



Conserving rare breeds since 1977

First Micro-grants Awarded to a Diversity of Projects

It has been a desire for many years for The Livestock Conservancy to establish a micro-grant program to help breeders enhance the competitiveness and stability of heritage breed livestock and poultry farms. The Conservancy is grateful to The Manton Foundation for providing funding to establish a pilot micro-grant program in the northeastern United States, and we are currently seeking funding to expand it around the country. We researched other small grants programs to establish forms and processes for microgrant applications. Nearly 100 Northeast farmers applied, and a team of 20 reviewers used a standardized review protocol to evaluate the applications. Applications were accepted through November 2018 and recipients were notified in January. Our reviewers were moved by the stories of the applicants, and their excitement to improve and grow their livestock operations. It has been incredibly gratifying to be able to help small-scale farmers in big ways.

One colleague, Marie Minnich, declined to help with reviews because she did not have the time – but she really wanted to help this program. To our delight, she and her husband, Stephen, decided to make a matching donation of \$8,000! In this micro-grant cycle, we were able to provide eight \$2,000 grants instead of the planned four. Commented Marie and Stephen, “We know just how important these grants can be helping these farmers reach their goals, and reaching those goals can only further help the conservation efforts



Rebecca and Dehan Courtney are two of the first recipients of the Conservancy's new Micro-grant Program.

for all of the heritage livestock breeds. We would love to see this type of program extended nationwide.”

The winning applications were selected in January and the following projects were selected to receive grants:

- To purchase a key Cleveland Bay stallion to add diversity into her breeding herd and to promote critically endangered Cleveland Bays at notable equine events – *Sharon Hanna, Bay Hill Farm, Pennsylvania.*
- To purchase an ox cart for their trained American Milking Devon Oxen, and take them to demonstrations to promote Milking Devons throughout the Northeast – *brothers Dale and Josiah Freier, ages 15 and 9, Every Season Farm, STATE.*
- To purchase electrical fencing and expand her operation and expand her breeding flock of Arapawa goats – *Michelle Nardozzi, Newbury Farms, Connecticut.*
- To add multiple poultry breeds to expand educational programming – *Erin O'Connell, Environmental Learning Centers Indian Rock Nature Preserve, The Learning Centers of Connecticut.*

- To develop an on-farm equine reproduction laboratory and semen collection center to conserve Brabant and other rare equine breeds – *Rebecca and Dehan Courtney, All the Kings Horses farm, Pennsylvania.*
- To expand pasturing capabilities and improve wool quality in their Romeldale sheep flock – *Kate Hagel, Ballyhope Farm, New York.*
- To predator-proof enclosures and add more breeding flocks of heritage chickens and turkeys – *Jim Schultz, Red Shirt Farm, Massachusetts.*
- To expand infrastructure of her rabbitry and bring in additional genetics for the breeding program – *Ashley Pierce, Silver Fox rabbit breeder, New Jersey.*

For every application we asked for two letters of recommendation to ensure the applicant is competent and working with the breeds they say they are. The following is an excerpt in support of the Freier brothers' project:

“These young people are fantastic

continued on page 4

Farewell Dorothy, Welcome Cindra

Many of you have had the pleasure of working with, emailing, or chatting on the phone with Dorothy Hammett, our Administrative Assistant over the past few years. Dorothy announced her retirement in late 2018 but generously stayed on to help with the transition for her replacement, Cindra Kerscher, who joined us in mid-January.

Having been raised in a rural, Pennsylvania farm community, Cindra fully

appreciates small, family farmers. She is currently working toward a degree in Sustainable Agriculture from Central Carolina Community College and on becoming a Certified Beekeeper with the North Carolina State Beekeepers Association. She is raising several breeds of heritage chickens and a small diversified farm is in her future.

We would like to extend a huge thanks to Dorothy for all of her contributions to helping the Conservancy run smoothly. Be sure to give Cindra a warm welcome the next time you talk to her!



Dorothy Hammett



Cindra Kerscher

New Life Members

The Livestock Conservancy would like to give a special thanks to the following individuals who recently chose to support the Conservancy and its conservation programs by becoming life members. For more information on becoming a life member, please contact Ryan Walker at 919-542-5704, ext. 102, or rwalker@LivestockConservancy.org.

The Rose Family
Center Cross, VA

Sydney L. Sparkes
Northport, AL

Lisa L. Douglas
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The Livestock Conservancy is a nonprofit tax-exempt corporation established to conserve and promote endangered breeds of livestock and poultry. The Conservancy

is a membership organization that engages in research, education, and communication to promote these purposes.

Basic annual membership is \$45 and includes the quarterly *Livestock Conservancy News* and the annual *Breeders Directory*. We also accept unsolicited donations. All contributions are tax-deductible to the extent provided by law. Please send changes of address to the Conservancy.

The Conservancy welcomes articles, photographs, letters, and classified advertising for possible publication. Publication of articles or

advertisements is not necessarily an endorsement by the Conservancy. Articles from this newsletter may not be reprinted without permission.

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Jeannette Beranger, Senior Program Manager
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Cindra Kerscher, Administrative Assistant
Deborah Niemann, Program Research Associate
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Advisors

D. Phillip Sponenberg, DVM, PhD, Technical Advisor

FROM THE DIRECTOR



Taking Pride in Our Heritage

By Alison Martin

At a livestock conservation symposium in Latin America in the fall of 2018, one speaker after another stood up with pride and described the breeds native to their country and how they are working diligently to conserve them. Phil Sponenberg leaned over and remarked, “Their breeds are who they are, and they get it”.

It reminded me, with regret, of comments made last year in the United States, following publication of an article on heritage breeds in the mainstream media. Some agriculture professionals were amused at the concept of livestock breeds native to the U.S., the implication being that the concept was mere puffery.

