

Online Poultry Market Report

By Ski Meers

Bird Shipping: where we are and what can we do.

I have witnessed for several months a decline in the online market of adult bird sales, and to some extent this has bled to the day-old chick market as well. The primary reason for this decline is producers' inability to ship product to the buyer. As we all know, there are only two ways to get adult birds: express mail via the United States Postal Service, or driving to the seller and picking them up yourself. However, with more and more farms tightening their biosecurity, many farms are frowning on pick-ups.

To give you a better understanding of the picture, I called Murray McMurray, who is the chairman of Bird Shippers of America (<http://www.birdshippers.org/>). He advised me that we, as producers and purchasers, must tread lightly on this issue due to the fact that the United States Postal Service is the only game in town. He added that a new Bill, 2395, has been introduced in the Senate to help many of the poultry producers. Mr. McMurray also advised that while these issues are still in the Senate, many producers need to work with their local postmasters in a cooperative effort to get their products shipped.

I also spoke with Bob Anderson, Public Relations, U.S. Postal Service. Following are the questions and answers as they were emailed to me.

1. First, what advice or suggestions can the Postal Service offer to shippers to simplify the process?

Shippers must call their local Expedited Services Office (ESO) to arrange for mailings. For mailers who do not already know ESO phone numbers, the numbers will be posted shortly on usps.com, and are included now. Calls should be made ahead of time, especially if the shipper has several shipments to send the same day. Most ESOs allow mailers to call or fax a copy of their shipments the day before. Shippers should have all destination ZIP Codes available for the call. Mailers should not change or add destinations without first calling to confirm that transportation is available.

Shippers should plan ahead and should develop a working relationship with their local Expedited Services Specialist (ESS). Requesting approval for live shipments in advance avoids potential disappointment at the retail counter and allows time to consider options. It also gives the Postal Service time to see if an alternate origin can serve the shipper's needs and to confirm transportation availability. It can reduce the mailer's waiting time. The mailer should not wait until the last minute to call. The longer the mailer waits, the fewer options the Postal Service has for a shipment.

2. Are there recommended "best practices" shippers should follow, and are there common mistakes/errors shippers make in trying to schedule or enter mailings of live poultry?

Shippers should consult the Postal Service's Domestic Mail Manual (DMM). It explains acceptance requirements. Shippers must use correct mailing containers.

Mailers must not try to "sneak" live shipments through in regular boxes, because the box could be easily damaged and its contents injured or killed. For example, if the Postal Service does not know that a plain brown express mail box contains a queen bee and its attendants, the box may be handled like any other item that is not marked fragile or live. Or it could end up beneath other mail with large amounts of weight. The Postal Service certainly sympathizes for damage, injury and death. The mailer is not eligible to receive a claim payment, however, if the mail was not identified as containing live animals.

Mailers should protect the health of their animals by preparing them in advance for a 2- or 3-day transport. The Postal Service recommends that shippers mail early in the week, on Mondays or Tuesdays.



3. What can poultry shippers do to make life easier for the Postal Service and for themselves that they aren't already doing in compliance with the basic rules and regulations?

It would help if lives (live animal) shippers understood that the Postal Service is doing its best to accept, transport and deliver lives mail, but is subject to air carrier restrictions. If the Postal Service ever has to refuse a shipment because of weather or the unavailability of a flight, it would be helpful if mailers accept that the Postal Service does not control the airlines or Mother Nature. In those instances, if a mailer remains calm and patient, the ESS can try to work out a solution. The Postal Service wants lives business, but also wants to ensure that we can

provide timely service and protect the safety of the animals.

It would help if poultry shippers can be flexible. In many cases, routing birds is literally customized from origin to destination.

4. Is the Postal Service doing anything internally to help educate postmasters and acceptance personnel to make the application of the rules more uniform throughout the service?

The Postal Service has authorized the local Expedited Services Specialists (ESS) to conduct outreach to inform live animal mailers of advance notification procedures, practical limitations and acceptance options. By contacting ESOs directly, mailers can get clear, consistent, locally focused

information and acceptance instructions. ESOs coordinate lives acceptance with postmasters, retail units, and airport facilities. The Postal Service intends for ESOs to have their fingers on the pulse of all live shipping from within their districts. The ESOs can work personally with live animal shippers to help meet their needs.

