



Soapbox **Eddie Hegarty**

Goose regains seasonal appeal

Geese are a growing market, and there is plenty of advice on hand

■ A few years ago there was little demand for goose eggs other than for decorating. Schoolchildren would come up with some wonderful ideas competing for the best painted egg... but that was before the computer and the internet, which have consumed the interests of so many youngsters to the detriment of many traditional pastimes.

Nowadays you are more likely to find goose eggs for sale in farm shops, delicatessens and even supermarkets. The cult of television food programmes and celebrity chefs – all seeking something different – has widened the interest of consumers. An egg is no longer just an egg and, if it's laid by a duck or a goose, it has novelty appeal, too.

In reality there is a greater demand for goose eggs than producers can supply. Few set out to provide just goose eggs, and the

Christmas goose producers who keep a few females back – assuming they can tell geese from ganders – can't meet the demand.

Yet this revival of goose eggs is only one part of the story. The goose that all but disappeared from the festive dinner table a generation ago is now in fine fettle. The demand for something different, that's truly seasonal and traditional for Christmas, has been steadily growing.

Every year at Norfolk Geese we get new inquiries from people seeking to start producing. Some may be already rearing bronze turkeys, others are looking for a new venture on a limited acreage. Often they are keen to begin with a few hundred – but we advise them to look to their market first and start with perhaps 40 or 50, particularly if they have no experience of plucking and processing.

Perhaps the best advice is to join the British Goose Producers. My



father-in-law, John Adlard, had the foresight to see that, without an organisation to promote the product, there wouldn't be a goose industry. He devoted much of his time to helping producers succeed, always welcoming them to our Chestnut Farm to show them how the job should be done – a policy we continue today.

But there's no better place to learn about producing geese than the annual BGP farm walk. It's a place where you can talk geese in

every sense of the word – whether for Christmas or Michaelmas, for eggs, or the fat that has become a favourite with many chefs and retailers. Even the down and feathers are in keen demand for the best pillows and duvets.

Make no mistake, the goose is regaining its seasonal appeal in all its guises.

Eddie Hegarty is vice-president of British Goose Producers