Why the difference in attitude? The ancestors of native livestock breeds in both South America and North America arrived at roughly the same time (150-500 years ago). Why then do agriculturalists in North America reject them as merely derivative, while our cousins in Latin America embrace them as essential to their heritage?

After a century (or two or three), are livestock and poultry still truly derivative of their long-ago ancestors? Or, have the local environment and conditions created new, American breeds? Our cousins in

Latin America would say the latter, and science agrees with them. DNA studies of goats, swine, cattle, and sheep of Iberian (Spanish) ancestry clearly show clear breed differentiation, not only from those long-ago ancestors, but from their cousins in other countries (*see references*).

How many centuries must pass until Americans perceive a livestock breed as native? After all, swine, chickens, and horses are no more native to Europe than they are to the Americas, yet each rightly claims breeds native to both Europe and the Americas. Is it a question of species? Few would dispute that the Morgan horse is American. But would they agree that Texas Longhorn cattle are a native breed? Is it a question of intentionality? The Morgan breed came about through the actions of man and nature, the Texas Longhorn primarily through nature. Yet, it is a fallacy to think that natural selection is less powerful than intentional breed creation.

My theory is that American agriculturalists dismiss our native, heritage breeds for cultural reasons that are deeply rooted in our early history. The European settlers came to North America to start a new life, leaving behind the values and religion of their former homes and in time rebelling against the rule of their European leaders. From the beginning of our history on this continent, Americans were focused on the present and future rather than the past. A series of studies published in *Psychological Science* in 2008 showed that we place more financial value on events that have not yet occurred than on the same events of the past. Do we dismiss the livestock of our past merely because they are historical, and believe that the best livestock breeds are yet to come?

Instead, let us stand up and take pride in the livestock and poultry we have inherited from our forefathers. Let us learn the lessons of history, natural selection, and selection by the hand of man that created the exquisite adaptations of the animals around us. Let us remember that Ossabaw Island pigs build their own nests and give birth to healthy piglets without our interference, and that Navajo Churro sheep have for centuries provided wool, milk and meat for native shepherds on the most marginal lands of the Southwest. Perhaps then all farmers will stand up and say, “This is who we are.” ❖

What the average American farmer wants is not a sheep that with good housing and good care and plenty of feed can be made to weigh 350 pounds, but they want a sheep that with no care and very little feed can be made (to) weigh 150 or 200 pounds. We believe the Tunis sheep will come as near doing this as any sheep in the world.

— James A. Williams, in a speech to the Indiana State Board of Agriculture and the Wool Drovers Association. 1897.

Tunis sheep were well thought of throughout the 1800s for their self-sufficiency and quality of the mutton. Although they nearly went extinct during the Civil War, astute breeders recognized their value and helped keep the breed viable.

References:

Ginja, C. et al., 2017. Genetic diversity and patterns of population structure in Creole goats from the Americas. *Animal Genetics* 48:315-329.

Burgos-Paz, W. et al., 2013. Porcine colonization of the Americas: a 60K SNP story. *Heredity* 110:321-330.

Martinez, A. M. et al., 2012. Genetic footprints of Iberian cattle in America 500 years after the arrival of Columbus. *PLOS One* 7:e 49066.

Sponenberg, D.P. and C. Taylor. 2009. Navajo-Churro sheep and wool in the United States. *Animal Genetic Resources* 45:99-105.



Navajo-Churro rugs for sale at the Sheep Is Life Celebration. Photo by Cindy Dvergsten.

MAY 19-25
2019

INTERNATIONAL HERITAGE BREEDS WEEK



HERITAGEBREEDSWEEK.ORG

Fifth Annual #Heritage- BreedsWeek

International Heritage Breeds Week, first launched as a national event by The Livestock Conservancy in 2015, will take place on May 19-25, 2019. Sixteen international conservation organizations now participate annually, raising awareness to the global public about the plight of endangered livestock and poultry breeds and the opportunities to bring them back.

Many individuals and organizations have used the week of awareness as an opportunity to engage local, regional, and even national media to educate the public about Heritage breeds. During last year's event The Livestock Conservancy reached over 530,000 people on social media, as well as millions more through traditional media.

How can you help?

If you would like to participate, reach out to your local newspaper, magazines, radio, or TV stations and propose a story on Heritage breeds. If you have a farm and are up for it, invite them out to take pictures and video or audio of you and your animals. If you produce food products, consider having some samples prepared for them to try while they are conducting the interview (which is a good way to ensure they'll want to come back for a second or third interview at a later date!) If you produce fiber, have some handy for them to feel and photograph, along with any fiber arts products that were made from it and be sure to tell them about the Shave 'Em to Save 'Em challenge!

If you don't have animals, let your local media know about The Livestock Conservancy and consider connecting with local Heritage breed farmers in your area, found in our *Breeders and Products Directory*. If you don't know where to start, forward the Conservancy's Press Release along to your local media when it comes out.

Some people also take the opportunity

to hold in-person events honoring Heritage breeds. Some have been partnerships with local fairs and festivals, others have set up "show and tell" areas at local businesses, and some have hosted on-farm events for the public to come and learn about their animals. If you manage a public farm like a zoo or living history museum, schedule activities about Heritage breeds during the week. And if you do any in-person activities, don't forget to send us pictures!

Help us spread the word on social media by sharing posts from The Livestock Conservancy and our community using the hashtag #HeritageBreedsWeek. The Conservancy is on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, but feel free to participate on any platforms you may frequently use. If you don't use social media, find a friend, neighbor, or relative who does and ask them make a post for you.

Make plans now!

