

The History of Kimber Farms Inc

Kingsley Smith 2006



The History of Kimber Farms Inc

Founder

John E Kimber started Kimber Farms Inc in 1925 as a small 800-hen farm at Niles. At the time Niles was a railroad town of about 1000 25 miles from Oakland, California.

John Kimber was born in 1895 in New York and attended Stanford University, N.Y. graduating in 1917 with a major in agriculture and a minor in music. He moved west to Oregon and completed some graduate work in the Poultry Department of Oregon State College under Prof. James Dryden before moving to California and for the next seven years he was teaching in high schools at Atascadero and Cambria (Western Poultry History, 1989). During the first 7 years the little enterprise failed to make any profit. John Kimber kept it going by filling a vacancy in the local high school for a teacher of music. The job involved one day a week in the high school and the rest of the week travelling around (in a Model T Ford) eight elementary schools teaching instrumental music. Mrs Alice B. Kimber kept the breeding operation going by undertaking trapnesting duties; the most important task for a poultry breeder. She was eminently qualified having majored in mathematics in college.

Pedigree hatches were taken off from about 4 in the morning till school time; other work was done after school and in the evening. Fortunately, the number of students taking instrumental music increased to more than 400, this increased his salary and also allowed a full time assistant for the elementary schools. A part-time worker was hired to help on the farm and hatching sales helped sustain farm income.

In 1932 generous friends William and Helen Ford provided finance so that Kimber could increase the stock from 800 to 1600 and install a small hatchery. Consequently they were able to start selling baby chicks. Income from teaching music was no longer required and success seemed assured when in 1932 the farm showed a profit for the first time. In 1933 additional buildings were constructed and the demand for chicks took the entire output even though the country was in the worst financial depression in history. In 1934 a part-time veterinarian were hired to autopsy all the birds that died so the cause of deaths in all families and lines could be known. Also, a full time geneticist was hired, making Kimber the second poultry breeder to employ a geneticist. The Mt Hope breeding company in Massachusetts started collecting stock in 1918 and was purported to be first, Col. E. Parmalee Prentice having employed Dr H. D. Goodale in 1922.



His lifelong interest in music was manifest in philharmonic and symphony association memberships. While in college he established and became the first conductor of the Palo Alto Symphony. He was on the Board of Governors of the San Francisco Symphony Association. From 1952 to 1967 he sponsored the Kimber award on Instrumental Music within California to help music students further their studies.



John Kimber at the 10th International Associates Hatchery meeting was given a copy of Tchaikovsky's 9th Symphony. Presenting the record were (from left) Reiner G. Ruigrok from Brussels, Dr Carlos Aldea from Madrid and George Wright from Northern Ireland. (Photo courtesy of Poultry International)

Many of his staff, including Walter Hughes and Arthur Heisdorf, thought of John Kimber as a genius. A man who was autocratic, a visionary, a very clear thinker and got things done. He had a diverse range of abilities; he was a skilled musician and a teacher of music; he had a unique vision in business management; he was able to design boat hulls for speed.

But although he was very clever, some of his characteristics may have contributed to the ultimate failure of the company. It seems that although he had real talent in finding good staff and getting them on the payroll, he could not handle people very well. He always wanted to give people a second chance when it was not deserved. When the President refused to sack staff that did not deserve a second chance the deserving staff were really upset. Those on a salary soon realized that they had to plan ahead and live on a budget. While he paid staff generously when cash flow was down he would at times decrease monthly salaries by 50-70%. Some of the staff got caught out and had to resign.

His technique for managing departments that should be cooperating was to put them into competition with each other. On occasion "husbandry" was set against the "laboratory" but the one that was ongoing was between "sales" and "research". He would also become personally involved in every new venture instead of assigning a manager and standing back to see what was going on. It became a real challenge to him to make a success of new ventures and a lot of money was wasted trying to make them work.

He had a philosophy that when he did something it should be done right. He built chicken houses that would last 50 or more years. That was very expensive, and a lot of money was put into these facilities.

However, as the years went by, management of birds changed and they were stuck with very expensive unsuitable houses. It was the only chicken breeding company in the country that could not control the value of their chicks. A frequent argument on the Board was that when sales went down Kimber would drop chick prices. The Board would pass a resolution that chick prices would not be cut unless economies were found to cover the cost. Nevertheless, Kimber cut the price without any consideration of other things. It was apparent to many staff that Kimber Farms was not going to make it because it did not have the financial administration required to make it go. The birds were never the problem. Nevertheless John Kimber firmly believed the company was in good financial health. He said, "We have been amused from time to time to hear that "Kimber is either broke or soon will be." But at the time of the 40th anniversary in 1965 he made the comment that "most businesses at some time make some use of commercial loans." Then the company had been incorporated for 225 months and in that time it owed banks on commercial credit for less than 1/3 of the time. For years their Dun and Bradstreet loan rating had been "AA A1"; this was at the time the highest rating they gave. He once stated, "We operate on a very small profit margin. Since our incorporation in 1947 our profits have averaged only about 3% of our sales dollar, less than 1c per baby chick. The greater earning power of a well-bred chick over a chick with mediocre breeding is many times 1c."



The 40th Anniversary picnic in 1965 (Photo courtesy of George Farnsworth)

He tried to pass the "direction" of the business off to several people, the first one he trained was his son Arthur, and somehow they got crossed and Arthur was sent to be in charge of the New York division. Dr Gordon Dickerson and Dr Will Lamoreux (he was a very capable administrator and the logical one) were both tried for a while but without success.

In 1965 John Kimber resigned as President and his nephew Robert J. Kimber was elected President, a position he would hold until the sale of the company in 1974. John Kimber maintained involvement in the company administration as Honorary Chairman of the Board until January 1970 when he retired from active service in the company. His company roles were taken over by Robert J. Kimber.



The Kimber home and lake in 1950 (Photo courtesy of DeKalb Poultry Research Inc.)

John Kimber died in May 1970 when he suffered a heart attack after being hospitalized for a broken hip. His wife Alice B. and his two sons, Arthur J. and John E. Jr. survived him. At the time of his passing in 1970 Kimber Farms Inc with a workforce of 300 employees was producing 500,000 grandparent and parent stock to supply associate hatcheries around the world. At the peak of success Kimber Farms had about 24% of the Californian market and 10% of the US market. The business continued another 4 years before it was sold to Dekalb AgResearch Inc.

