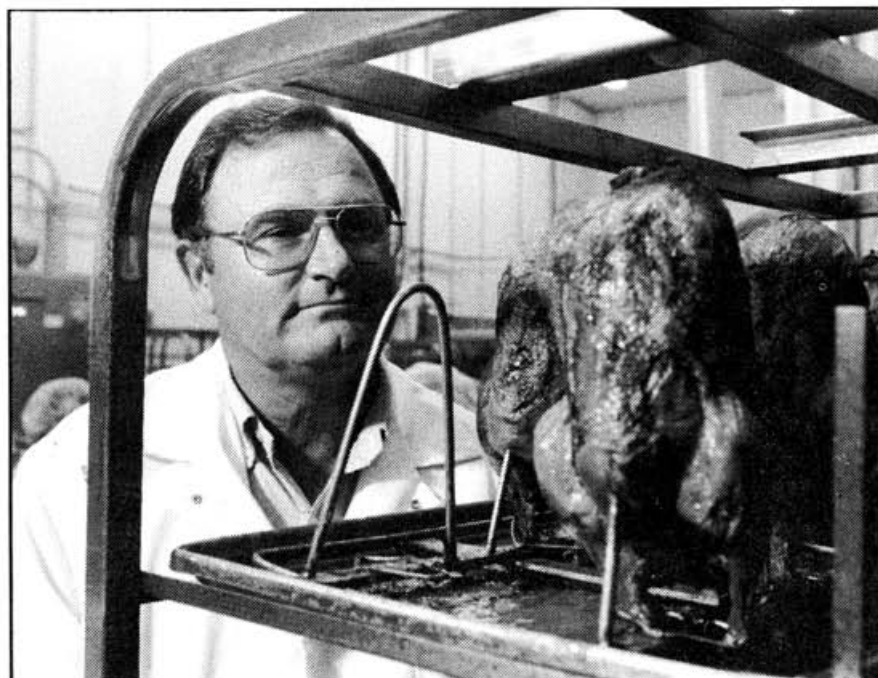


WHEN IN CHINA...

Alum advises students to keep an open mind



Hoosier Terry Tucker, BS '63, knows the eating habits of people around the world. He is president and CEO of Maple Leaf Farms, the nation's largest duck producer.

Michael M. Kerper

By Tracy S. Petersen

When in China, Terry Tucker, BS '63, does as the Chinese do: He eats duck feet. Tucker, who knows a lot about the eating habits of people all over the world, knows that while Americans enjoy chowing down on chicken wings, Chinese enjoy munching on duck feet and duck tongues.

"Over the years they've learned to eat everything," noted Tucker, president and chief executive officer of Maple Leaf Farms, the nation's largest producer of ducks, and Serenade Foods, the division that markets pre-cooked duck items. This year the company will produce about 12 million ducks.

Like many freshmen entering Purdue University's School of Agriculture, Tucker knew there was a good chance that he would join the family business upon graduation. What he didn't know was that the Milford, Ind. business was to become one of the state's 100 largest privately held companies, exporting duck products to countries as far away as Japan and Kuwait.

"Much of what we export is what we refer to as 'by-products,'" Tucker said. That includes feathers and down as well as the duck tongues and feet. Maple Leaf also exports liver to France for pate.

While only 10 percent of the company's total output is exported, in some years fully 20 percent of its income is derived from duck exports, Tucker said.

To be a successful exporter, you need to learn the customs, the habits and the business traditions of the people with whom you are doing business, Tucker said.

"You have to visit the country and develop relationships," he said. "The relationships with international customers can be closer and more dependable than in this country. The relationship is long-distance, and they are counting on us to

deliver the product."

Along with that goes learning how to deal with the red tape, the transportation problems and inspection certificates of international business. "There's a learning curve," Tucker said.

In the United States, Maple Leaf Farms and Serenade Foods market poultry products such as roast duck and Chicken Kiev to medium and upscale restaurants, hotels, country clubs and caterers. Maple Leaf Farms products also can be found in most retail outlets and military commissaries.

Tucker said the company employs 950 people in Indiana, Wisconsin, Ohio and Michigan. Maple Leaf Farms is vertically integrated, controlling the entire product from start to finish.

"We started out raising ducks and processing them," Tucker said. "Then we bought a hatchery and expanded to manufacturing our own feed and went into genetic improvement and then into prepared foods. As an opportunity and need arises, and you see how you can improve your business, you go for it."

In the future, Maple Leaf Farms will concentrate on improving its product, Tucker said. "They (the ducks) are going to look more meaty, like a chicken, if you will," he said. He added that the company faces tough competition from the Far East, with its cheaper labor and production costs.

Tucker, who majored in agricultural economics at Purdue, urges young people to travel and to keep an open mind.

"International travel is good for anyone," he said. "It helps all of us with our view of the world and with international relations.

"Don't get too narrow of an education, because you don't really know where you're going to end up. Prepare yourself to think and reason, and keep an open mind."