If you need guidance or want to discuss ideas, visit www.HeritageBreedsWeek.org or reach out to Ryan Walker at rwalker@LivestockConservancy.org or call 919-542-5704. ❖

Micro-grants

Continued from page 1

ambassadors for both their heritage breed cattle and 4-H Youth Development. They are pleasant and friendly. They make friends quickly and are articulate with adults. They worked together to give an informative presentation at the county fair. Dale's older working steer team were very impressive as he told the gathered crowd about their training and practical uses. Josiah's calves working together in their yoke may be one of the most adorable things I have witnessed. It is a great pleasure to see them teaching other youth and fairgoers about their special interests in a positive way. They both seem as comfortable talking to their peers as they do to the Executive Director of my association or on a microphone in front of a crowd. One of the strongest traits both Dale and Josiah possess is their interest in learn-



Josiah Freier and his American Milking Devon oxen, Ruben and Simeon.

ing. They eagerly participate in workshops and clinics. They attended a district dairy clinic and I received a report from one of the educators about their attentiveness to the program and the great questions they

asked. They attended a state 4-H program at Cornell University. They participated in an animal science learning challenge in Seneca County and also took on the New York State Dairy Challenge at the New York State Fair. After visit-

ing several stations covering topics such as meat quality, nutrition, health, safety, dairy judging, and linear appraisal, Mark said, "Thanks, Ms. Susan, that was fun!" It is a dream for a 4-H Youth Development



Student Memberships

Do you know a student who would be interested in heritage breed conservation? Get them a student membership! For just \$25, students will receive all of the perks of the Basic membership with the exception of receiving *The Livestock Conservancy News* and the *Breeders and Products Directory* only online. Students from pre-K through college are eligible for the student membership. To sign a student up, visit www.livestockconservancy.org or send the student's name, contact information, and the name of the school they currently attend with payment to The Livestock Conservancy, PO Box 477, Pittsboro, NC 27312. Cash, checks, money orders, or credit cards (VISA, MasterCard, American Express, and Discover) are accepted. Students must be currently enrolled or between semesters in an academic program at the time membership is purchased.

Educator to hear those words after a youth participates in a multi-faceted knowledge event."

Susan M. Coyle, 4-H Youth Development Educator, Cornell University Cooperative Extension

It was clear to the reviewers of this proposal that these young men are destined to do some great things with their cattle.

A big thank you to all who helped to review the applications. It was not an easy task to choose from so many good proposals. The next cycle for grants will open in August 2019 so look for details on the Livestock Conservancy's website!

If you would like to help fund micro-grants in other regions, please contact the Conservancy at (919) 542-5704 or at info@LivestockConservancy.org. ❖



**SHAVE 'EM
TO SAVE 'EM™**
A LIVESTOCK CONSERVANCY INITIATIVE

Starting to Shave

Our new project, Shave 'Em to Save 'Em, encourages fiber artists to work with wool from sheep on our Conservation Priority List. When fiber artists register they receive a passport that includes a page for each breed with space to put a stamp after they purchase wool from that particular breed. As they work their way through the breeds, they will receive prizes for completing projects with 5, 10, and 15 types of wool. There is a Facebook group and a Ravelry group where members can connect with shepherds and share pictures of their projects.

In order for a project to count, it must be made with 100% pure wool from a single breed. Wool from crossbred sheep and wool that has been blended with other fibers, such as alpaca or mohair are not allowed. One of the goals of the program is to introduce fiber artists to the different types of wool that each breed produces.

Some have a softer wool that's excellent for garments while others have wool that's more suited to making rugs, but you may not be able to discern the unique attributes of each wool if it is blended with another fiber. Some have white wool that takes well to dyes while others come in a wide variety of natural colors and patterns.

The Conservancy has long said that the way to save endangered breeds of livestock is to give them a job. In the case of wool sheep, we need to start using their wool again. Because of marketing challenges, not everyone sells the wool their sheep produce. Some shepherds compost the wool after their annual shearing rather than cleaning it and selling it. In addition to encouraging fiber artists to try rare wools, the program will also educate shepherds about how to prepare their wool for sale to fiber artists. Helping shepherds market their wool, helps them become more financially stable, which helps ensure the future of the sheep. Fiber workshops for shepherds and fiber artists will be held in Oregon in August and in Pennsylvania in September.

For more information about Shave 'Em to Save 'Em or about the sheep breeds that are on the Conservation Priority List, visit RareWool.org. ❖



Fran Stafford was the first to complete five Shave 'Em to Save 'Em projects by spinning wool from five heritage breeds. Skeins left to right: Jacob, Navajo Churro, Shetland, Karakul, Romeldale CVM, from Solitude Wool, Fibers by Laura, Fiber Curio, Hobbyknob Farm, and Marushka Farm, respectively.

Top Video Game Features Heritage Breeds

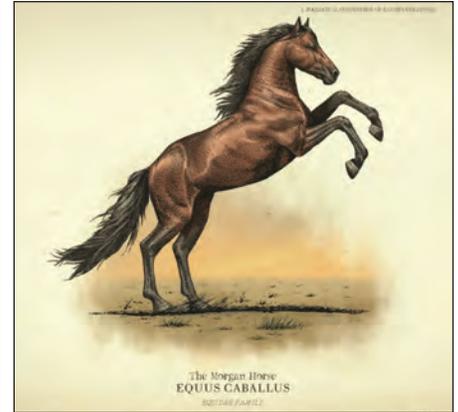
One of the most popular video games of all-time launched in late October. While this kind of news doesn't usually end up in the Conservancy's newsletter, the game *Red Dead Redemption 2* is newsworthy to our readers for good reason – it includes eleven Heritage breeds!

Spoiler alert - the artistic depictions aren't always to breed standard and the game openly combines historic facts and fiction, but several breeds are referenced by name, including: Devon and Florida Cracker cattle, Morgan, Mustang, Shire, Belgian, and Suffolk Punch horses, Domi-

nique, Java and Leghorn chickens, and Gloucestershire Old Spots pigs.

The game (rated M 17+) is an open world, Western-themed, action-adventure game developed and published by Rockstar Games for the PlayStation 4 and Xbox One consoles, and is currently the highest rated game on both systems. Over 17 million copies were shipped in the first two weeks, earning \$725 million and the distinction of the single-biggest launch in the history of entertainment. ❖

The images pictured here were obtained from the fan site Red Dead Base, www.rddatabase.com.