The Foundation

In 1942 John Kimber was putting plans in place to set up a permanent foundation with a Board of Trustees that would eventually take title to the Kimber assets including the properties operating under the “Kimber Poultry Breeding Farm” name. The agricultural breeding works were to be carried on under the name of “Kimber Farms” as a subsidiary of the Kimber Foundation. While at the time the breeding work was confined to poultry, plans to establish breeding divisions for other animals were being considered and plant breeding would also be added eventually. One feature of the Foundation was to be unique: as a matter of policy one half of the year’s net income was to be reinvested in the principal assets of the Foundation. This was established to ensure that whatever expansion and growth may be enjoyed, the facilities, resources and usefulness of Kimber Farms will tend to be strengthened and enlarged. Consequently the goal of the definite and fundamental objectives of developing better plants and animals would be realized. A portion of the income assigned to the Foundation would be directed to educational, philanthropic and cultural activities: 25% to the University of California, 25% to Stanford University, 20% to various hospitals and welfare institutions, 20% to the advancement of fine arts, and 10% to various scientific awards and special grants. (The plan to establish a Foundation was outlined Kimberchik News in 1942. However, even if the plan had been realized, it was not well publicized subsequently in the company literature).

Kimber Genetics Award

In a continuation of a vision to recognize academic excellence in 1955 Kimber established a prize within the National Academy of Sciences to recognize the work of a geneticist who had made an unusual contribution to the welfare of mankind through the science of genetics. When first announcing the award it was stated: “at the present time there are more than a thousand geneticists in the US, with many more in other countries. Many of these geneticists have demonstrated most brilliant and profound thinking.

They have been intellectual giants of a stature far beyond anything realized by the general public.... It is desirable that.... these great men be recognized and honoured for their contributions to a science which directly affects both mankind's food supply and also to the evolution of countless future generations of human beings."

The Kimber Medal by Malvina Hoffman featured the likenesses of Darwin, Mendel, Bateson and Hunt Morgan. The medal was awarded to 14 scientists over the years 1955 to 1967.



Reproduced with permission of DeKalb Poultry Research Inc.

Winners of the award over the years 1955 to 1967 were:

William Ernest Castle-1955; Hermann Joseph Muller-1955 (*1946); Sewell Green Wright- 1956; Alfred Henry Sturtevant-1957; Theodosius Dobzhansky-1958; Tracy Morton Sonneborn-1959; George Wells Beadle-1960 (*1958); John Burdon Sanderson Haldane- 1961; Milislav Demerec-1962; Curt Stern-1963; Max Delbruck-1964; Alfred Day Hershey- 1965 (* 1969); N.V. Timofeeff-Ressovsky-1966; Barbara McClintock-1967 (* 1983). (* Also awarded a Nobel Laureat).

Staff

In 1941 office staff worked a 40 hour week while farm staff worked 46 hours a week. The plant operated with one superintendent, two full-time veterinarians (one was Kermit Schaff), one full-time (Arthur Heisdorf) and one part time geneticist (Ramon Barnum), six other office workers, four hatcherymen, seven trapnesters, two men on brooding, two on farming (mostly growing and feeding green feed, one man on cleaning (including using an industrial vacuum cleaner), two other poultrymen, one man on plant maintenance, one night watchman, three relief men and "specials" and one or two working foremen. The average monthly salary bill for the staff was \$4000. Arthur Heisdorf was hired soon after he graduated in genetics from Wisconsin in 1936.



Early R&D, Art Heisdorf (seated) and assistant Ramon Barnum (March 1938)
(Reproduced from Kimber Chick News 1938 courtesy of DeKalb Poultry Research Inc.)



Farm and R&D staff soon after the appointment of Dr Lamoreux. In Row 3 John Kimber is at the extreme left, Will Lamoreux and Arthur Heisdorf are 5th and 6th (Photo courtesy of DeKalb Poultry Research Inc.)

A crucial part of the Kimber management ethos was the appointment of scientists of high calibre. The following were part-time or full-time members of the staff.

The geneticists were W.S. Malloch 1934-36, Arthur Heisdorf 1937-45, Dr Will Lamoreux, Dr Kenneth Goodman, Dr Gordon E. Dickerson, Dr Don C. Warren, Dr Clyde D. Muller, Dr George M. Farnsworth, Dr Tapeshwar Kashyap.

The veterinarians were Dr O.W. Schalm 1934-35 (part-time), Dr Sydney P. Levine, Dr Russell R. Vickers, Dr N.R. Brewer, Dr Simon Bornstein, Dr Kermit Schaaf 1937-41, 1949-62, Dr Morris Povar, Dr George Kernohan, Dr William D. Urban, Dr Walter F. Hughes, Dr Irvin S. Peterson, Dr Daniel Watanabe.



The 1960 R & D staff from left: Dr Kermit Schaaf, Dr George Farnsworth, Dr Don C. Warren, Dr Gordon E. Dickerson, Mr John E. Kimber, Dr Will F. Lamoreux, Dr Walter F. Hughes and Dr Kenneth Goodwin (the person obscured between Lamoreux and Hughes might have been Dr F. B. Hutt) (Photo courtesy of George Farnsworth).

By 1965 the R&D Staff were augmented by Daniel Watanabe, Dr Irving Peterson, Robert John Kimber, Dr Clyde Mueller, and Dr T. Kashyap while Drs Schaff and Goodwin had left while Lamoreux had started working in a Nova Scotia laboratory before returning in 1968.

Other staff were brought to Fremont on a consultancy, mostly during the summer months, but a least two for approximately a year. These included Dr M.A. Jull, Dr Jay Lush, Dr L.N. Hazel and Dr F.B. Hutt.

When John Kimber stood down as President on January 1 1966 to become Honourary Chairman of the Board, Robert John Kimber was appointed President and General Manager until the company was sold in 1974. Dr George M. Farnsworth became the Executive Vice President and Assistant General Manager in addition to his role as the head of the turkey breeding operation.

Managers of European subsidiaries

Europe: Arthur C. Kimber, managed the European Office of Kimber Farms Inc with Florient V. Cauwenbergh, at Centre International Rogier, Brussels, Belgium.

