

New GP broiler complex keeps pace with Hubbard growth in UK

Ken Randall was given a rare tour of a new grandparent farm in Lincolnshire

Over the past six months, a new grandparent farm complex for one of the world's major chicken breeding companies has been taking shape in rural Lincolnshire.

Hubbard has taken a step further into the UK market with two new grandparent breeder farms and a supporting rearing unit. With a dedicated hatchery at Fulletby in the same county, Hubbard is gearing up for a significant share of the UK broiler market.

The current developments began when the first grandparent facilities were set up in East Anglia in 2006, in response to the AI outbreak in France, and to reassure the UK and other customers that they would continue to be supplied.

Until about six years ago, Hubbard had been out of the mainstream UK market for some time. Before the takeover by Groupe Grimaud, the company was a relatively small division of a big pharmaceutical company, explains senior technician Nick Lynn.

"We are very serious about developing our market share in the UK,



This single production unit can supply 10% of the UK market.

and Hubbard is here to stay.

"The investment in people, buildings and the hatchery is proof of our commitment."

It is a reflection of the company's success in breaking back into the UK market, a process driven by experienced breeder Jim Hunnoble, that Hubbard claims to be the second largest broiler breeder supplier into the UK market. In general, one in every five broilers in the UK is today a Hubbard broiler.

When it comes to the speciality sector (organic, free-range and Freedom Food) almost all are Hubbard chickens, says Mr Lynn.



Four different genetic lines all arrive on the same lorry.

"As part of Groupe Grimaud, we have one of the widest ranges of genetics available to any breeding company. Our approach has been to say to customers 'OK, what do you want the birds to do?'. Our task is to find a genetic solution to fit the product requirements."

For the latest stage in its UK expansion programme, Hubbard contracted the existing units of Lincolnshire farmer John Ward and the completely renovated houses are now fully operational.

"The new facilities here have increased production by 50%," said Mr Lynn. "It's also much easier to collect eggs from here. They can go straight into the hatchery twice a week."

The staff facilities with their existing biosecurity arrangements were retained, while the breeder houses were completely refurbished and fitted out with new equipment supplied and installed by Vencomatic UK.

Mr Ward paid for the equipping and updating of the sheds – more than £500,000 – and leases them to Hubbard on a long-term contract. In addition to taking on the three farms, Hubbard has chosen to put the people directly onto its payroll.

Biosecurity procedures are stringent

and require everyone entering the buildings to take a hot shower.

All personal clothes (including underwear) are left in the "outside" changing room and fresh clothes are donned in the "inside" changing room when the worker has passed through the shower.

No "inside" clothes ever leave the unit and these are laundered in a washing machine within the secure accommodation. Once the people are in for the day they tend to stay there.

The staff, who until recently were accustomed to keeping ducks, have been learning fast about managing broiler grandparent stock. →p42

It's been a steep learning curve. Getting eggs out of the female line is easy, but managing the male line is much more difficult, says James Clark.



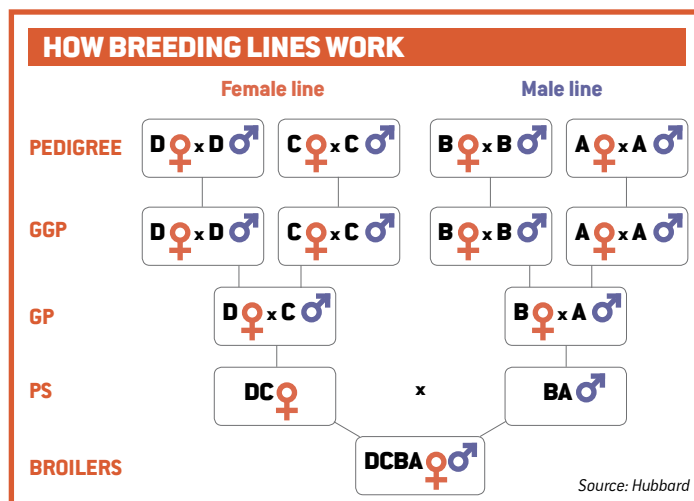
James Clark, who manages the production unit at Scampton, has got the toughest job of all.

The male line production flock, with the A males and B females, is notoriously harder to manage. "It's been a steep learning curve," admitted Mr Clark. "Getting eggs out of the female line is easy, but managing the male line is much more difficult."

