



Code's Corner Emu Farm

Duncan BC



Searching for a way to slow down

The birds stand five to six feet high and stalk deliberately around the field, their long necks slowly moving, their reptilian eyes inquisitively searching.

Although they do not move their beaks, a primeval drumming noise fills the air. It is made by the females as they push air out of a hole in their windpipes at the base of their throats. Hearing the sound, it is not difficult to believe that these birds have been around as a species for some 80 million years, having lived through the last stage of dinosaurs.

Suddenly, one bird begins to run and dance, playing with its own shadow.

Fwap, fwap, fwap: it runs rapidly and erratically, its feet thudding as they plunge down onto the earth. The others in the herd curiously follow, wondering what all the fuss is about. The birds move together, quickly, jerkily, boldly.

Originating from western Australia, emus are the second largest birds in the world after ostriches. According to emu farmer Bill Code, however, unlike their larger counterparts, emus are not dangerous but friendly and curious. "They call emus good-neighbour birds because they have almost no noise and smell," he adds.

Bill operates Code's Corner Emu Farm in Duncan on Vancouver Island. He began farming emus in 1993 after attending an agricultural exhibition as a 4-H leader. He recalls, "I had tennis elbow from digging in the hard clay. Nothing had helped it for two or three weeks, so the demonstrator at the emu booth said, 'I'll put some of this emu oil on, and we'll try it'. I didn't expect it to work, but it did. It took away all the pain in about ten minutes."

After that auspicious beginning, Bill found himself not only raising emus, but also creating a market for their newly emerging products, including oil, meat,

leather, and eggs. "You're using 95% of the bird, so that's very good for the planet," he comments. In addition, the emu products have several special properties. According to Bill, emu oil can penetrate the skin very well, act as an anti-inflammatory, and provide pain relief. He also says that emu meat tastes like lean beef, is low in cholesterol and high in iron and creatine, while the jade-coloured eggs are in demand amongst craftspeople.

Bill Code is as interesting and unique as the birds he raises. Dr. Code wasn't always a farmer: He initially trained in medicine and anesthesia and then worked as a professor of anesthesiology at the University of Saskatchewan. But in 1992, when the pace of life as a physician and professor became too rapid, Dr. Code and his family moved to Vancouver Island to attempt to slow down. "I realised I was up to the workaholic stage," Bill recalls. "I tried to eat and stay healthy, but I thought, 'This isn't working. I need to slow down.'"

For the first four years after moving out west, Dr. Code continued to work as an anesthesiologist, farming emus part-time in partnership with his wife Denise, a nutritionist. But in 1996, after he was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, a

chronic disease of the central nervous system, he was no longer able to practice medicine.

Since the diagnosis, Bill has farmed fulltime, maintaining the business with the help of Denise, his children, and his mother. He enjoys the way of life that farming affords and finds that he seldom misses practicing medicine. As a farmer, he says, his way of life is much healthier. "I get a lot more sleep. I eat even more healthfully. I've also got more time to spend with my family."

Farming, Bill says, is also an important part of fighting Multiple Sclerosis. "You rest and become part of nature and then the immune system and other parts of the body have a better chance of recovery," he explains. "Farming is healing in a lot of ways relative to just running to and from work all the time. It makes you slow down enough to smell the roses."

And that is an integral part of his new life philosophy. "Take one day at a time and enjoy life because it's a special thing," he advises. "Don't take your health for granted and don't take your relationships for granted because they're what matters when all the smoke clears."

Good advice from someone who's learned from experience.

FARM FACTS

Employed –
seasonal: 2
year-round: 0

Gross Farm Sales –
\$12,800

Land Owned –
7.5 acres

Land Leased –
0 acres