A Morgan horse, as depicted in *A Zoological Compendium of Earth's Creatures*, a fictional encyclopedia that catalogs the wildlife and domesticated animals that players encounter in the game.



An in-game screenshot of an encounter with a Florida Cracker cow.



An in-game image depicting a Gloucestershire Old Spots pig.

MEMBER VOICES *from the farm*

GREETINGS to everyone, from snowy upstate New York! I'm writing this article on behalf of all rare breed animals and people who love heritage breeds and who strive to help protect such animals.

I live on a small farm, where we support rare and Heritage breeds. We have a small herd of Dutch Belted milk cows and about 40 Icelandic chickens.

Dutch Belted cows are very beautiful, with their sleek black fore- and hindquarters with a ribbon of white in between. I like to think of them as black-and-white Oreo cookies. I've already milked them by hand before and helped train them as oxen.

Riding in an ox-cart drawn by a heritage breed Dutch Belted ox team is an awesome experience, as is a ride on a stone-boat over mounds of sparkling, glistening snow in the wintertime.

Rare breed Icelandic chickens, on the other hand, vary greatly from Dutch Belted cattle! They remind me very much of game birds, with their flighty movements and strong instinct to protect themselves.

Icelandic hens are exceptionally good sitters and fairly good mothers. They come in a great array of colors, ranging from red and black cockerels to yellowish-white



Icelandic cockerel. Photo by Jeannette Beranger.

spotted pullets. And instead of being bright yellow little chicks, they each have their own unique patterns and colors, including black, orange, yellow, tan, and grey.

We also have an American Buff gander, which is considered to be a rare breed. We named him Hugh and he lost his mate last winter due to a coyote. After having geese for two years I found out how smart they are! Hugh usually knows what's expected of him. But sometimes, when no one is watching, he's bold enough to do the prohibited, such as sneaking in the barn to eat chicken feed or even grabbing himself a bite of cat food.

American Buff geese are one of the mildest breeds of geese, which is one reason I like them so much. And they are so beautiful too – especially while gliding over a clear lake of water.

Heritage and rare breeds all deserve to be preserved and protected, so let's all do our share in committing to their future! ❖

– Virginia Hund, age 15



Shopping Online? A New Way To Give!

Giving Assistant

We've recently added **Giving Assistant** to our options to make it easy for you to donate to the Conservancy and save money while shopping online. Sign up at <https://givingassistant.org/np#the-livestock-conservancy> to begin saving money and earning cash back on your everyday shopping at over 3,000+ online stores. Then, automatically donate some or all of your earnings to the Conservancy. Additional options include:

AmazonSmile

Visit <https://smile.amazon.com/ch/03-0270281> and select The Livestock Conservancy as your charity to support. Save a bookmark to smile.amazon.com to use every time you shop at Amazon instead of using Amazon.com or the mobile app. The AmazonSmile Foundation will donate 0.5% of the purchase price from your eligible AmazonSmile purchases.

iGive

Shop at any of the 1,700+ online stores in the iGive network through the iGive.com website or on your phone. iGive provides shoppers coupons, free shipping deals, and sales. It's all automatic, and it's all free of charge. There are no hidden fees or extra costs and up to 26% of each purchase benefits The Livestock Conservancy. Sign up at www.iGive.com/LConservancy.

Goodsearch

Use Yahoo! powered **Goodsearch.com** as your search engine and they'll donate about a penny to us every time you do a search. Just choose The Livestock Conservancy as your charity to support.

Goodshop

At Yahoo! **Goodshop.com** you can shop at more than 2,600 top online retailers and a percentage of your purchases will go to The Livestock Conservancy. You pay the same price as you normally would, but a donation goes to us. ❖

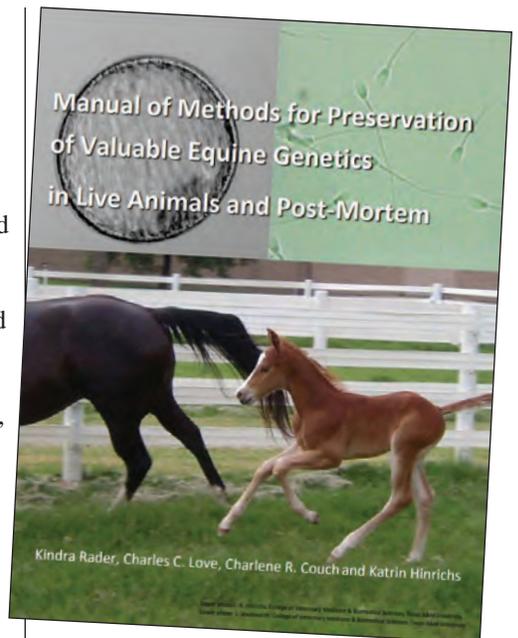
New Manual Aims to Help Save Equine Genetics

Texas A&M University and The Livestock Conservancy have recently published a much-needed guide for veterinarians, breeders, and horse owners to conserve valuable genetic materials from horses and donkeys. These samples of sperm, eggs, or tissue may represent the last remaining genetic information from a valuable horse, bloodline, or breed.

The manual was created as a resource for owners and non-specialized veterinarians to understand how to properly collect vital tissues in ways that minimize loss and maximize resources for conservation. The tissues can then be sent to specialized facilities that can "work the magic" to utilize and preserve what could be irreplaceable genetics for the future.

Authors Kindra Rader, Charles C. Love, Charlene R. Couch and Katrin Hinrichs provide detailed information and emergency protocols for veterinarians and owners that make it possible for any veterinarian or horse owner to preserve priceless genetics – even after the animal's life has ended.

The manual contains detailed protocols for saving sperm, eggs and tissue samples from live animals and post-mortem emergency situations. While it was originally conceived as a resource for conserving rare equine breeds, many of the techniques are directly applicable to the conservation



of other mammalian species.

