



Butterball, LLC

TELEHEALTH CASE STUDY



Telehealth & Turkeys: Improving Quality and Efficiency of Care

“Telehealth allows our veterinarians to continuously monitor and quickly respond to the health of our turkeys, to ensure they are receiving the highest level of care possible.”

– Dr. Kabel Robbins, staff veterinarian, Butterball, LLC

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

Widely scattered farms and long travel times meant potential delays in addressing veterinary concerns for flocks. On-the-spot decisions sometimes were made by non-veterinarians in urgent situations before a veterinarian could arrive, and veterinarians spent much time on the road, rather than tending directly to patients.

SOLUTION

Butterball utilizes electronic monitoring of flocks to deliver a constant information stream to veterinarians, along with telecommunication systems allowing video consultations, remote triage and preliminary diagnoses, and electronic prescriptions.

RESULTS

Better quality of care and increased efficiency.

Farmers have more access to veterinarians and can share information with them instantaneously whenever a potential problem arises. Veterinarians can better triage cases, begin appropriate treatment more quickly, and plan efficient travel among farms. In addition to improving health care of birds, telehealth also has improved work-life balance for the veterinarians.

BACKGROUND

“Butterball is the largest turkey producer in the United States,” says Dr. Kabel Robbins, staff veterinarian at Butterball’s Ozark and Huntsville, Ark., facilities. With its Arkansas turkey flock scattered over 200 farms, Butterball recognized that its veterinarians were spending a large amount of time traveling from one farm to another, and that they sometimes could not see a flock immediately when an issue arose. The company wanted to optimize the level of care provided to flocks by improving their veterinarians’ ability to provide timely care.



IMPLEMENTATION

Butterball invested in systems to electronically monitor an array of parameters such as temperature, ventilation, water and feed consumption at each of its facilities. Farmers noticing any change in these parameters or birds with signs of health issues can digitally share information, photos or videos with their assigned staff veterinarians. This allows Dr. Robbins and his colleagues to remotely triage cases, establish a preliminary diagnosis, and plan for farm visits based on the level and type of action needed. The Butterball veterinarians establish and maintain the Veterinarian-Client-Patient-Relationship during on-site visits to farms, then stay connected with day-to-day operations through telecommunications.

Butterball also invested in electronic prescription software. Prescriptions for both water-soluble or injectable usage, as well as VFD, are generated and approved electronically via a mobile app, and distributed electronically to warehouses for pickup and delivery to a farm. This minimizes the time between diagnosis and treatment.

THE IMPACT

Butterball has embraced telehealth as a vital tool for caring for its turkey flock. By increasing the number of interactions veterinarians can have with every farm, telehealth has helped improve the level of care.

Thanks to multiple methods of communication with farms, staff veterinarians are ever present and easily accessible for all health-related questions and issues that may arise in the flocks under their care.

The system also allows veterinarians to better manage their time. "I can gather a lot of preliminary information through telehealth, then schedule my time based on what farms have cases that are not routine or not something that can be handled over telehealth," says Dr. Robbins. "I can determine which ones are best for me to go see in person to have that level of interaction."

"Telehealth improves veterinarians' quality of life, too," Dr. Robbins adds. Being able to efficiently handle several cases remotely reduces time spent traveling and lets veterinarians at Butterball focus their time on direct patient care.