

International reign for the ‘King of Duck’?

China is naturally seen as the home of ducks and Hua Ying Group is the largest duck producer in that country, producing over 40 million day old Cherry Valley ducklings and processing over 30 million of these in its own processing facilities.

In fact the Hua Ying Group is the world’s largest duck producing company as most of its production goes on to its own farms plus 700 or so contract growing farms that supply ducks to the company’s four processing plants. A fifth is under construction. For this reason the company calls itself ‘The King of Duck in the World’.



Recently, International Hatchery Practice visited the company and, in particular, looked at its breeding activities at Huangchuan in Henan Province, which



One of Hua Ying’s grandparent farms.

is some 300km north of Wuhan in central China.

The Hua Ying Group’s origins go back to 1991, but their breeding activities are focused in Sino-British Joint Venture Hua Ying Grandparent Stock Duckling Co Ltd that was established in 1997.

Today, that company has some 20,000 Cherry Valley SM3 grandparents and produces 750,000 SM3 parent stock females and accompanying males per year.

Every three to four months the company imports grandparent male and female line packages from Cherry Valley’s elite breeding operation in England and these are placed in a quarantine brooder farm where they spend their first few weeks under the close

supervision of Chinese government veterinarians.

At the end of the quarantine period, and subject to official clearance, each grandparent shipment is released and moved into the grandparent breeder complex.

A double environment

Here there are 21 houses, 17 situated on the ‘old farm’ and four on the ‘new farm’ totalling some 7000m² of accommodation.

Typically, five ages of grandparent are present at any one time and each house is divided into sections that allow ducks

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Grandparent ducks have access to an external environment and, right, the staff accommodation.





Above left, the grandparent hatchery and, above and right, grandparent farms.

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access to both inside and outside environments.

The eggs from the grandparent flocks on the grandparent farm all go into a dedicated 'grandparent hatchery' that is located on the grandparent farm. This hatchery produces all the day old parent stock ducklings.

Dedicated hatchery

These day olds then go on to the company owned commercial breeding farms that have, in total, some 130 breeder houses on five farms.

Each farm has a dedicated hatchery for the production of commercial SM3 ducklings.

Typically, the commercial breeders come into lay at 24 weeks of age having experienced a livability of over 98% in rearing.

The normal laying period is for 48-50 weeks with the breeder flocks being depopulated at 72-74 weeks of age, having produced some 280 hatching eggs per duck housed.

The general health status of the flocks is good and the breeders are currently only vaccinated against avian influenza with a killed product.

Dedicated staff

Each breeder house has its own staff, all of whom live on the site and some of whom overnight in the house with the ducks – ensuring 24 hour supervision of the birds.

The company's own veterinarians and comprehensive laboratory facilities keep a regular check on the health status of all their ducks.

Eggs are collected regularly and are washed and have the cuticles removed on farm with hypochlorite before being



transferred to the appropriate hatchery in the company.

We visited one of the commercial hatcheries which was in fact the largest of the hatcheries in the Group.

It contained 115 setters of local manufacture, each of which held 12,000 eggs.

These incubators are of typical Chinese design and construction and the hatchery staff were quite adamant that the quality of the ducklings was improved by removing the trolley of eggs from the machines for 10-15 minutes each day to allow them to temporarily 'cool off' as they feel that this improves duckling vitality.

Good hatchability

After 26 days of incubation eggs are transferred to hatchers which are of a similar local manufacture.

The hatchery we visited had an annual
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Setter doors are left open for a while each day for a 'cool off' period.





The parent stock hatchery.



The impressive setter room and, below, the Chinese recording system.



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average hatchability of 81-82% with the hatchability being slightly higher in the cooler, winter months and then marginally depressed in the hotter summer months.

Quality from the start

So, what about quality? This starts back at the breeder farm where all eggs are graded. Eggs are only removed if they fail to meet size or hygiene criteria.

A second grading process then occurs

at the hatchery. Quality continues with the day old ducklings which are thoroughly screened before they leave the hatchery.

However, quality does not stop there as it goes all the way through the system to the further processing and cooking divisions.

The Chinese poultry sector is, in international terms, on the 'springboard'. Time will tell when, not if, the Chinese become major poultry product exporters. From what we saw, Hua Ying Group should be in the first wave. ■