The manual is available for free download on The Livestock Conservancy's website and is being widely promoted among equine health and conservation organizations.

Bound copies of the 67-page resource are also available for \$26.95 + s/h from the Conservancy's store. ❖

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THE LIVESTOCK CONSERVANCY

2019 HERITAGE LIVESTOCK CONFERENCE

"ALL THINGS SHEEP"

OCTOBER 25-26, 2019 • SANTA ROSA, CA



Meishan

A Celebration of Tradition

Presented by

Insa Korean BBQ
328 Douglass Street, Brooklyn

April 9th, 2019

Cocktails 6:30 pm & Dinner at 7:00 pm

\$85 per person*

Join us for an evening to celebrate the ancient breed, Meishan. The Livestock Conservancy is partnering with Insa to present a 6-course, family style Meishan pork tasting menu. Proceeds from this event will be donated to The Livestock Conservancy.

Tickets can be purchased on Insa's website: www.insabrooklyn.com

Guest Speakers

Isabella Rossellini - actress, model, author, endangered breed advocate & steward

Rico Silvera - Founder & President, American Meishan Breeders Association.

Jeannette Beranger - Senior Program Manager, The Livestock Conservancy

Dinner

Mungbean Pancakes with a Soy Pork Relish

Pork Dumplings

Gamjatang

(Spicy Pork Stew with Potatoes & Perilla)

BBQ Pork Bulgogi

Grilled Pork Belly

Dessert

Sweet Cream Soft Serve with Black Sesame Chicharron & Asian Pear

insa
인사



**THE LIVESTOCK
CONSERVANCY™**

*\$85/person for tasting menu. NY State Tax as well as gratuity will be added to that price. Beverages can be purchased a la carte on the night of the event.

Original artwork by Carolyn Guske

First Regional AMD Show in 79 Years Held

By Richard Larson, Old Gjerpen Farm

American Milking Devon (AMD) breeders held a Mid-Atlantic Regional Show and Card Grading in September, hosted by the Virginia State Fair. Ten breeders, from as far away as New York and Illinois, exhibited 31 Milking Devon. *“The exhibitors represented an excellent cross-section of AMD breeders.”* – John Hall, President, AMDCA

While having a judge who is familiar with the breed is important to any livestock show, it is particularly important when evaluating rare breeds. The show was judged by Dr. Drew Conroy, an Animal Science Professor from the University of New Hampshire, who has raised American Milking Devon cattle and oxen since 1992. Dr. Conroy is a past president of the AMDA, and past ALBC board member. His 26 years of experience working with Milking Devon, coupled with his experience from judging more than 20 dairy and beef shows, made Dr. Conroy uniquely qualified to evaluate this historic, tri-purpose (milking, beef & oxen) breed.

This was the first AMD regional show in 79 years. While many factors contributed to the success of the gathering, chief among them is the fact that four of the breeders were youth, and their characteristic enthusiasm bodes well for the future of the breed. *“The real highlight for me was seeing the enthusiasm and interest by the young people involved in the show.”* Drew Conroy

On Saturday the Milking Devon led off the Fair’s competitive dairy show where classes of animals of same sex and age were evaluated against each other. For the Milking Devon there were three heifer calf classes, as well as four yearling heifer, two cow and two bull calf classes. Emphasis was placed on “bred & owned” classes restricted to animals that were both bred by and owned by the exhibitor. Examples of this type of class included: Three Heifers; Produce of Dam; Dam & Daughter; Get-of-Sire; and Breeders Herd. In addition to numerous champion and reserve champion awards, the show capped off with Premier



Senior Cows competition (top) and Grand Champions (lower) at the AMD Show.

Junior Exhibitor and Premier Breeder awards, both based on overall point accumulation. *“I think the greatest value for the breeders who were there and for those watching the show was to see the differences in quality and to recognize them going forward.”* – Drew Conroy

On Sunday the entire day was devoted to scoring of each individual Milking Devon against the Breed Standard. In addition to scoring each animal and giving the exhibitor their official score card, Dr. Conroy articulated his reasons for the animal’s score for the benefit of both the breeder and the public. This proved to be the highlight of the three-day gathering. A great education experience for both breeders and the general public. *“The most valuable experience was the individual scoring. It helped to improve my eye as a breeder.”* – Deadre Keen, Virginia

The young Milking Devon breeders enjoyed participating in several special Fair events including Showmanship and the Pretty Cow Contest in which judging was based on creativity, attractiveness and audience applause.

The fact that the Milking Devon were grouped in the show barn enabled the breed, in their deep red coats and black-tipped horns, to stand out in the eyes of the public. It also enabled breeders to easily engage one another in leisurely conversa-

tions, comparing notes about blood lines, breeding, marketing strategies, etc. *“I really enjoyed the opportunity to simply be amongst so many Devon breeders and Devons at the same time.”* Dale Freier, New York

Conservation of rare breeds is an agricultural niche – a very small group spread across various livestock species. Promoting the breeds and having them visible to the public is challenging. The AMD Regional Show exposed thousands of Fairgoers, not only to the breed but more widely, to the importance of rare breeds conservation in general. *“My personal highlight was seeing the dedication of breeders willing to compare their animals to others’ animals in the pursuit of improving their herds and sharing what they have learned. ... it was a step in the right direction for the breed association and exhibitors to compare animals and discuss the pros and cons of the breed and its standard of perfection.”* – Drew Conroy

There was overwhelming agreement amongst participating Milking Devon breeders, AMD association leadership, and State Fair officials that 2018 was a great success and that there will be a **2019 Mid-Atlantic Regional Milking Devon Show – September 27-29, 2019**. Mark your calendar and plan to join us. ❖

From Pharma to Farmer

By Mike Hansen

My wife Sue and I were awoken at 2:30 a.m. by a loud and constant dripping. It was raining hard, the wind was blowing from the north, and rainwater was leaking from the ceiling onto unopened moving boxes and running down the walls of the bedroom. When we moved into the 100-year-old farmhouse two weeks earlier, we thought we had fixed all the leaks. The leaks were not the only problems we encountered. The septic tank failed. The heating, insulation, and windows were so inadequate that we had to wear every stitch of clothing and have every blanket and comforter on the bed because the temperature felt below freezing in the house at night. We were starting to wonder if our friends and family were right. Were we crazy for leaving our cushy jobs in Raleigh to start a farm near the North Carolina Zoo? Looking back, the choice to start a farm business with zero farming experience, zero retail experience, and a head full of idyllic ideas may have been a bit crazy. But honestly, we didn't feel like we had a choice.

