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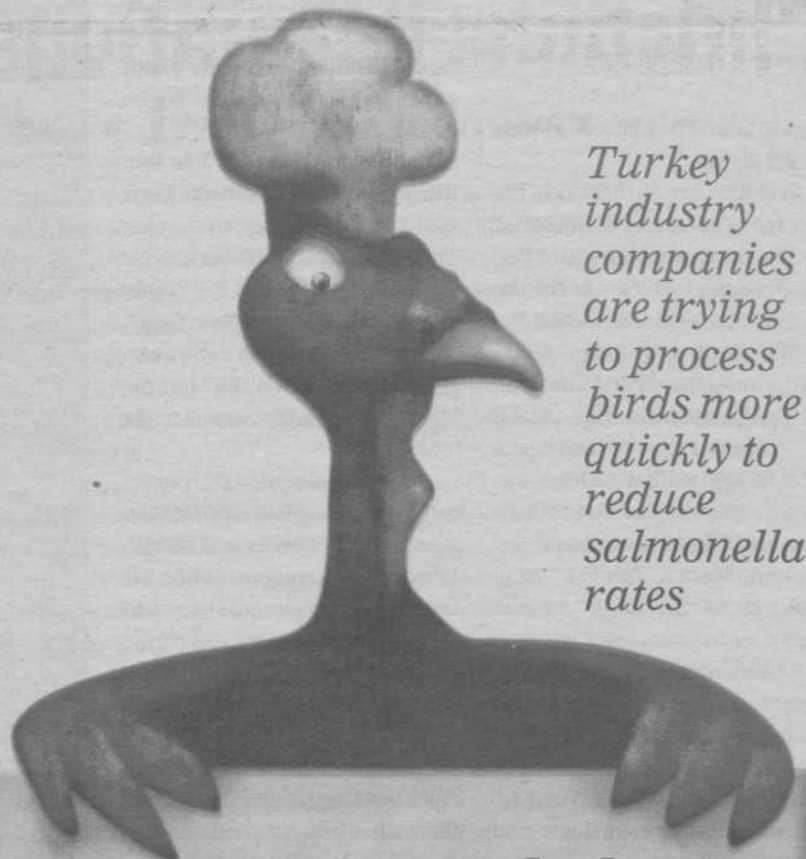
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*Turkey
industry
companies
are trying
to process
birds more
quickly to
reduce
salmonella
rates*

Temperature is key to keeping Thanksgiving feast safe

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY KIRK LYTLE/KRT CAMPUS

BY LAURIE KELLMAN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Getting family together for a Thanksgiving feast can be stressful enough without worrying whether the meal will make anyone sick. That's why the government and consumer groups are talking turkey about how cooks can serve a safe meal.

People buying a bird at the grocery store should check out the "sell by," "best if used by" or "use by" dates stamped on the packaging to confirm freshness.

Then, double-bag the bird in plastic for its trip home and quickly get it into the refrigerator or freezer.

Those steps can reduce the risk of food-borne illness, such as salmonella, from developing on the turkey and rubbing off on other food, hands or kitchen utensils before it is cooked. Infections occur when a person ingests live salmonella bacteria, which survive digestion and cause symptoms such as vomiting and diarrhea.

into the kitchen, then we can reduce the risk of contamination," said Caroline Smith DeWaal, director of food safety for the Center for Science in the Public Interest.

Thorough cooking destroys salmonella bacteria and other food-borne illnesses.

Even before a turkey arrives in a retail store, the government has tried to give consumers a head start on safety. All turkeys found in these stores are either inspected by the Agriculture Department or by states with the same standards.

Each turkey and its internal organs are inspected for evidence of disease, according to the department. A Grade A stamp means the turkey is the highest quality. It's the only grade consumers are likely to see in retail stores.

Government testing has led many in the turkey industry to process birds more carefully and to get their salmonella infection rate below 2 percent, ac-