Britain: Mr Edwin Waterworth, managed Kimber Farms Ltd at Netherheys, Colne, Lancashire; he was an accredited hatcheryman and Vice-Chairman of the Chick Producers Association when the K-137 was imported to the Widnes quarantine farm in January 1964.

Netherlands: Mr Benny F. Soetman, managed Kimber Farms Nederland NV at Barneveld. He started the company in 1963 when the first importation of grandparents of the meat strains and Kimwhite took place.

Spain: Dr Carlos Aldea, managed Kimber Espana S.A. which was a grandparent farm supplying egg-type parent stock to KimberCHIK Associate Hatcheries in Spain.

Research Success

Research at Kimber and by Kimber staff accomplished (1) the first successful control of Avian Encephalomyelitis (Drs Schaaf and Lamoreux), (2) The fact that eggs from virus free Kimber chicks were available made possible the first successful vaccine for measles. (3) While at the University of California-Los Angeles, Dr George Kernohan produced the first successful vaccine for Infectious Laryngotracheitis.

In 1965 Dr Walter Hughes and co-authors Daniel Watanabe and Dr Harry Rubin of the University of California Virus Laboratory received the research award from the American Association of Avian Pathologists for a paper on the development of a chicken flock apparently free of the leucosis virus.

Resume of some staff.

Dr Welford (Will) F. Lamoreux

Dr Lamoreux started at Kimber in 1942 as a consulting geneticist and was appointed as Director of Research and Chief Geneticist in 1943, a position he held till his death in 1975. In 1963 and 64 he was the Technical Director with Kimber Farms European subsidiary, AGRESCO, in Brussels, Belgium. During 1965 to 1968 he worked with the Canadian Research Station in Kentville, Nova Scotia. After graduating with his PhD from Cornell University in 1938 and served on the faculty from 1939 to 1943. Dr F.B.Hutt of Cornell University said he was a great scientist and a wonderful person who was a team man and tackled tough research projects. In 1955 working with Dr Kermit Schaaf, a Kimber veterinarian, they developed the first epidemic tremor vaccine.

(Canadian Poultry Review March 1971)

Dr Walter Hughes

In 1948 Dr Hughes entered the first class of the new Veterinary School at the University of California-Davis. After graduation he spent two years in a general practise before joining the Poultry Pharmacy in Petaluma. In 1955 he joined the company under the direction of Dr Lamoreux. He initially worked on husbandry related problems and was the first in the industry to promote the concept of "all in - all out" as a method of disease control. Following that he was instrumental in establishing body weight and production goals for layers. An early problem that he solved was avian hysteria that was caused by an amino acid-energy imbalance. When hens are on the floor it was characterised by waves of high excitement up and down the length of the house. Hens would hit the walls and bounce off; their ocular senses are almost switched off. In growing pullets the condition was cured by changing to a low-energy feeding regime. With layers it required the induction of a moult to cure the problem and a change in the laying feed after the moult.

He served on the company Board for two years. Dr Hughes worked at Kimber until the business was sold.



Dr Walter Hughes with Japanese visitors (Photo courtesy of Walter Hughes)

Dr George Farnsworth

Dr Farnsworth joined Kimber Farms in January 1946 after leaving the US Navy. Initially he worked on the farm and was involved in performance recording. Prior to starting on his bachelor's degree at University of California-Davis he was helping Dr L.N. Hazel in the genetics department. After completing his MSc he headed for Iowa State University to work towards his PhD in genetics. His graduate committee included Drs A.W. Nordscog, Jay Lush and L.N. Hazel. He returned to Kimber Farms as a geneticist in 1955 and was assigned the selection programs of certain strains. When the company decided to start breeding turkeys Dr Farnsworth was put in charge of the breeding program with Dr Don Warren as his assistant. In 1967 four of the turkey breeding lines were sold to Nicholas and Dr Farnsworth moved to Nicholas with the turkeys.



Location and Company Development

1 In the USA

The farm was established on the Niles-Mission Road (Highway 238) near the crossing of the Western Pacific Railroad, approximately 2 miles from the Niles District and 3 miles from Mission San Jose. The Niles Canyon, a favourite location for making Western movies, was nearby. The address was to change later from Niles to Fremont. The farm was started on 7 acres of land that backed onto low hills from which San Francisco could be seen 30 miles away. The initial investment of about \$6,300, bought the land, built the 18'x120' house holding 720 hens and a 20'x40' garage residence that included two flattop Charters incubators.

In 1932 the plant was expanded to make it both more efficient and profitable. A sum of \$12,000 was borrowed, out of which a hatchery was built. By 1936 the plant had expanded to 40 acres of land with 6000 birds housed among thirty buildings and among the 19 regular workers were the finest technical staff of any poultry breeding farm in California.

In 1941 the plant consisted of 71 acres of land, housing for 17,000 hens, incubator capacity for 175,000 eggs, 35 to 40 employees year round with gross sales in 1940 of \$138,000.



Kimber Poultry Breeding Farm in July 1939. Taken from a plane at 800 ft. The housing capacity was 17,000 birds and the incubator capacity was 175,000 eggs. The concrete yard of the third layer house has been covered over and the building screened. The first portion of the new South Plant has just been built with ranges for young stock beyond. The original breeder houses are in the lower right just left and above the railway. The cherry orchard is on the left middle. (Reproduced from Kimber Chick News 1939 courtesy of DeKalb Poultry Research Inc.)

In the same year the first expansion outside of the Niles plant was made by the purchase of the 25,000 hen Puritan Poultry Farm at Atascadero, near San Luis Obispo (about half-way between San Francisco and Los Angeles). The Puritan Ice Company that owned it used some of its cool stores for egg storage.



Atascadero parent farm in 1957 (Photo courtesy of Walter Hughes)

The Niles plant had expanded to 66,000 birds and 60 workers by 1947 and was producing several million chicks per year. After 30 years in business the farm had expanded to 160 acres with a research laboratory and company headquarters with a staff of over 200.



The Fremont company headquarters in 1965 (Photo courtesy of DeKalb Poultry Research Inc.)

