



**For Immediate Release**

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**HERITAGE CATTLE AND THEIR PRODUCTS DEFINED**

THE AMERICAN LIVESTOCK BREEDS CONSERVANCY SECURES THE TERM  
HERITAGE CATTLE FOR CONSUMERS AND BREEDERS

In an effort to secure the term Heritage in the food and agricultural marketplaces, the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy (ALBC), a non-profit organization ensuring the survival of rare breeds of livestock and poultry, has defined the term Heritage Cattle and established criteria for beef and dairy products made from Heritage Cattle breeds. In 2005 and 2009 respectively, ALBC defined the term Heritage for turkeys and chickens which have become widely accepted in the marketplace.

“The goal of defining Heritage for cattle and their products is to secure a market niche for the term so that these historic breeds can be promoted in their own right,” said ALBC’s Executive Director, Charles Bassett.

Cattle have been a part of the American agricultural landscape since the arrival of Spanish colonists beginning in 1493. During the colonization of America, cattle indigenous to Europe were brought over. For centuries these breeds provided milk, meat, leather, tallow, draft power, and companionship.

Today many cattle breeds that were once core components of regional cultures are now in danger of extinction. Since 1950, there’s been a 99.7 percent decline in the number of farms in the U.S. raising dairy cattle, yet cattle production has risen. Variety is decreasing as production is increasing. As cultures are homogenized and historic agricultural traditions are abandoned, the flavors and food traditions of these breeds are threatened. ALBC hopes that through Heritage branding efforts, awareness of and support for endangered breeds will be generated. The ultimate goal is to ensure the long-term genetic conservation of these breeds.

Heritage Cattle, as defined by ALBC’s newly released definition, must meet several criteria:

1. **True Genetic Breed.** The breed is a true genetic breed of cattle. That is, when mated together, it reproduces the breed type.
2. **Endangered Breed.** The breed is or has been endangered, as defined by the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy (ALBC), and appears on the ALBC Conservation Priority List in the Critical, Threatened, Watch, or Recovering categories.
3. **Long History in US.** The breed has an established and continuously breeding population in the United States since 1925. If developed since 1925, foundation stock is no longer available. If more recently imported, the breed is globally endangered. (Please refer to ALBC's criteria for listing on the conservation priority list for details on this).
4. **Purebred Status.** Heritage Cattle must be registered purebred animals or immediate offspring of registered purebred animals. Cattle that are the result of a breed association sanctioned grade-up program must have obtained purebred status.

Once breeders have met the Heritage Cattle criteria, their products must too be evaluated against the criteria established for Heritage Cattle products. (See Appendix A ) ALBC worked with a number of partners and organizations to develop these criteria which address elements such as diet, management practices, antibiotic and hormone usage, environment, and humane treatment.

ALBC Technical Advisor Dr. Phillip Sponenberg added, "We are after a definition that catches the interaction of genome, management, and manufacturing that provides for a sustainable, closed system."

So why does The American Livestock Breeds Conservancy, an organization interested in genetic diversity, care about defining Heritage Cattle? As late as the mid-1950s, breeds such as the Pineywoods, Randall Lineback, and Red Poll cattle were found on small farms across the country. In less than 50 years, nearly 60 percent of all beef cattle operations closed their doors – meaning many breeds disappeared from the American dinner table. "If we can give these animals a job again, and market them as the hardy, tasty, historic breeds that they are, we are more likely to be able to save their valuable genes," said Marjorie Bender, research and technical programs director for ALBC.

"If our food system only relies on a single industrialized breed and something happens to that breed, we need the diverse genetics of other breeds to fall back on," added

Bender. Heritage breeds fit this bill, providing necessary genetics for a healthy, diverse food system.

While the definition of Heritage Cattle may be complex, the goal is to ensure that the legacy left to succeeding generations has as much genetic breadth and biological robustness as the current generation has inherited from previous generations. The definition draws attention to endangered breeds of cattle, supports their genetic integrity and long-term conservation, encourages management strategies that are biologically appropriate and agriculturally sustainable, and celebrates the cultural and culinary traditions of these breeds.

“insert quote from breed association of heritage cattle breeder promoting taste, flavor to promote this aspect as well. ..”

To see the complete definition of Heritage Cattle and their products and to learn more information about Heritage Cattle breeds, go to [www.heritagecattle.org](http://www.heritagecattle.org).

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## **Appendix A:**

### *Definition of Heritage Cattle Products:*

Heritage Cattle Products **must** come from:

- Heritage Cattle only.
- Herds with ongoing breed selection practices for longevity, fertility, and productivity.
- Herds that follow sustainable management practices that provide for animal well-being
  - diets that are all plant-based, and primarily forage-based.
  - raised primarily in open, pasture or range, environments. This specifically excludes total confinement operations.
  - free from routine prophylactic antibiotics.
  - free from administered synthetic or natural growth promoters or growth hormones.
  - humanely slaughtered.

### **A. Definition of Heritage Beef Products:**

Beef animals and their products marketed as Heritage Beef must:

- be produced from the mating of registered, purebred parent stock.
  - This allows for the sale as Heritage of those offspring that are produced by mating registered animals of two different Heritage breeds.

- include the name of the breed of that animal on the label, or the two Heritage breeds used in crossbred production.

### **B. Definition of Heritage Milk or Heritage Milk Products:**

Milk marketed as Heritage Milk must:

- be exclusively from animals that have been produced from the mating of registered, purebred parent stock.
  - This allows for the sale as Heritage of milk from those offspring that are produced by mating registered animals of two different Heritage breeds.
- include the name(s) of the breed(s) of the animals on product label.

### **Products made with Heritage Milk :**

- must be made exclusively with Heritage Milk to use Heritage in the product name.
- as an ingredient may use “Made with Heritage Milk” on the label but cannot use Heritage in the product title, and the label must state the percentage of milk from each Heritage breed.
- must include the name(s) of the breed(s) of the animals on product label.

Terms like “heirloom,” “antique,” “old-fashioned,” and “old timey” imply Heritage and are understood to be synonymous with the definition provided here.