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Introducing the Tough New Bird on the Block

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BY HOWARD MUSON

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FRANK Perdue has become an American icon as a result of starring in his own commercials as "a tough man who makes tender chicken." The latest radio and TV commercial for Perdue Farms marks a succession rite of passage for a family whose business has burgeoned through mass marketing.

The commercial introduces his son, Jim, his successor, who Frank says "may be even tougher than I am." The full script for the 30-second spot, which is airing in two markets initially—Albany, New York, and Richmond, Virginia—is below.

Son Jim thus becomes part of a family advertising tradition that goes back to 1968 when the Maryland-based family company first decided to market poultry under its own brand. Jim has been chairman of the company for the past three years and will be appearing with his father in a series of commercials. He is doubtless one of the best educated chicken farmers in the country.

While growing up, Jim Perdue spent his summers working at Perdue Farms in various grain and animal production jobs. After receiving an undergraduate degree in biology from Wake Forest University, however, he was headed for an academic career. He did graduate work at the University of Washington in Seattle, receiving a Ph.D. in marine biology before deciding to join the family company.

Returning to Perdue Farms in 1983, he started as a plant management trainee and worked his way up through a variety of jobs: eviscerating foreman, plant manager, quality control manager, product manager, vice president of quality improvement, and vice chairman of the company. Meanwhile, he was earning a master's degree in business administration from the Perdue School of Business at Salisbury State University in the Perdues' hometown of Salisbury.

"The 10 years I spent away from the company allowed me to achieve successes outside the family environment," says Jim, now 45 and the father of three. "It is an experience I recommend to anyone who works in a family owned business."

Perdue is the largest integrated poultry producer in the Northeast. The company employs 13,500 and ships more than seven million chickens and three million turkeys weekly to markets and butcher shops from Maine to Florida and as far west as Chicago. It also serves institutional customers nationwide and exports to Eastern Europe, China, Japan, and South America.

The company was founded in 1920 when Arthur Perdue built a coop for 50 egg-laying chickens. Frank was born the same year. When he joined the company in 1939, he was only the third full-time employee. Over the years Frank Perdue, now 74 and chairman of the executive committee, has been the spokesman in more than 175 commercials. His father appeared with him in one, before his death in 1977; in it Arthur described how hard Frank worked.

"You wonder what drives a man like this," the proud father said. "I'll tell you...Me!"

THE NEW SCRIPT FOR PERDUE FARMS

Music under.

FRANK PERDUE: After all these years, my competitors are still waiting for us to get soft.

I guess they think eventually I'll just retire...

…then everyone around here can take it easy. Next thing you know, our chicken won't be as fresh.

Maybe we'll stop feeding them so well, or inspecting them quite so carefully.

Maybe Perdue chickens won't have more breast meat than everyone else's.

Well, gentlemen, if that's what you're thinking, I've got some bad news for you...

...it's a little project I've been working on for the past 45 years, the result of decades of intensive development.

Enter Jim Perdue.

FRANK PERDUE: Meet my son, Jim. He may be even tougher than I am.

JIM PERDUE: I have to be. My name and money-back guarantee are on every bird I sell.

FRANK PERDUE (arm around Jim): This could be my greatest achievement yet. ▪

Howard Muson is a writer, editor and consultant, and former editor and co-publisher of Family Business Magazine.

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