Kimber Farms initially marketed commercial white egg layers, then in the 40's brown egg layers and later parent white and brown egg layers, broilers and turkeys. Sales initially were interstate, but this was suspended and was confined to California, primarily in order to remain independent as possible of

Federal interference. The National Poultry Improvement Plan (NPIP) set up an elaborate system of inspection operations and approval of the products of breeders who affiliated themselves with the government program. John Kimber pointed out that the certification of the quality of the end product might be desirable, but it is not desirable for the government to prescribe the processes by which the end products are produced. According to John Kimber customers were only interested in the chickens that on their own farms made them money did not care whether or not they were produced under the NPIP.

During 1955 Arthur C. Kimber, was responsible for setting up a franchise hatchery system to distribute Kimber stock throughout the world. Hatcheries managed by Associates to distribute KimberCHIKS were set up in the US, Mexico and Canada. Arthur Kimber established and became Vice President for Europe and manager of Kimber Farms European Division, in Brussels, Belgium from 1962 to 1971. After the death of his father he moved back to California to take up the role as director of company communications and develop plans for the international activities of the company.

During 1959 the corporation established a turkey breeding program on a 224-acre property near Fresno with Ray Houck as manager. Dr George Farnsworth managed the breeding program and was assisted by Dr Don Warren. An isolated pedigree research farm was built in 1965 at Pt Arena, on the coast 100 miles north of San Francisco.

The company developed a breeding farm in Greensboro, Georgia in 1963 for the development and distribution of egg and meat lines. The Kimber Farms Broiler Breeding Division was established in 1965 at Hollister, 60 miles South East of Fremont. The complex consisted of nine rearing and 10 pedigree houses.

The business was incorporated on December 3rd 1946 and became Kimber Farms Inc. At that time there were poultry rearing and laying housing at Niles (the H.Q.), Atascadero, Los Gatos (20 ml south of Fremont), Sanger and Clovis (both near Fresno). Hatcheries were located at Niles, Parlier (10 miles from Fresno) and Pomona (30 miles east of Los Angeles city centre).

In 1965 when Robert J. Kimber took over from his Uncle, the company employed a staff of 400 including 10 geneticists and veterinarians supported by a large technical staff. It operated 12 plants in California, one in Georgia, five in Europe and one in South America, with Associate Hatcheries in nearly every state and many in Europe and elsewhere.

In 1973 the company made long range plans for the California operation to move the foundation breeding flocks to expanded premises in Hollister and Sanger. The administrative headquarters were to remain at Fremont, together with the hatchery of 1.3 million chicks capacity. The new laboratory to manufacture Marek's vaccine and other biologics was to remain at Fremont. Although the leasehold of the Centralmont property for Marek's vaccine production had three years to run, continuation of the Federal licence to produce vaccine appeared to be problematic.

2 Outside the USA

Kimber made its European appearance in the late 1950's but it was not permitted entry into Britain until 1963 due to veterinary restrictions on US stock. During 1962 Agresso S.A. (managed by Mr Art Kimber) was established in Brussels to administer wholly owned farms and hatcheries and associate hatcheries in Europe and Africa. Parent stock farms were built in France, Germany and Holland There were associate hatcheries Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain and Switzerland. In S.E. Asia associate hatcheries were in Taiwan and Thailand.

Grandparent Kimwhites and broiler strains were delivered into Holland in 1963. Mr Benny Soetman, the Director of Kimber Farms Nederland NV, situated at Barneveld, was encouraged by the performance of the Kim Brown in the Belgium RST. While the numbers of white and brown birds in the company were

50:50 the expectation was that this would move eventually to 70% brown birds. The official HQ for Kimber in Europe was in Brussels. But a substantial part of its coverage was at Barneveld from which the Middle East, North Africa, the Common Market and Eastern Europe were supplied. During 1971 Kimber Farms Netherlands constructed a three unit experimental farm to test management techniques and a test facility for introducing new model Kimber layers to the European market. Kimber Farms also had investments in commercial egg farms in the Netherlands.

The Kimber brown egg stock, Kimbrown, was successful in winning the litter-housed section of the 1971-72 Belgium (Merelbeke) Random Sample Test with a hen-housed average of 265.3 eggs and a Feed Conversion Ratio of 2.59. In the following year the Kimwhite and Kimbrown hens won their respective sections of the Austrian Official Random Sample Test.

In 1964 a parent stock farm was established in Britain. The stock were imported by Mr. Edwin Waterworth whose business at Netherheys, Colne, Lancashire was also the new HQ of the Kimber Farms Ltd, the UK subsidiary of Kimber Farms Inc. Ten thousand K137 grandparent and parent stock were imported into the Kimber quarantine quarters in Widnes, Lancashire. This farm was set up for trapnesting. Performance data of pedigree birds was sent to the US for processing and stock selection. The Widnes breeding program was designed to operate without further stock importations until superior stock were available from Fremont. By July 1966 the first Kimber layers were nearing the end of their first laying year.

In 1969 Kimber Farms Inc. and the Anglian Food Group Ltd formed a new jointly owned company Kimber Breeding Company Ltd. The office of the new company transferred from Colne, Lancaster to Braintree, Essex. It continued with production of Kimwhite and Kimbrown parent stock for the UK and Eire markets and in conjunction with Kimber Farms Inc. it sent stock to Europe, Africa and South America. A Kimwhite, bred specifically for the British market, was imported into Northern Ireland as grandparent stock in 1969 and went on sale in January 1971.

During February 1968 Kimber Farms Italy was formed in Bologna, with Giancarlo Venturi as manager, as a subsidiary to Kimber Farms Europe Inc. of Brussels. The company was to market the layers and broilers throughout Italy. Also in Italy Pan-Crystal in Padova, distributed Kimber Turkeys throughout Europe.

In April 1968 Robert Kimber announced that the European HQ in Brussels would become a branch of the Fremont parent company as Kimber Farms Inc European Division; the administration office in Lausanne, Switzerland was merged into the Brussels office while the German subsidiary changed its name to Kimber Farms Deutschland GbmH from Kimberchicks GbmH.

In March 1960 45,000 K-137 parent stock chicks left San Francisco Airport to Madrid and Barcelona for Granja Avicola Gallina Blanca, an Associate Hatchery with its own network of associates and dealers for Spain and Portugal. A TWA chartered plane handled the largest single order made by Kimber and the largest order received by a European concern. The European program of Kimber Farms Inc was expanded further in February 1971 with the establishment of egg-type Grandparent farm in Spain under control of Kimber Espana, S.A. This was to greatly assist the supply KimberCHIK Associate Hatcheries with their parent breeding stock.