The key to opening up the UK market has been the Hubbard Flex broiler, explains Mr Lynn. The arrival of the Flex has allowed Hubbard to offer a bird which more closely meets the needs of the UK market, with its need for mid-range finished weights, he says. It occupies the middle ground between the "Classic" bird, with a high output of saleable chicks and efficient growth in the broilers, and the Yield, which majors on production of deboned meat.

"The Flex suits markets like the UK, requiring lowest live cost (chicks, FCR, liveability) with good conformation and the flexibility to be used for a wide range of bodyweights.

"It entered the UK market about six years ago and it has proven to give our customers enormous advantages in animal welfare traits such as active behaviour, very low levels of hock burn and footpad lesions, in



combination with very competitive technical results in the broiler house and the processing plant.

"The quality of the litter in the broiler houses is remarkably good and dry, resulting in much less need to re-litter the houses or to use antibiotics. Therefore additional costs are lower than most broiler managers are used to, and there is also less additional labour needed to produce a good quality final product."

More recently there has been an increased interest in the mini version of the Flex, the Hubbard F15.

This bird offers the same advan-

tages as the Hubbard Flex, and as the Hubbard F15 is a "mini"-type breeder female it produces the maximum number of chicks per square meter with the lowest amount of feed per chick produced.

For the speciality market, the Hubbard JA57 PS female has proved to be a popular choice for the different alternative markets in the UK, whether Freedom Food, 56-free range, 81-day free range or organic.

"Since 2008 we have also introduced a new product called the JA87, which answers to the changes in consumption patterns and offers

“Our approach has been to say to customers, ‘OK, what do you want the birds to do?’”

NICK LYNN

a real balance between economic growing of alternative chickens, and the demand for conformation and meat quality, in combination with very good welfare traits.

"This new product fills the gap between the standard broiler and the 56-day free range chicken, and – like the JA57 – complies with the Freedom Food standards.

"Even though the economy has slowed down, overall we can still say that the speciality chicken market has seen a tremendous growth over the last few years and is expected to continue to grow in the future."

PRODUCING CHICKS

Anatomy of a grandparent unit

It is easy to see why breeding companies like to spread the risk. The numbers are impressive and somewhat sobering in their implications.

The grandparent production unit at Scampton keeps about 12,000 D-line females. Each of these can be expected to produce about 50 parent female chicks, so the unit output is about 600,000 females a year.

When those females go on the broiler breeder units, they will produce some 125 commercial broilers.

So one GP production unit in Lincolnshire is responsible for 75m day-old broilers. That's about 10% of the UK market. And there is another Hubbard GP unit the same size in Lincolnshire, and a smaller one in Cambridgeshire.

The hatchery at Fulletby hatches a total of 1.5m parent females a year, which will be the source of almost 200m day-old commercials.

These D-line females are accom-

panied by some 10% C-line males to fertilise the eggs.

At Scampton there are two sheds, and one half of one shed is kept apart for the male line flock, which will produce the breeder male chicks for the broiler breeder farms. These birds feature the A-line males and B-line females.

The rearing unit at nearby Welton Cliff is an even more complex operation. Four separate genetic strains have to be reared to the same age in complete physical separation from one another.

All the chicks arrive on the same day on the same lorry from France in clearly marked cartons, and it is essential to make sure nothing becomes mixed up, either on day one or later. Once the birds arrive in the sheds the doors are shut and remain shut.

Before moving onto the production unit, the males undergo a final manual selection for conformation by farm manager Kevin Lawrence

and chicken management consultant Terry Bolam, who handle every bird individually.

Mr Bolam has been in the industry all his life and says, "Each grandparent male provides 50% of the genetics in the parent male or female and 25% of the genetics in the broiler – so it is important to use only the healthiest birds. At this stage of the breeding process we don't want any that are below par."

All the males that pass the tests are then copiously spray marked – different colours for the A and C male pens – which means that any sexing errors among the females can easily be spotted on the production farm.

Genetic security is a fundamental part of the quality control and many of the procedures in place centre on ensuring that everything is precisely identified at all stages of rearing and laying and then on into the hatchery.

Customers need to be confident that what they are buying "will do what it says on the tin".

Rearing unit manager Kevin Lawrence is responsible for genetic security.