From C-word to F-word

The inspiration to leave the relative safety of our IT jobs in the pharmaceutical industry for farming was inspired by a disease that Pharma helps treat but cannot seem to cure, cancer. At the age of 5, my son Marcus was diagnosed with a rare form of spinal cord cancer, acute astrocytoma. A few years later Sue was diagnosed with breast cancer. During treatment, they both discovered how food affected their health and became passionate about eating well to take back control of their lives. Sue read hundreds of books and scoured the internet for information about how the right food can help improve health. She found a lot of conflicting information but with time and a healthy skepticism, she established her own idea of what healthy food is. At some point our discussion moved to wanting to grow our own fruit and vegetables and raise our own livestock. By doing so, we would be confident that the food we ate was as healthy and fresh as possible. In 2013 we made the final decision to start farming.



In February 2014 we moved into a drafty and cold 100-year-old farmhouse in Coleridge, North Carolina. We had a lot of ideas about what we would grow and raise, but no experience of how to do it. During our preparation for farming we discovered and fell in love with the concepts of 'heirloom' and 'heritage'. We discovered the Livestock Conservancy website and after studying all the cattle breeds and speaking with staff, we found that Pineywoods Cattle stood out as the cattle breed for us. We loved the idea of becoming part of a small community of farmers that were helping to bring this historically significant breed back from the brink of extinction. We were attracted to their disease and parasite resistance, heat tolerance, mothering and natural calving ability (we wanted the breed we chose to be able to birth without our help!), and the fact that they could thrive on less-than-ideal forage. And of course, they are beautiful animals!

These traits made good business sense, too. Compared to commercial cattle, at least on paper, Pineywoods add up to a net positive. Disease and parasite resistance meant lower vet bills; high natural calving and low calf mortality rates meant fewer losses; ability to thrive on less-than-ideal forage meant lower annual cost for organic hay. On top of the tangible savings these traits should give us, we should also be able to free up time from managing the herd to use to build the business. Only

time will tell if this expectation will hold true, but we are already seeing anecdotal evidence. Speaking with local farmers, we have learned that we are feeding a lot less hay than they are.

Aside from the business aspects, we expected the history of Pineywoods Cattle would make for a great story to tell future customers. Brought to the Southeast by Spanish explorers in the early 1500s, Pineywoods ran wild for 350 to 400 years and are considered America's first cattle breed. With their innate heat tolerance, they are extremely well adapted to weather in the South. We often see them hanging out in the pasture in the middle of summer while our neighbors' cattle stand in the pond or crowd under a few trees. Every member of the herd has a different personality. Our cow Blackberry, who has the saltiest attitude in the herd, inspired Sue to print a t-shirt with Blackberry's picture and the phrase "Farming - the Original F-word." Sue's a bit salty too.

Ideals, More Disease, and Not Taking Advice

The idyllic ideas of how we would farm – no pesticides, no herbicides, sustainably and organic – started to play out at Ozark Akerz in the spring of 2014 as we began to plant heirloom tomatoes and peppers in a newly tilled patch of what used to be a hay field. I'm still not sure how we got them to grow in that clay, but they did and, believe it or not, they tasted amazing!

So much so that a local restaurant and a co-op started buying them. The chef said they were the best tasting tomatoes she had ever eaten. Our heads could hardly fit through the door at the end of the day, we were so proud. During that time, we began fencing 40 acres of the farm in preparation for introducing Pineywoods cattle in 2015. It seemed an ideal spread for the breed: 25 acres of pasture and 15 acres of dense scrub, kudzu, and young trees on land on which timber had been harvested 15 years earlier. They would have a tasty variety of forage to choose from as their wild-roaming ancestors did. Since their introduction to the farm we've discovered they even love privet, an invasive species in our state.

On June 24, 2015, about 30 minutes before the first three Pineywoods were delivered from a farm in Alabama, we finished the fence. Tangerine, Rosie, and Louise were joined by Blackberry and our bull, Rocky, a few hours later. About the same time, all 450 tomato plants we had planted in the spring wilted from some unknown disease. We were crushed, and we barely made \$300 on the crop. Since then we have been improving the soil with chicken litter from our own chickens, organic raw milk, and organic kelp. We are starting to see much more resilient crops, although we are not sure if we will grow commercially in the future.

Sue and I have struggled with our ap-

proach to vaccinating the Pineywoods herd. We got a lot of advice from local farmers and our extension office, but it was mainly based on commercial breeds like Angus and Holstein and included a strict vaccination regimen. We were very selective about the advice we chose to follow. We both agreed that we didn't have to vaccinate for everything. Pineywoods are, after all, renowned for being disease and parasite resistant. When we pushed back on the many vaccinations the vet recommended, we moved the discussion to one of risk management instead of comprehensive vaccinations. The vet finally, and with much reservation, strongly recommend that at a minimum we vaccinate for blackleg, leptospirosis, and pink eye. Sue and I did not agree about how to proceed. I was fearful of losing animals to blackleg, which is fatal. The farmers we spoke to in our area encouraged us to vaccinate for it. Sue believed that any regular vaccinations would do the breed a disservice and would breed the innate disease resistance out of our herd in a few generations. After a lot of discussion, Sue finally convinced me that we should not implement a fixed vaccination regimen. Instead we would monitor individuals in the herd and treat as necessary. We do vaccinate for tetanus when we castrate animals, but apart from that, we do not adopt any strict vaccination regimen. We have had one cow contract

pink eye which we treated with antibiotics and a patch over her eye. The pinkeye cleared up and she is fine.