Further expansion throughout Europe, Africa and the Middle East was planned in 1974. Six thousand day-old grandparent chicks, the largest consignment of Kimber breeding stock for Europe, were flown from California to be reared on a quarantine farm in Eire.

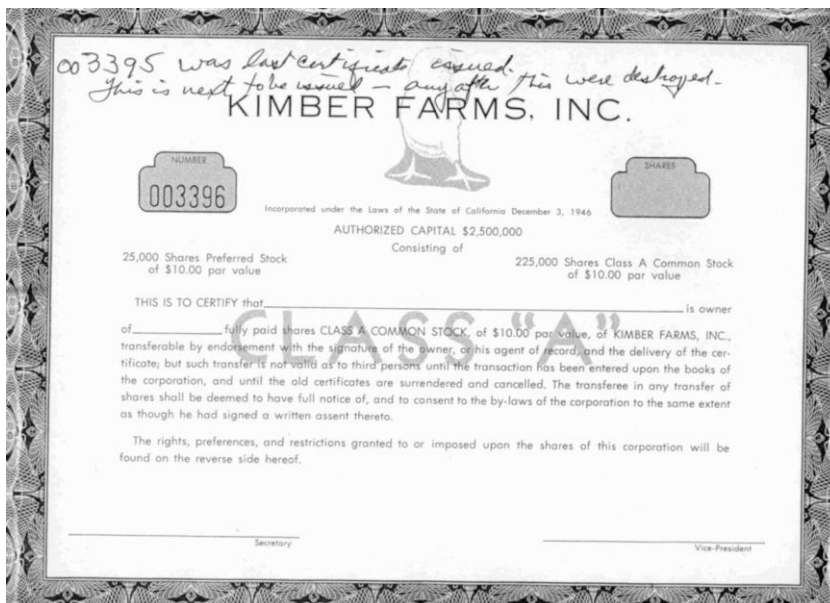
3 Company Sale

In an interview by John Pachtner for the local paper "Argus" on 5/6/75 Robert Kimber stated: "From 1972 onwards we looked quietly for a buyer. It became apparent that although Kimber Farms had an outstanding product we were greatly handicapped. Several large customers had been wooed away from us by large competitors who had the money to invest (in the customers operation.)"

During 1973 Kimber Farms in Brazil showed a loss due to Newcastle Disease scare. There were several plants and property that were not operative but were costing money. The corporation was give serious consideration to sell the Atascadero, Pt Arena and Greensboro properties; and to sell more lines of pedigree meat birds to Vantress. Meanwhile Vantress were considering the value to them of continuing to lease the Greensboro site. The State of California was in process considering the rental value of the Administration site.

Shapell Industries unveiled plans for Kimber Park as a neighbourhood of luxury homes. They were built during 1974-76 and became one of Fremont's most desirable neighbourhoods The Park was focused around the lake with a racquet and swim club. The Kimber Woods Tennis and Country Club opened in 1976. The main buildings were purchased in 1977 and gradually remodeled to a church and school functions.

On 27 September 1974 DeKalb AgResearch, Inc. made an offer of \$1.125m to purchase 100% of the 203,528 shares of Common Stock. Negotiations dragged on for three weeks while some complications among approximately 12% of shares were being resolved. The purchase was finished on October 18th 1974 and Kimber Farms became a subsidiary of the DeKalb Corporation.



Share number 003395 was the last share to be issued, 003396 was not issued (Reproduced with permission of DeKalb Poultry Research Inc)

For Dekalb AgResearch, Inc. the President was Mr T.H. Roberts, Jr, and Mr John R. Nelson was the Vice President. For Kimber Farms Inc., Robert J. Kimber was Chairman and Arthur C. Kimber was company secretary.

Products and Performance in Tests

Prior to 1941, Kimber Farms devoted all its resources on Single Comb White Leghorn (WL) breeding and had approximately 20,000 pedigreed WL under selection. But in 1942, due to the demand for heavy breeds it was decided to start breeding Rhode Island Reds. The Parmenter Reds with a long track record of winning various tests were chosen as the strain to carry out further testing on Kimber test farms.

Ernest B Parmenter, Red Mount Farm, Franklin, Massachusetts bred Rhode Island Red's since 1900. In 1931 his Rhode Island Red's had the distinction of being the first non White Leghorn breed to win a laying contest (Maine and Passaic).

After a long period of evaluation the company offered them for sale in 1943 as Kimber-Parmenter strain, a continuation of the naming policy followed with their Leghorns where for example one strain was called the Beall-Tancred Leghorns. This was to reflect what the original breeders had done with the strains rather than the Kimber staff. As time progressed and other strains were included in the breeding program and selection within lines had taken place, then a Kimber designation would be given to reflect the efforts of the company R&D staff.

Layers

The main product of Kimber Farms Inc was a WL layer. With the development of other products the commercial layer numbers were introduced. As the sales of the company expanded other WL layers were developed to serve other markets with respect to egg size. The K-137 was the first product and during the period 1956 to 1960 the K-155, K-141 and K-222 were field-tested. The K-155 was marketed in 1961-62. The main commercial characteristics of the 4 layers are as shown in the Table below from the 1960 KimberCHIK News.

The main differences among Kimber egg strains

Type	K-137 Strain Cross W.L.	K-141 Strain Cross W.L.	K-155 Strain Cross W.L.	K-222 Crossbred
Developed for	Efficient production of 26oz premium quality eggs.	Efficient production of 25 oz eggs under respiratory stress	Efficient production of 25.5oz premium quality eggs	Stress tolerance and quiet disposition in production of 26 oz eggs.
Egg production HD to 18 months	240-280	240-280	255-290	240-280
Egg size average for year oz	26	25	25.5	26
Albumen quality Haugh Units 32 weeks	85+	80	85	80
Body weight 32 weeks lbs	3.7-3.9	3.7-3.9	3.8-4.0	4.5-4.6

The three strain-cross WL were successful and were seen as entrants into various RST, whereas the K-222 was not. A WL K-163 was produced but apparently was not successful. Kimber entered the European markets in the early 60's with the K-137 and the K-188 brown egg bird, the latter was reported to be very successful in France; but at that time there was no sign that this layer was being made available in Britain. The K-137 was imported into Britain in 1964 and had been available to farmers by 1965. In 1969 the Kimwhite, said to be bred specifically for the British market, was imported into N. Ireland as GP stock and was on sale by January 1971. The Kimbrown was imported at about the same time and proved a better competitor in the RST and the commercial markets than its white egg counterpart. In 1973 a K-275 white egg layer was introduced and was seen in RST but was withdrawn owing to poor performance. The K-137 continued to be marketed by DeKalb after it purchased Kimber stock in 1974; other layer products were discontinued.

