged texture of the leg leather;
-  the unusual, double quilled feather and its potential uses;
-  the large and exquisite dark green eggs from which beautiful works of art are carved;
-  the toenails, from which jewelry has been fashioned.
-  the small acreage land requirements.

Collectively, these factors and the appeal of an exciting and profitable new agri-business prompted unprecedented attention to this unique bird.

Cover photo courtesy Susan Gray

## ***Land Requirements***

Unlike other agricultural endeavors, emu farming today offers the rancher the opportunity to enter the business without high land costs. Emus can be raised on almost any type of terrain, from rattlesnake country to wooded hills to rocky land unusable for other purposes. Many operations today exist on as few as 5 acres.

## ***Facilities***

Rectangular pens are often used to accommodate breeding pairs of emus. This arrangement allows ample running room for the birds while providing efficient use of available land.

Structures needed include an incubation/hatcher room and brooder room for small chicks. Adults may be provided with outdoor sheds which serve a number of purposes, including protection from inclement weather, as shade, to protect feed from the elements, and as a nesting area for eggs. As with all livestock, adequate perimeter fencing is also required.

Equipment costs are minimal for a livestock operation. For an entire operation, from egg to market-ready bird, major equipment costs include feeders, waterers, incubators, and hatchers.

Feed is available commercially in pellet form and grazing can be used as a supplement.

Emu farming offers the agriculture-minded family the opportunity to be a part of an emerging industry which offers products unlike any on the market today.

## ***Markets***

Present and future market trends and conditions indicate significant opportunities for the emu and its diverse products. As farmable land continues to disappear to commercial developments and living space requirements, many nations are increasingly becoming hard-pressed to feed their own population. The emu offers an excellent solution as it can be raised on small or inhospitable acreages, providing a high protein, high iron red meat.

In the US, the trend toward healthier diets is also one that







favors what a recent Texas Tech study has confirmed — the emu offers a nutritious, low cholesterol, and delicious meat dish.

Excellent market potential also exists for the unique oil rendered from the bird's fat. Several published research studies have indicated that the oil has multi-faceted uses due to its unusual composition and properties. These uses include industrial, cosmetic, and pharmaceutical. This

new distinctive oil has spurred additional research in the private sector and through producer sponsored organizations as the race to identify and develop commercial applications for the oil continues.

The finely quilled hide produces an exquisite leather suitable for fashion wear and accessories. The leg leather offers a striking accent to leatherwear, producing a fashionably rugged image.

### **Information Sources**

Today, emu farmers have a wealth of information at their disposal concerning the raising and care of emus, including books, videos, and other literature. The American Emu Association is the foremost organization providing sources of information to emu producers. This active association maintains a structured network of regional and state affiliates nationwide, providing emu producers with easy access to fellow producers and industry information. Membership in this organization keeps the emu farmer current on issues directly affecting producers.

State agencies such as departments of agriculture offer various support programs for both incoming and existing emu producers. Loan programs, as well as domestic and international marketing assistance for those exploring new marketing options for emu products are also available. As a virtually untapped natural resource, the market paths for the emu's unique products are just beginning to be explored.

## **Commercial Emu Production Facts**



### **Colony Breeding Pens**

5 pair or 10 birds per acre

Average egg production –  
30 eggs per hen

Average hatch per hen –  
70% (20 chicks) = 100  
chicks produced per acre



### **Grow-out Pens**

40–50 chicks at 2 – 3 months of  
age per acre, depending on  
climate, terrain and soil type

80 – 100 lbs. weight per bird  
at 12–18 months of age

Average Product Yield

\* 25–30 lbs. of red,  
de-boned meat

\* 15–25 lbs. of fat yielding  
1–2 gallons of oil

\* 7–8 sq. ft. of leather

Feed Efficiency – 6 lbs.  
of feed per pound of live  
weight gain depending  
on feed & environment

Yield per acre – 3,000 –  
5,000 lbs. live weight



### **Summary**

A five acre farm would raise  
100 emu yearlings that could  
produce the following raw  
products:

\* Total live weight of  
8,000–10,000 lbs.

\* 2,500–3,000 lbs. of lean,  
red, de-boned meat

\* 1,500–2,500 lbs. of fat  
yielding 150–250  
gallons of oil

\* 700–1800 sq. ft. of hide



# The Bird

Emus are curious, generally docile, and easily handled by experienced ranchers. At hatch, they are approximately ten inches tall with black and white stripes. As three-month-old chicks, they turn nearly solid black and change into a mingled tan, brown and black color as adults, with some having a bluish neck. The mature emu is five to six feet tall and normally weighs approximately 90 to 120 pounds.



Emus adapt well from temperature extremes in excess of one hundred degrees to below zero. They are susceptible to few diseases and can exist on a simple diet. Emus require a lot of water, drinking as much as two to four gallons daily.

The emu hen can be productive for 20 years or more and can lay 20-50 eggs in a season. A hen usually lays as early as 13-18 months, but laying normally begins at 2 to 3 years. The emu lays large, green eggs during the winter months, normally between November and March.

The emu is a totally usable livestock. Processed mainly for its meat, hide, and oil, it is also used for its feathers, eggs and toenails.



## What To Know Before You Buy

- 1.) Have you visited farms and researched information on raising emus?
- 2.) Have you created a "PLAN" for how you will take care of your emus and pay for their feed and daily care?
- 3.) Do you have adequate land, water, buildings and locally available nutritious feed, plus the personal health and energy to care for emus? Have you checked your state and local zoning laws?
- 4.) Within 1 year that cute little chick will grow into a bird that will weigh over 75#s and will be able to stretch up and look over a 5 ft. fence. By 2 years it can weigh over 120#s and stretch to look over a 6 ft. fence. Do you have adequate fencing (6' chain link fencing or 2"x4" woven wire)? Emus can run up to 30 miles per hour. They cannot be left to "free range" in your yard.
- 5.) Emus are attracted to shiny objects like, eye glasses, buttons, earrings, watches and such. When pecking at these objects their serrated beaks can hurt and leave a bruise when they pinch the skin.
- 6.) When handling an emu, only work from behind. Emus have very powerful legs with sharp claws that can do a lot of damage to clothing and skin when they kick and flail while trying to get away.