We have since learned of another Pineywoods breeder in Georgia who, in the 12 years he has been raising Pineywoods, has never followed a strict vaccination regimen and has never lost a head to disease. His reasoning is like ours, that the breed is known for being healthy and resistant to diseases. As breeders, we are always enthusiastic about sharing the 500-year history of Pineywoods, and it's our responsibility to consider, and discuss, how our actions may affect the Pineywoods population 500 years from now. For us personally that means being conscious about how we help the breed day-to-day, including difficult decisions about vaccinations.

This approach is not for everyone. We always outline the risks to all the farmers we sell breeding stock to. We remind them that Pineywoods are resistant to diseases, not immune to them and encourage them to gauge their personal risk tolerance as well as proximity to other herds when making their decision about vaccinations.

To Save Them We Have To Eat Them

Selling Pineywoods breeding stock is extremely rewarding. The reality, however, is that the supply of bulls far exceeds the demand, and we only have a limited amount of land to graze our herd. So, we're left with the difficult decision to take some of the boys to the meat processor. This has been the most difficult part of farming. In some African tribes, families swap animals when they are getting close to slaughter. They recognize the emotional attachment that is built for animals that you care for. Even if we could swap, the knowledge of knowing where the boys are going would be emotionally draining. Although we try to reason that the money we make on beef sales helps us maintain and sustain our herd, the decision to take a life is not a easy one, nor should it be.

We started selling Pineywoods Heritage Beef in early 2018. Previously we had only marketed and sold eggs and tomatoes. Opening doors to discussions with our customers about what we do and what makes us different from other farms has never been easy. Most consumers have little if any time to truly understand how choices made by farms affect their food. In addition, food marketing phrases like

continued on next page



Ozark Akerz uses stunning images to promote their farm and products on social media. Photo by Mike Hansen.

From Pharma to Farmer

Continued from previous page

'farm-raised chicken' confuse many consumers. As opposed to what? Bathroom-raised chicken? We have an additional hurdle for Heritage cattle. Angus has a big marketing machine behind it. Angus certifications and even restaurants that include the word Angus permeate our society. As providers of a product as rare as Pineywoods Heritage Beef we needed to differentiate ourselves but at the same time not sound too unusual.

To most consumers, a ribeye is a ribeye, with today's biggest differentiator being grain-fed vs grass-fed. We don't feed any grains to our cattle. To consumers that means we're grass-fed beef and that doesn't differentiate Pineywoods Heritage Beef from Angus or any other breed.

After a lot of trial and error, we're now adopting a multi-stage approach to communicating with customers:

Starting the conversation. It's harder to start the conversation online than it is in person, but that aside, the biggest challenge is still starting the conversation. We tried to connect with the local movement by printing t-shirts that read "I'm #CluckingCrazy about Local Farmers," three years ago. We have never had anyone comment or start a conversation about anything farming related upon seeing these t-shirts. In October 2018, we printed t-shirts that read "Graze Against The Machine™ - Pineywoods Cattle" (see photo to right). The first day we wore them we had someone ask where they could buy the t-shirt, another ask what it meant and a third tell us about seeing the band Rage Against The Machine at Lollapalooza. Each conversation led to us talking about our animals and the farm. This was the first time people had started the conversation with us, people we most likely wouldn't have had an opportunity to talk with otherwise. We've trademarked Graze Against The Machine in order to strengthen branding and continue expanding the conversation.

Communicating our farm practices. Communicating our farm practices shows how we care for the animals and the land. As with everything else, this has been a lot of trial and error. We started with simple examples of what we did like feeding our



Mike and Sue's "Graze Against The Machine" T-shirt has been a very successful conversation starter.

Communicating our products. The flavor of wild foraged Pineywoods Heritage Beef is different from grass-fed Angus, Charolais, and other breeds. But how do we communicate this without consumers tasting it first?

Initially we spent a lot of time authoring a flyer that outlined what sets Pineywoods apart from other beef. For our initial draft, we found inspiration from other Pineywoods breeders, added our personal touch and sent it to 15 people for review,

including a vegetarian! We got some great feedback and it really helped us refine the message. The final copy has remained relatively static since we started using it in early 2018. We find that the content and format of the flyer fits nicely into our broader marketing channels such as emails and our website. The photo to right shows the current version.

It seems to be working. We have sold quarter-sides of beef to customers in North Carolina, New Jersey, and Georgia and are working with a new customer in Florida. Our individual-cut customers are coming back to buy more because they love the flavor. Here is a sample of what they're saying:

"The ground beef from Ozark Ak-erz is some of the most flavorful I have ever eaten. It tasted like something you would expect to receive from a high-end restaurant." — Isaac S., Asheboro, North Carolina

Sustaining the conversation. Once we have made a connection with a customer, the biggest challenge is maintaining that connection, and this is where we are still very much in the experimental mode. Social media is a good place to share farm life, but we have found that there is no correlation between what we think is good content or great photographs and the engagement our followers have with a

chickens organic feed, but with time we have begun to tell a story that illustrates how the decisions we make impact the farm ecosystem. Here's an example from our website:

"When we choose to buy organic straw from Cohen Farm to put in the chicken coop, we do so with the knowledge that when the straw is cleaned out of the coop, we will compost it for use as a natural fertilizer in our garden. If we purchase straw that has not been grown under organic practices, we don't know what kind of chemicals are found in the straw, chemicals that could end up in our garden, affecting or preventing the growth of our plants. That, along with supplementing our birds' diet with non-soy, organic feed means we get the best fertilizer around!"