The ability of the K-137, the most popular Kimber strain in the USA compared with other popular white egg strains of the time is illustrated in the Table below. The data are from the 1959-60 and 1967-68 ARS reports of the USA RST. In 1961 the "Poultry Tribune Trophy" was awarded to Kimber Farms for achieving the highest estimated average income over feed and chick costs in the combined summary of the RST for 1959-60.

	Kimber K-137	Hy-Line 934C	Shaver 288	H&N Nick Chick	Babcock B-300
1959-60					
Tests entered	15	18	6	18	17
Egg Number HH ¹	238	234	236	235	223
Feed efficiency	2.77	2.73	2.87	2.87	2.83
Income OF&CC	2.60	2.40	2.41	2.41	2.35
Albumen HU	83.8	77.2	82.0	84.5	82.3
1967-68					
Tests entered	13	12	2	8	8
Egg Number HH	224	228	233	219	234
Feed efficiency	2.73	2.70	2.71	2.81	2.66
Income OF&CC ²	2.28	2.26	2.42	2.18	2.46
Albumen HU	82.5	74.2	77.1	80.8	75.8

1 HH=Hen housed, 2 IOF&CC = Over feed and chick costs

Kimber Farms were using egg quality as a unique selling point. In particular their most popular strain, the K-137 had a consistently higher albumen quality than other leading strains. It reflected the importance that Kimber geneticists placed on egg quality. The company report on albumin quality for RST results spanning the period 1960 to 1969 is shown below. This illustrates the consistently superior albumen quality of the K-137 over those products of commercial competitors whom the company regarded as their main rivals.



KimberCHIK NEWS

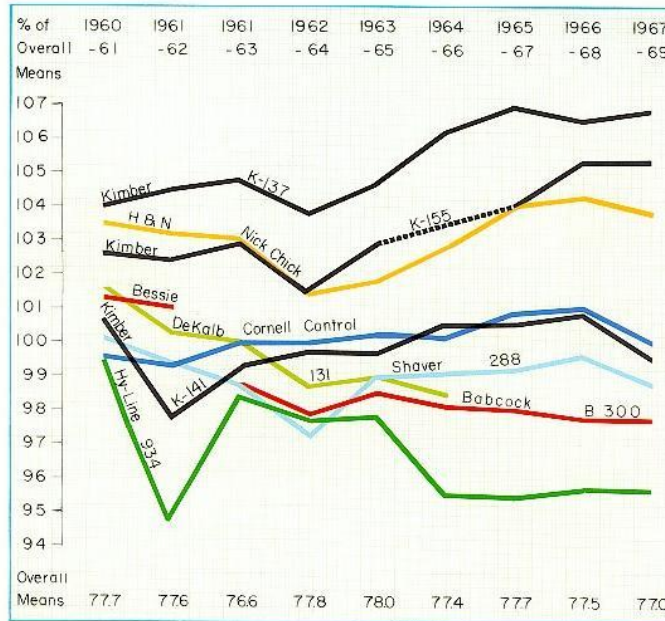
ALBUMEN SCORE

OF EGGS PRODUCED BY SOME MAJOR STOCKS

Expressed as a percentage of the Overall Means of all stocks entered in all Random Sample

Egg Laying Tests from 1960 through 1969 incl.

(BASED ON DATA IN OFFICIAL USDA AMS SUMMARIES, 44-79-2-10)



IN HAUGH UNITS

IN ALL RANDOM SAMPLE TESTS, 1960-1969 INCLUSIVE,

KimberCHIKS

CONSISTENTLY HAD THE BEST ALBUMEN QUALITY

The albumen quality of Kimber CHIKS in all Random sample Tests in the 1960's
(Reproduced with permission of DeKalb Poultry Research Inc)



Kimber won the 1959 New York RST albumen quality trophy.

L-R Dr Will Lamoreux, Dr Gordon Dickerson, Arthur Kimber and John Kimber
(Photo courtesy of DeKalb Poultry Research Inc.)

Turkeys

The company was making a lot of money in the 50's and was looking to diversify into breeding other poultry. Dr Farnsworth saw that there were opportunities in turkeys since there were not very many real turkey breeding programs. There were a lot of breeders who had selected within their own strains, but no one had done pedigree work except Nicholas. The company was persuaded to start turkey breeding in 1959. The lines were established to produce the KB-33 Bronze and the KW-66 White KimberTURKEYS. Although it was fairly successful, it was a drain on the capital of the company. Early in their program the RST results from Minnesota and Texas showed that Kimber's Broad Breasted Bronze KB-33 was as good as the Nicholas equivalent. At the peak of its success the turkey project had around 15 % of USA sales. Most of the sales in the US were in the hands of Nicholas, so Kimber were trying to take business from Nicholas. John Kimber decided in 1967, for various reasons, he had had enough of turkeys, and was willing to sell it. Dr Farnsworth was sent on an expedition to Sonoma to sell the turkey division to George Nicholas. After several months of discussion, the sale was made in 1968. Nicholas bought four pedigree lines developed on the research farm at Pt. Arena together with the right to use the Kimber turkey trademark and goodwill. John Kimber was said to be almost dancing the Monday morning following the sale "I got \$90,000, I'd have taken \$20,000." The sale amounted to 5,000 day-old toms and hens off 8 consecutive pedigree hatches in 1967. Two of the lines were white feathered since Kimber had acquired them in 1959, one of which was from Nicholas. The other two were synthetic developed by Dr Farnsworth. As a result of the sale Nicholas picked up several good customers of Kimber and consequently regarded the acquisition as worthwhile. Nicholas kept the Kimber lines for several years and then came to the conclusion that the Kimber stock was no better and in many cases not as good as the Nicholas stock and so they were sold.

