

Thanksgiving, but US Turkey Farmers Aren't Celebrating

From VOA Learning English, this is the Agriculture Report in Special English.

Thanksgiving Day is a national holiday that Americans celebrate on the fourth Thursday in November. This autumn festival is traditionally celebrated with family and friends over a big meal that takes hours to prepare.

The meal usually includes turkey served along with dishes like cranberries, sweet potatoes, green beans and pumpkin pie. The turkey is usually seasoned and roasted in an oven, but some people fry the bird in oil or cook it on a grill or in a smoker.

The National Turkey Federation estimates that Americans ate forty-six million birds for last year's holiday. The government expects turkey production to increase two percent this year. About two-thirds of the turkeys raised in the United States came from six states: Minnesota, North Carolina, Arkansas, Missouri, Virginia and Indiana.

Turkey is eaten all year, and Americans have been eating more of it over the years, though chicken, beef and pork are still more popular. Federation president Joel Brandenberger says twenty-twelve will not be as profitable for turkey farmers as the last two years were. Feed costs are up while turkey prices are about the same.

"Corn is our number one feed ingredient, and the drought has obviously increased the price of corn dramatically and, frankly, the fact that an ever-increasing amount of the corn crop is being diverted to ethanol production also has increased the cost of corn. So that's created some difficulty for the industry this year."

The Pilgrims' feast in sixteen twenty-one is often considered the nation's first Thanksgiving. The Pilgrims were early settlers of Plymouth Colony in what is now Massachusetts. They held a three-day feast to celebrate a good harvest. However, other European settlers in North America also held ceremonies of thanks. These included British colonists in Virginia in sixteen nineteen.

In eighteen sixty-three, during the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln declared the last Thursday of November as a national day of thanksgiving. In nineteen thirty-nine, as the Great Depression was ending, President Franklin Roosevelt established the holiday on the fourth Thursday. He did not want to shorten the Christmas holiday shopping season in years when November has a fifth Thursday.

The season traditionally begins with a busy shopping day on the Friday after Thanksgiving, although some stores are now opening on the holiday itself.

One of America's founders, Ben Franklin, thought the turkey would better represent the country as its official bird than the bald eagle. But Joel Brandenberger disagrees.

"I think we're better off having the bald eagle on our coins and the Thanksgiving turkey on our dinner table."