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For Pilgrim's Pride Egg Man, Easter Season Means Long Hours But Plenty of Smiles Too

Wayne Mooney and Pilgrim's Pride Dish Up 12 Million Eggs a Week

PITTSBURG, Texas, March 26 /PRNewswire-FirstCall/ -- Wayne Mooney may work for the world's largest chicken company, but this time of year, all he can think about is Easter egg hunts and lots of baskets filled with brightly colored works of art.

As vice president of egg sales and marketing for Pilgrim's Pride Corporation (NYSE: PPC), which produces about 528 million table eggs each year -- or enough to cover a football field 28 feet deep -- Mooney is charged with making sure the company keeps retail customers such as Wal-Mart, Kroger and Brookshire's stores well stocked during Easter.

In the three weeks leading up to Easter weekend, Pilgrim's Pride ramps up production to about 12 million eggs per week in response to demand that could exceed 150 percent of the normal weekly average. According to the American Egg Board, it's not uncommon for American consumers to scoop up more than 1 billion eggs in the week before Easter.

"When Easter season rolls around, we work overtime," said Mooney, who got his start in the egg business back in 1966. "We start early and get out late."

But egg companies haven't always been able to ramp up production that quickly. Improved technology, refrigeration and distribution networks have helped dramatically reduce the time from farm to market.

"Things are much different today than they were 40 years ago," he recalled. "Back then, egg companies built their inventories much earlier to meet demand for holidays. They would begin putting eggs in cold storage 60 to 120 days before Easter. Today, for the most part, an egg is laid today and is at market tomorrow."

Indeed, the eggs in your grocer's dairy case are fresher than ever. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) typically inspects and grades eggs the same day they are laid. The USDA specifies a 30-day window from the time the egg is graded until the time it must be gone from the store shelf.

"That's what the sell-by date on the carton means; it's 30 days from the day the egg was graded," Mooney explained. "But that doesn't mean you have to throw eggs away after that date. They are still good for 30 to 60 more days."

Time and temperature are the two main enemies of freshness, Mooney explained. To ensure that your eggs stay as fresh as possible, he recommends that consumers always leave the eggs in the carton while stored in the refrigerator.

"Eggs are porous. If you put them in the egg holder in the door of your refrigerator, they will begin to absorb odors. And if the humidity level in your refrigerator is not high enough, it will take humidity out of the eggs and hurt their quality," he said.

Egg Decorating Tips

Here are a few tips from Mooney and the American Egg Board to help consumers get ready for decorating Easter Eggs. Before you get started, decide if you want to eat the decorated eggs afterward. If you won't be eating the eggs, you can use any decorating materials you want and display the eggs anywhere for as long as you like. If you do want to eat the eggs, follow these rules:

- Wash your hands between all the steps of cooking, cooling, dyeing and decorating.
- Be sure that all the decorating materials you use are food safe.
- Keep the eggs refrigerated as much as possible. Put them back into the refrigerator whenever you're not working with them.
- Dye the eggs in water warmer than the eggs so they don't absorb the dye water.
- If you hide the decorated eggs, put them where they won't come into contact with pets, birds or lawn chemicals.

- After you've found all the hidden eggs, throw out any that have cracked or have been at room temperature for more than two hours. Eat uncracked, refrigerated hard-cooked eggs within a week of cooking them.

About Pilgrim's Pride Corporation

Pilgrim's Pride Corporation (NYSE: PPC) is the largest chicken company in the United States and Puerto Rico and the second-largest in Mexico. Pilgrim's Pride employs approximately 56,500 people and operates 37 chicken processing and 12 prepared-foods facilities, with major operations in Texas, Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Mexico and Puerto Rico as well as other facilities in Arizona, Iowa, Mississippi, Ohio and Utah.

Pilgrim's Pride products are sold to foodservice, retail and frozen entree customers. The Company's primary distribution is through retailers, foodservice distributors and restaurants throughout the United States and Puerto Rico and in the Northern and Central regions of Mexico. For more information, please visit <http://www.pilgrimspride.com> .

SOURCE Pilgrim's Pride Corporation

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