

Subject: Statement

Sunday 10 April 2011

Ladies:

I have not forgotten about providing you with an official statement from Whiting Farms regarding the husbandry of our roosters, quality considerations and your two companies as "preferred" outlets for Whiting Farms fashion feathers. What I have been waiting for (besides the undisturbed time to write this) is seeing what questions come in from the myriad of fashion people who contact us in regard to their concerns about using commercially grown feathers for fashion accessories. Now I have a pretty good idea of the issues with them, so feel I can address their major concerns. So here is my "statement" for you to have.

Whiting Farms, Inc., from its inception in 1989, has been completely focused on Quality. My mission statement, right from the beginning, was "to provide feathers to the fly fishing tyers of the world with the best quality, value, selection, service and reputation." This has been achieved through a higher order of genetic knowledge and husbandry, innovation in processing, and listening to the desires of fly tyers to develop novel chicken lines which provide unique fishing feathers. From this multiplicity of efforts Whiting Farms has grown to become the dominant producer of quality feathers in the fly tying world. Recently (March 2011) Thomas Whiting, Ph.D. was awarded a lifetime achievement award from Fly Tyer magazine in recognition of these efforts.

To breed and raise roosters for their feathers is a surprisingly technical and challenging endeavor. Not only does it require a sophisticated genetics program, but all elements of the roosters' lives need to be optimum so they can realize their genetic potential. This requires the right nutrition, lighting, environmental control and expert husbandry, and a myriad of refinements and details, that all work together to allow the roosters to grow these unequalled feathers. And on top of this each individual rooster has to live a very pampered life, because if anything isn't right, with feathers being fairly low on their hierarchy of needs, then they won't achieve the desired result. I know the chickens at Whiting Farms are the most pampered commercial chickens in the world. And the quality difference between our feathers and the other hackle growers' feathers demonstrates our higher level of expertise in all these facets of production. But this higher level of care costs more and so that is why Whiting Farms feathers have to be the most expensive.

The genetics program at Whiting Farms involves a system of gently evaluating the feathers on breeder candidate roosters and hens to direct the lines towards an ideal set of feathers for whatever purpose that line is intended for. Interestingly, and actually quite surprisingly, the attributes demanded by discerning fly tyers are also appropriate for feather uses in fashion! And this has led us into a totally unexpected market. But Whiting Farms' foundation business has been and will always remain the fishing world—we just have a new set of customers who can also utilize these special feathers. So the same highly selected roosters are allowed to breed with females to further develop these unique lines. No "laboratory genetic engineering" is involved, just the diligent study and knowledge of the lines, coupled with vision on where they need to be taken, in a gentle, incremental process of natural reproduction.

Roosters being roosters they will do battle with each other if given any opportunity to do so. And if allowed to do battle they will seriously harm each other and will certainly damage the

feathers which are the very reason for which they are being raised. So there is no humane alternative than to keep the roosters separated from each other in individual cages. But the cages at Whiting Farms are spacious, with each rooster having their own feeder and waterer, yet the roosters are able to see and relate to their neighbors without anyone getting hurt. Early experiments with trying to "free range" the roosters were an unmitigated disaster-in every respect-so quickly abandoned. Our caged roosters to me seem quite happy, in that they crow and strut and are kings of their own individual world. And if they weren't content they wouldn't grow the beautiful feathers. The sheer sound volume of all the roosters crowing at once is a visceral experience that cannot be appreciated unless in their presence-the best hearing protection money can buy only takes the edge off of it!

In order for the feathers to be properly processed and sold the unavoidable fact is the roosters have to be harvested. This is because what are desired by fly tyers and fashion folks alike are the "first nuptial" feathers that the roosters grow (their "breeding plumage"), and subsequent sets of feathers are not as good. But a unique attribute of the lines at Whiting Farms is the "saddle" (back) feathers, that are so highly prized by everyone, never stop growing. So our roosters get an exceptionally long life of almost a year waiting for these saddle feathers to get as long as they can, compared with a meat chicken that is harvested at 35 to 49 days of age. But unlike the brutal end that most commercial chickens endure, at Whiting Farms we euthanize the chickens painlessly so there is no distress nor blood. The meat from our roosters, though I could argue it is the safest meat in the world as we feed no antibiotics nor hormones and the chickens live such a pampered life, cannot be sold nor even given away because of USDA inspection regulations. What is left over after harvesting is composted, in conjunction with wood chips and manure, to create a soil amendment for our irrigated farm crops. So at least nothing is wasted. Plus the meat on these year old roosters is truly tough, and pretty minimal having not been bred for meat, so not very worthwhile nor palatable.

Whiting Farms prides itself in regard to the quality of processing of our feathers, whether for fly tying or fashion. ALL pelts are washed using a mild, biodegradable soap. No curing chemicals are ever used, just natural air drying. And our expertise in dyeing is second to none. Proper feather dyeing happens to be particularly challenging, being almost as much alchemy as chemistry, which we have been studying and refining for many years. The dyes we use are a class of mineral dyes that are also used with other natural products such as cotton, wool and hair. These dyes specifically bind with these natural materials creating a "dye fast" result, in other words the dyes won't come out. This is not the case with some of the competitors dye jobs-the acid test being whether any color comes off when the feathers get wet.

Because of all these efforts and expertise the feathers from Whiting Farms are in a league of their own. We have and always will strive to produce feathers of the highest quality and value we can. To keep our focus on what we do best we sought a few select companies to channel a limited supply of feathers through to the fashion world. The two companies we are principally supplying fashion appropriate saddles to are Feather Locks ([www.conditionculture.com](http://www.conditionculture.com)) and Fine Featherheads ([www.finefeatherheads.com](http://www.finefeatherheads.com)). These two companies share our ethic of quality, value, selection, service and reputation. Whiting Farms will continue to supply our bedrock fly fishing customers with our wide range of fly tying feathers and our own package of fashion feathers (the Whiting Fashion Pack), and also some other fashion and jewelry companies with our bundles of saddle feathers.

Sincerely,  
Thomas Whiting, Ph.D.

President and founder  
Whiting Farms, Inc.