

# Howard operation grew out of love for outdoors

By Mari Olson

The Mitchell Daily Republic

August 27, 2004

HOWARD — Some people choose jobs to pay for their personal passions, Adam and Stacy Shumaker chose a lifestyle that is one.

About three years ago, the Shumakers moved to Howard and began raising pheasants commercially.

It's all in the family for Mr. Shumaker.

"We started out with about 300 birds our first year," said Mr. Shumaker, of South Dakota Gamebirds, about his family. His family started raising pheasants to release on their own land when he was in high school.

"I guided my first hunter when I was about a sophomore in high school," he said.

His love for the outdoors slowly grew into a business and now, he and his wife, Stacey, own and operate South Dakota Game Birds in Howard. Mr. Shumaker went to college at Lake Area Technical Institute in Watertown and majored in business, which is also the time he met his wife, who works for Great Western Bank.

"I was nervous about starting the business," she said. "But now I like it."

"She helps with everything," he said. "It's sort of her unpaid part-time job."

The Shumakers have been married since 2001, which is also when they made the decision to move to Howard and begin raising pheasants. Adam's family is from Howard and they own a hunting preserve.

His brother Kevin, and father, Dale, run Top Gun, just down the road from South Dakota Gamebirds.

"They raise their own birds. We're two entirely different businesses," Mr. Shumaker said.

The Shumakers now raise about 21,000 pheasants a year, which come in four batches beginning in April and the last in July. Each batch is roughly 5,250 birds, keeping the couple busy.

The birds, all roosters — except for the few hens that accidentally get shipped — go through three rotations. They arrive just hatched and are put in a large ventilated room with waterbowls and feeders and very dim lighting. The ventilation system resembles, if not replicates that in hog barns, Mr. Shumaker said. The light is kept low because it scares the chicks.

"If you leave the light on very high they'll pile up on top of each other, smothering the ones on the bottom," he said.

After the birds are three weeks old they are moved to another room in the brooder barn to make room for the new batch of chicks. The next room is much like the first and they stay in it until they're about six to seven weeks old. Then they are taken to outdoor pens.

"There are 20 pens," Mr. Shumaker said. "The whole area is 456 feet by 100 feet."

Each pen has about 900 to 950 pheasants in it. By the time the birds are transferred outside

they have been peeped. Peepers are plastic pins stuck through the pheasants noses, which is required by the Game, Fish and Parks of any domestically raised pheasants, he said.

“It doesn’t hurt very much,” Mrs. Shumaker said.

“It’s like getting your ears pierced.”

“Sometimes they’ll gang up on the weakest bird and peck on it until it dies. The peepers keep them from fighting as much,” he said.

From day one to 20 weeks of age, a pheasant consumes about 20 pounds of 24 pounds of feed, averaging to about one pound a week.

“By then they have all their color,” Mr. Shumaker said.

He sells his birds to preserves all over the state, and also to local landowners who just want to replenish the pheasant supply on their land for personal hunting purposes.

“The most important thing for them to find when released to the wild is water,” Mr. Shumaker said. They can find food anywhere, but if people don’t have water on their land, the birds will go to someplace where there is.”

The Shumakers have gone from personal bird raising to making it their business. They sell the birds and then begin getting new batches in April again.

“I think there was one day this year that he said he didn’t have any birds here,” Mrs. Shumaker said.