



Ostrich and Emu

Interesting Facts

Ostrich is a low-fat, low cholesterol red meat similar in taste to beef. A full grown male ostrich can easily reach heights exceeding 2.4m (8 feet) and weigh in excess of 135kg (300 lbs). Emu adult females boom like a drum and males grunt. In the wild the male emu sits on the eggs and raises the chicks.

What are ostrich and emu?

Ostrich and emu are both large, swift-running, flightless birds. Ostrich are native to Africa and emu come from Australia. Ostrich are 2.5m tall, weigh 160 to 200kg and can run 65km/h. Adult emu stands 1.8m and weighs 70kg.

Where are ostrich and emu produced in BC?

Ostrich and emu farms in BC are in the Okanagan Valley, the Lower Mainland and on Vancouver Island.

How much ostrich and emu do we produce?

Production is low, as this is a new enterprise. In Canada, ostrich and emu are raised for therapeutic oil, leather and meat. Secondary products are feathers and eggs. An average emu can yield approximately 14kg of meat and 6 to 10 litres of oil. The fat on the bird is stored in a pad on it's back which is rendered into oil. The meat itself is very low in fat and high in iron. Hides are shipped to the United States. Secondary products are feathers and eggs.

How are ostrich and emu produced?

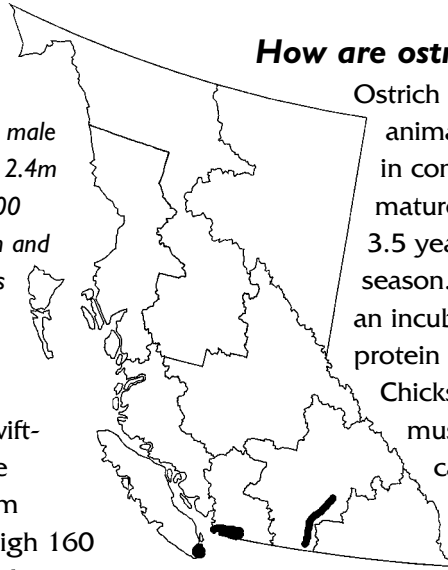
Ostrich and emu are both specialty livestock animals. They can, however, be raised in conventional barns. An ostrich hen is mature at 2.5 years and a male at 3 to 3.5 years. A hen will lay about 50 eggs a season. It takes 42 days to hatch an egg in an incubator. Young ostrich are fed a high-protein feed. They can grow 30cm a month. Chicks are susceptible to pneumonia and must be kept warm, fed and dry. Birds can live up to 70 years and produce eggs for 40 of those years.

Hens lay the eggs while the male makes the nest, incubates the eggs and raises the chicks after they hatch. Each egg weighs about 700g and are dark green in colour with a pebbled surface. By comparison, a large chicken egg weighs about 56g. Eggs are incubated for 48 to 54 days.

Each ostrich requires 0.12ha of relatively flat land. The area needs to be flat to minimize the risk of the birds tripping and injuring themselves.

These birds will eat anything shiny, like nails or buttons on clothing. Fencing should be made with a woven wire, approximately 1.6m high. Adults are capable of protecting themselves from coyotes or stray dogs by executing a strong forward kick.

Ostrich can eat approximately 3kg of feed per day. Their feed is one-half chopped alfalfa and one-half grain. Where pasture lands permit, ostrich are grazed as well.



How are ostrich and emu used?

Ostrich meat is eaten in upscale restaurants and is exported to Europe, where it is considered a delicacy. Ostrich feathers are used in feather dusters and as decorations on hats. Ostrich hides can be sold either raw (green) or tanned and are used for shoes, clothing, handbags and luggage. Ostrich eggs are decorated by artists as collectibles. Emu oil, from the thick layer of fat on the back of the emu, is used for skin care products.

What happens to the ostrich or emu after it leaves the farm?

Ostrich and emu are sold to other farms as breeding animals, but as the breeder market is limited most are sold for meat and hides. Ostrich and emu meat is sold through restaurants and retailers. Emu oil is sold for cosmetics and rubbing oils. Feather sales are quite profitable in some regions.

What challenges do ostrich and emu producers face?

There are very few ostrich in Canada, so purchasing breeding stock can be quite expensive. A large initial investment is required. An ostrich egg sells for \$20 and a day old chick sells for \$50 to \$110. An adult proven-breeding pair can cost \$1,000 to \$5,000. Emu pairs currently sell for \$500 to \$1,000.

Who are the stakeholders in ostrich and emu production?

- Ostrich and emu producers
- Feed suppliers
- Equipment suppliers
- Veterinarians

Contacts and other resources:

BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands
Canadian Ostrich Association

