RATITE INDUSTRY IN CHINA

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INTRODUCTION
Several groups of flightless birds (Ostrich, Emu, Rheas, Cassowaries and Kiwis) are often grouped together as the ratites. Their most striking common characteristic is the lack of a large keel on the sternum. The living species of ostrich including 4 subspecies: S. c. Camalus, S. c. Anstralis, S. c. Massaicus and S. c. Molybdochana, live in African and middle East. The Arabian ostrich, S. c. Syriacus disappeared in the 1940's. Emus (Dromaius novahollandiae) have been resident in Australia for at least 80 million years. Emus takes its place as one of Australia's large native herbivores.

Fossil remains of ostriches have been found in lower pliocene formations in Pao Te Hsien, Northwest Shan'xi, on the Yellow River, China; and fossil eggs have been found in a region from north-northwest to south-southwest of Kalgan on the border of Shan'xi and Inner Mongolia. There are no more wild ostriches in China where fossil remains have been found. Ostriches have disappeared from a large part of their range for perhaps a million years.

Ratite industry in China was almost totally a breeder production system since 1990's. Ostriches and Emus were imported from Africa, America, Europe and Australia. Bird prices were very high. All birds were marketed as breeders. It has become an ideal diversification for farmers and ranchers seeking an alternative dependence on the traditional forms of livestock. Ostriches and Emu are valuable for their hides, feathers, oil, meat, also the red meat is extremely low in choesterol and fat levels, with fewer calories and carbohydrates, the ultimate goal is to produce sufficient birds for slaughtering. Currently there are an estimated 100,000 birds on about 400 ostrich farms in main land and 15,000 birds in Taiwan.

The present ratite industry is primarily one of producing products (meat, hide, oil, feathers). This trend should continue for years, with a small and increasingly select group of birds marketed or retained for breeder seek. During this period, small farms are being bought by large farms and some will abandon the business.

China imported four ostrich breeds: Black Neck (African Black), Blue Neck, Red Neck and Australian Grey. Two hens to one rooster as a production unit in the breeding farms.

The breeding characteristics of the birds held in the population can be monitored. The pioneer phase is set up own pedigree. The eggs are hatched and the chicks sold at three months of age.
The company associated with a feed company, producing rations of dry matter with some minerals and vitamins, and quite a bit of crude fibres for birds at different age and breeders in order to prevent them from getting fat. Fat is detrimental to productivity in breeding birds and reducing the quality of slaughter birds.

The total Emu population of China is between 20,000 to 30,000 on more than 50 farms mainly in Guangdong, Shanxi, Inner Mongolia and Hebei provinces.

Guangdong Enlucky Industrial Co. Ltd has the largest Emu population in China. There are more than 9,000 birds including 3000 breeders. The breeding season is from November to March of next year. Steps have been taken in development of a slaughter and processing system. Three abattoirs are in operation to process ostrich meat since 1999. Commercial birds are slaughtered at a year old. They yield 30kg of meat and produce 13–20 sq.fe. of fine quality leather. The heart, liver, stomach, gizzards and neck are considered delicacies. The end products were sold at supermarkets and restaurants in Beijing, Guangzhou and other big cities. The number of commercial birds is still too small to support tanneries and slaughter houses. The company sold chickens to contract farmers. Veterinarians visited farms once a month. Rearing commercial birds, returns to the farms per year were well in excess of 20–25% with proper management. This kind of organization runs a new breeding system for ostrich and Emu farming in China.

PROSPECTS
Numerous problems exist in quality of breeder, nutrition, fertility, incubation, chicken survivability, disease, management and marketing, but these problems can be overcome by research, experiments and good husbandry practices.

REFERENCES