Kenneth Soileau: ‘My goal is to one day have an emu farm’

By BERNICE ARDOIN
Family Focus Editor

Last year at this time Kenneth Soileau, of the Faubourg community, had never heard of emu. One year later, he is raising the large, ostrich-like, flightless birds.

Kenneth purchased two emus in August this year. "There's money to be made in raising and selling them," he explained his reason for purchasing the two birds.

"I had never heard of these birds before," Kenneth admitted. "Until I read an ad in the Lafayette paper about a man in Maurice owning some. I contacted the emu farmer to get more information. I'll never forget I asked him "what's that?" he said grinning.

Contacting the man in Maurice was only the beginning of Kenneth and his wife, Fonda's, search for information on emu. "He told us of a man in Groverton, Texas that he purchased his from," Kenneth explained. This information prompted Kenneth and his wife to make several trips to Texas to research what they hoped to one day raise on their small country farm. "We went to Texas six times," he related. Dr. Bailey, a professor of poultry science at Texas A&M, helped the Soileaus collect information on emu. Dr. Tully at LSU in Baton Rouge also provided them with details on the large birds.

Kenneth and Fonda and their son, Corey, and daughter, Angel, soon visited Phillip Minnaar in Groverton, Texas. This was the man they purchased the soon-to-be three-year-old emus from. "He has about 300 birds on his farm," Kenneth added. "You can select the birds you want."

When emus are born, they are approximately six inches tall and have a lot of white stripes, Kenneth related. They are the second largest birds, next to an ostrich. They have three large toes on each foot and a very long, skinny neck. They have small wings and cannot fly. They make no noise and they have no tongue, he continued.

The meat is edible and according to Kenneth, it tastes great grilled or in a sauce. "It tastes like beef meat," Kenneth grinned. "It's good," he boasted.

The feathers on an emu can be used to make costumes, dusters, etc. "There's two feathers in a quilt.

"You can also use the hide to make boots and other goods," he noted.

Kenneth also explained that each bird has five liters of oil in their fat. "This oil is used in cosmetics," Kenneth said. "It's also being tested in certain medicines. Their toenails can be used to make costume jewelry."

Emu eat a certain type of feed that the local feed store orders for Kenneth. "It's similar to chicken feed," Kenneth said. "Except it has more calcium."

Even emu egg shells can be sold. "Some companies make designs and decorate the large eggs. They're a bright turquoise green. They're beautiful," he stressed. During their laying season, emus lay an egg about every three days or about 20-40 eggs per laying season which normally runs six months.

Kenneth has just purchased an incubator to keep his emu eggs in once the birds begin laying. After about 48-56 days, the egg will hatch.

(See Kenneth Soileau - Page 2A)
Kenneth Soileau

“There’s a breeder’s market right now,” Kenneth emphasized. “They’re trying to get enough people to raise these birds so a slaughter house can be opened in Texas.”

The Faubourg resident keeps updated with the latest news on emus by subscribing to “Emu Today,” a monthly magazine. Through his magazine, he learned of legislation recently passed to get emu into state as an industry.

The Australian birds are classified as ratite. When full grown, they weigh between 120-150 pounds and stand six feet tall. They have a brownish-gray color and eat about one pound of food each day. “That’s not a lot,” Kenneth stressed. “It only costs about $100 per year to feed each bird.

“They’re life expectancy is about 25 years,” Kenneth related.

“I’ve always wanted to find an animal that I could raise without a lot of expenses and not a lot of work involved.

“I hope one day to have an emu farm. That’s certainly my goal,” Kenneth concluded.

Help Needed
Volunteer workers are needed to participate in the after school Free Tutoring Program being held at Disciples Baptist Church. The program is sponsored by the Lafayette Catholic Diocese. For more information, call 363-1488.

Board of Directors
The regular monthly meeting of the Farm Bureau Board of Directors will be held in the Farm Bureau Office on Monday, November 4, at 6:30 p.m.

From P-1A

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