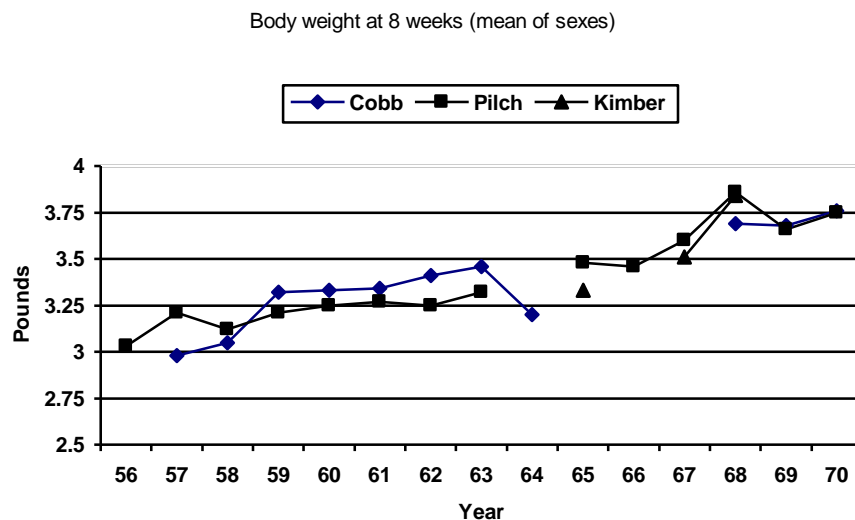
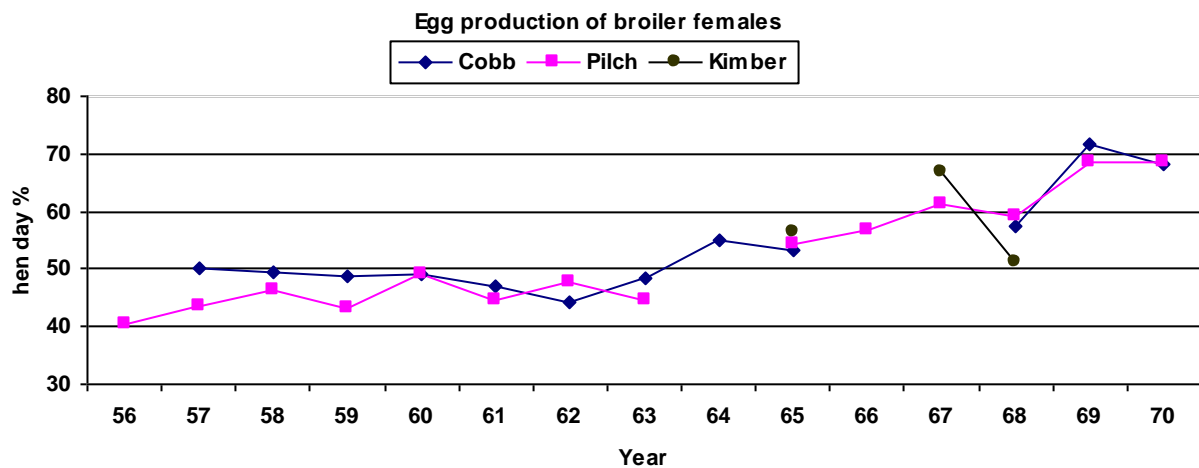
Broilers

In the early 1950's work had begun on developing lines for fryer production. In 1952 an entry of Kimbrecross K-43 won the 3rd Official Californian RST Poultry Meat Production contest. This was broiler was the product of a Synthetic male and a New Hampshire female. The broiler parents and the broiler product was the K-43 and followed by the K-44. Further development lead to the introduction of the K-701 and finally the K-745 female parent was offered for sale in the late 60's as a female parent line. From the K-44 onwards the broilers were white feathered with yellow skin. The K-745 was a recessive white strain cross which possessed excellent liveability with good resistance to respiratory stresses, excellent egg production and good hatchability under average management. In Europe the broiler was marketed as the Kimcross.

In 1951 the University of Arkansas hosted the second National Chicken-of-Tomorrow (C-o-T) contest. The University then started Random Sample Tests for "Broiler Meat Performance", "Commercial Egg" and "Meat Performance Egg Phase". The latter were conducted from 1956 to 1970. Breeding companies supplied eggs for male and female broiler parents which were hatched, grown and taken through a reproduction phase during which eggs were collected twice to produce broilers; these were grown and live performance assessed at 7 or 8 weeks or both ages. Kimber K-745 females were entered in the 1965, 1967 and 1968 tests. This action may have been to show the performance of the stocks having set up a new breeding operation in Georgia where Charles Vantress had set up business after winning the 2nd C-o-T contest.

The K-745 female was entered into the Arkansas Meat Performance Egg Phase and Reproduction Tests 10, 12 and 13, commencing in each with the hatch of parent stock in March 1965, March 1967 and May 1968 respectively and ending at June 1966, April 1968 and July 1969. During reproduction phase three hatches were taken to produce broilers and 126 males and females were grown to 7 weeks, 8 weeks and their live performance was recorded. The Kimber K-745 was mated to Browns Ledbrest and Vantress males as separate entries in the three tests. The best performing female entry and the best performing

progeny of the two entries are compared with the best performing entry from Cobb and Pilch over all the tests from 1956. The hen-day % egg production and 8 the week body weights of Kimber, Cobb and Pilch are shown below. This information is merely to show how the three stocks were performing without commenting or drawing conclusions since they are selected results.



At some time Kimber had leased the Greensboro site to Vantress and had sold them some pedigree lines and by 1973 Vantress were considering the value to them of continuing to lease the Greensboro site. In the same year Kimber had plants and property not operative and were costing money. They were giving serious consideration to the sale of Atascadero, Pt Arena and Greensboro properties; and to sell more lines of pedigree meat birds to Vantress.