A list of destinations to which there is available live animal transportation from different origins has been posted on the USPS internal website, and will be posted shortly on usps.com.

5. The lack of acceptance options offered to poultry growers sometimes means they have to drive great distances to deposit their shipments. The issues are often complicated by the availability of air transportation, varying points of deposit and practical limitations required to protect live animals during shipment. Can the Postal Service offer shippers any encouragement that their concerns are being heard and addressed?

The Postal Service is listening to lives mailers and is working to accept and transport lives mail. In general, the ESO makes every effort to accommodate the mailer's chosen point of deposit, but may direct a mailer to an acceptance point other than the mailer's preference, based on available transportation and, in the case of large-volume lives mailings, based on the capability of a retail site to handle large volumes. Because of the limited availability of transportation, the Postal Service must tailor acceptance procedures in order to reasonably believe that lives arrive at their destinations in a viable condition.

The Postal Service is conducting ongoing discussions with air carriers to include lives requirements. In addition, we are closely following the status of the bill introduced by



Above: Baby chick, breed unknown.

Market Averages for March and April 2006

Eggbid.com

Eggs	Bantam Breeds Eggs			Large Breeds Eggs		
	Lo	Avg	Hi	Lo	Avg	Hi
March	\$0.17	\$6.09	\$12.00	\$0.33	\$1.33	\$2.33
April	\$0.17	\$1.17	\$2.17	\$0.17	\$1.21	\$2.25

Prices reflect price per egg sold.

Chicks	Bantam Breeds Chicks			Large Breeds Chicks		
	Lo	Avg	Hi	Lo	Avg	Hi
March	\$1.29	\$1.65	\$2.00	\$1.29	\$1.58	\$1.87
April	\$2.00	\$2.00	\$2.00	\$1.29	\$1.29	\$1.29

Prices reflect price per chick sold.

Prices can be affected by several factors, such as breed, the producer's reputation, wants and needs of the buyer or the tenacity of the of the bidders involved. This can result in such anomalies as pairs finishing higher than trios.

Pairs and Trios	Bantam Pairs			Bantam Trios			Large Breed Pairs			Large Breed Trios		
	Lo	Avg	Hi	Lo	Avg	Hi	Lo	Avg	Hi	Lo	Avg	Hi
March	\$11.00	\$18.00	\$25.00	\$25.00	\$27.50	\$30.00	\$15.00	\$15.00	\$15.00	\$20.00	\$20.00	\$20.00
April	\$15.00	\$15.00	\$15.00	\$20.00	\$20.00	\$20.00	N/A	N/A	N/A	\$20.00	\$27.50	\$35.00

Prices reflect the prices paid for pairs and trios sold.

eBay®

Eggs	Bantam Breeds Eggs			Large Breeds Eggs		
	Lo	Avg	Hi	Lo	Avg	Hi
March	\$0.17	\$1.96	\$3.75	\$0.14	\$1.28	\$2.42
April	\$0.17	\$1.59	\$3.00	\$0.17	\$1.21	\$2.25

Prices reflect price per egg sold.

Senator Grassley of Iowa which, if it becomes law, could significantly improve the Postal Service's capability to transport live animals.

The Postal Service is a customer service-oriented organization and it continually strives to provide the best possible service. Through direct communication with mailers of live animals, ESSs develop mutual understanding. We strive to find ways to help each other.

For example, one of our ESSs, Barbara Nall in Sacramento California, said, "I am very biased

in our live shippers' favor because I have worked with them for so long and talk to some of them more than I do some of my children. No joke. They trust us with their livelihood and more. I understand what that means. You get a feeling for what you are being trusted with and the shippers who trust you. We have become part of their families. We know them by the sound of their voices, what they ship and when they ship. If our cheerful Tuesday chicken shipper from Modesto doesn't call we

wonder if he is OK. Or our shipper of beautiful black swans and peacocks, I recognize his voice and cheerful manner. He asks for me by name. They all know us by name; it means a lot."

Well, I hope this has helped in some way to clear up some of the questions you might have about shipping live birds.