Breeding Systems

Foundation stock was obtained from about a dozen of the world's foremost breeders of WL stock at a cost from 25c to \$25 per hatching egg. There was no correlation between the price paid and performance of the stock subsequently. Among the stocks purchased were those from Beall (Vashon Island,

Washington), Mt Hope (Williamstown, Massachusetts) and Ghostley (Anoka, Minnesota). Beall purchased Leghorns from Douglas Tancred in nearby Kent, Washington to start his breeding program. He continued with purchases buying as good as Tancred had for sale until Tancred died in 1923. Tancred started trapnesting his Leghorns in 1905. When the Mt Hope Leghorn flock was established in 1918 several strains were purchased among which was the Tancred stock and later Beall stock.

From the outset Kimber started trapnesting his stock and testing crossing the lines he had acquired. He would have seen these methods in operation after working with Prof. James Dryden at Oregon. Dryden was an advocate of what we now call hybridisation and of selection for combinability of unrelated strains and breeds. During the period when Kimber was starting to employ highly qualified geneticists (for the period) two centres of excellence for animal breeding were available to him to obtain information about breeding systems. The University of California maintained a WL flock at Berkeley and was the source of much of the information used by I. M. Lerner in his book Population Genetics and Animal Improvement. J. M. Lush at Iowa State was a frequent visitor for the summer at Kimber Farms during the early 40's. This led to an invitation for L. N. Hazel to work with W. F. Lamoreux at Kimber Farms to estimate parameters pertinent to indexes for poultry breeding. Hazel, Lamoreux and Heisdorf while working at Kimber were joint authors of papers with Lerner and Lush. A study on disease resistance with Lush was an innovative study on breeding for all-or-none traits. There was another collaboration with Lerner at the University of California. Later, G.E. Dickerson completed the development of index procedures with Lamoreux and others at Kimber. A reasonable conclusion could be drawn that the Kimber commercial White Leghorns were a two-way or a three-way line cross and that in the 30's and 40's mass and family selection within lines took place to improve the traits that made economic sense at the time. Following the Heterosis Conference at Iowa State College in 1950, at which the technique and advantages of recurrent and reciprocal recurrent selection (RRS) were outlined, Arthur Heisdorf (then with his own company H&N in Seattle) switched to RRS. However, at Fremont John Kimber may not have been embraced RRS as quickly or as enthusiastically as H&N. Speaking at the 9th Poultry Breeders Roundtable in Chicago in 1960, John Kimber noted that some geneticists had reservations about RRS yet concluded that such a system should be included in a really comprehensive breeding program. In the Kimber Newsletter in 1960 the value of RRS was discussed and noted that they await reliable estimates of the worth of the procedure. Finally, Don .C. Warren (1974) noted that Heisdorf and Kimber were the leading practitioners of RRS for 20 years. They provided an "opposition" in the West to the breeders in the mid-west such as Hy-Line and DeKalb who used the inbred-line hybridisation system followed by their parent corn breeding companies of Pioneer and DeKalb respectively. Don Warren was on the Kimber staff from 1956 to 1968 and would have seen the system in action.



Calculating results pre 1940 (Photo courtesy of DeKalb Poultry Research Inc.)

It is certain from the company Newsletter in 1940 that progeny testing was practiced as early as 1932 (prior to the employment in 1934 of W.S. Malloch, their first geneticist): "It is impossible to prescribe any hard and fast rule for the number of daughters that is necessary to test from two parents in poultry breeding work. But it is safe to say that the larger the number tested the better.....every effort is made to raise and test as many daughters as possible from each mating. In recent years we have markedly improved our breeding technique from the standpoint of size of sample".

See Table

Year Hatched	Families	Daughters per family	Total daughters
1932	86	13.9	1203
1933	123	12.2	1499
1934	172	13.0	2234
1935	143	15.3	2192
1936	168	16.8	2822
1937	246	16.9	4155
1938	273	18.9	5156
1939	411	28.9	11878

Inbreeding was practiced in some instances but largely for analytical purposes, but the bulk of production matings were not very closely inbred as far as the three nearest generations as were concerned. Most matings were checked to see that there were four different grandparents of the chicks to be produced. This procedure was not followed in all cases, but in the 30's at least in 80% of the regular matings.

In relation to hybrid vigour and the level of inbreeding in lines to be crossed Tom Barron (World's Poultry Congress, Cleveland 1939) stated that he found that inbred stock, provided it was not too close, mated to other unrelated inbred stock gave very good results. Specifically he found that families made up chiefly of an eighth to a quarter related blood mated to other unrelated but similarly inbred families were most successful.



Direct autopsy recording live from autopsy room 1967 (Photo courtesy of DeKalb Poultry Research Inc.)



The former Kimber headquarters in November 1999. It is now a community school and church.
John Kimber's office was between the first and second brick pillars on the right of the brown saloon car in the middle of the photo.

Bibliography and Resources

- Anon (1959) Turkey Performance Tests 1959. US Department of Agriculture ARS December 1959 ARS 44-13
- Anon (1961) Random Sample Egg Production Tests 1959-60 Combined Summary July 1961 ARS 44-79-1
- Anon (1969) 1968 Report of Egg Production Tests United states and Canada. January 1969 ARS 44-79-9
- Anon (1975) Noted Poultry Breeder Dies. Obituary of W.F. Lamoreux. The Canadian Poultry Review March 1975
- Dietz, A. (1989) Kimber Farms. In: Western Poultry History. First Edition. Ed George Biddle. The Pacific Egg and Poultry Association.
- Henderson, G. (1966) He interprets the Kimber story. Poultry World 7 July pp 35, 39 and 41

Kimber, J.E (1965) Four decades of poultry breeding. On the occasion of the 40th Anniversary of Kimber Farms Inc.

Lerner, I. M. (1950) Population genetics and animal improvement. Cambridge, The University Press

Pachtner, J. (1975) Family poultry farm ends but its memory lingers on. The Argus 6 May 1975

Warren, D.C. (1974) Breeding. In: American Poultry History 1823-1973. Ed J. L. Skinner. American Printing and Publishing Inc, Madison Wisconsin.

All of the past issues of the poultry magazines Poultry Industry (UK), Poultry World and Poultry International were sources of information about the advertising, personnel, products, purchases and sales of the breeding and related companies.

Dr Walter Hughes provided some issues of The Kimberchik News

Recorded oral histories during November 2001

1 The oral history of Dr George E. Farnsworth at Kimber Farms.

2 The oral history of Dr. Walter Hughes

Copyright © Kingsley Smith 2007