We have included three short stories on our website. The stories give new customers some basic insight into how we farm, and we're starting to see people contact us and comment on how they love what we're doing. The stories are clearly working.

Storytelling has an important place in human history and has proven to be an effective way to retain memory. As people rely more and more on Google to remember, we're trying this old technique to increase our chances of remaining in customers' awareness as they make their everyday food purchasing choices.

specific post. There seems to be a lot of voodoo magic involved.

In order to share more detailed content about how we farm, we started a blog a few years ago. The problem with blogs is that we're not sure if they are read and no one has ever commented on them. As a result, we haven't written many posts.

We have been very active approaching local newspapers and TV news stations about our story. I am fortunate to have made a connection with a reporter at our local newspaper who serves as a volunteer with me at our county Extension office. He has written several articles about the developments, challenges and successes of the farm over the past three years. It's been a bit more challenging to get TV news interested, but this summer we got a bite from Fox8 News in Greensboro when a newlywed couple from Israel came to visit us as part of their farming honeymoon, or as they called it, their 'farmingmoon'. They are in the process of starting a farm and visited farms in Italy, the U.K. and the U.S. to learn more about farming sustainably. They found us on Instagram. Instagram has been our most successful social media platform for sales of breeding stock and for connecting with like-minded farmers from around the world.

In November 2018 we started a YouTube channel called *Farm to Brookdale* to share our life with Sue's mom, who lives at an Alzheimer's care unit in Arizona. As of writing this article, we have uploaded seven episodes, sharing everything from feeding chickens to sampling homemade wild-crafted beer. The feedback from Brookdale has been very positive and it didn't take long for friends and customers to take notice as well.

I had never done any serious video production before and initially the process was intimidating. But after a little research I found an app that was easy to use and has made learning video production and editing enjoyable. I use Splice on my iPhone. It is free and does everything I need it to do plus it has a library



Pineywoods cow and calf. Photo by Mike Hansen.

of free-to-use music that I can overlay as background music for the video. Unlike for our blog, we can measure viewing rates and engagement via the YouTube channel. In the first month we had 433 views

with over 1200 minutes of video being viewed by 180 people. I'm not sure if this is good or bad (more learning required!) but being able to measure how much our followers watch is a big advantage over blogs. We are making the videos for Sue's mom so we feel like the time invested is really paying off because she (and the other residents and staff of Brookdale) enjoy the videos. The fact that others are watching them too is a bonus.

Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube each have a unique place as channels of communication and make it easy to share farm life in various guises. Instagram and Facebook work well for sharing spontaneous glimpses, YouTube for more in-depth stories. At the end of the day we realize that our efforts to engage and communicate with our customers and followers online and in-person will continue to evolve as they have over the past four years. Whatever this evolution brings, we will continue to share the journey the animals we care for take us on and the sustainable and healthy life we are building for ourselves on the farm. ❖

Mike Hansen is co-founder of Ozark Akerz Sustainable Farm with his wife, Sue Meyer. They sell Pineywoods Heritage Beef, breeding stock, and semen. Their approach to marketing is grounded in a deep passion for sharing their own personal farming experience. Prior to starting Ozark Akerz, Mike founded Exco InTouch, a pioneer of mobile technology in the pharmaceutical industry. You can connect with Mike on LinkedIn (linkedin.com/in/mikehansen/) or via ozarkakerz.com.



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April

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★ **April 27-28 – The Mother Earth News Fair** will be held in Asheville, NC. This fun-filled, family-oriented sustainable lifestyle event features dozens of practical, hands-on demonstrations and workshops on everything from beekeeping to using solar electricity. Visit www.motheearthnewsfair.com for more information.

May

★ ★ **May 19-25 – International Heritage Breeds Week** will be held worldwide to raise awareness of endangered Heritage breeds of livestock and poultry. Heritage breed farmers and the public are encour-

aged to spread the word throughout their networks. The week of awareness culminates with Heritage Breeds Day where many farms, ranches, and organizations will hold local events such as farm tours, workshops, or lectures to raise awareness in their communities. Visit www.Heritage-BreedsWeek.org to learn more.

May 25 – The 2019 Spring Heritage Breeds Festival will be held in Riceville, TN. Several Heritage breeds will be on display, as well as vendors of soaps from artisans who source local ingredients, candles, food goods, and more. Visit <https://buchanansbarnyard.com/2019-spring-heritage-breeds-festival> for more information.

June

★ **June 1-2 – The Mother Earth News Fair** will be held in Frederick, MD. This family-oriented sustainable lifestyle event features dozens of practical, hands-on demonstrations and workshops on everything from beekeeping to using solar electricity. Visit www.motheearthnewsfair.com for more information.

August

★ **August 3-4 – The Mother Earth News Fair** will be held in Albany, OR. This family-oriented sustainable lifestyle event features dozens of practical, hands-on demonstrations and workshops on everything from beekeeping to using solar electricity. Visit www.motheearthnewsfair.com for more information.

August 12-14 - The Nebraska Grazing Conference will be held in Kearney, NE. Visit <https://grassland.unl.edu/> for more information.

September

★ **September 13-15 – The Mother Earth News Fair** will be held in Seven Springs, PA. This family-oriented sustainable lifestyle event features dozens of practical, hands-on demonstrations and workshops on everything from beekeeping to using solar electricity. Visit www.motheearthnewsfair.com for more information.

October

★ **October 19-20 – The Mother Earth News Fair** will be held in Topeka, KS. This family-oriented sustainable lifestyle event features dozens of practical, hands-on demonstrations and workshops on everything from beekeeping to using solar electricity. Visit www.motheearthnewsfair.com for more information.

★ ★ **October 25-26 – The Heritage Livestock Conference** will be held in Santa Rosa, CA. Visit The Livestock Conservancy's website for more information.

December

★ ★ **December 31 – DEADLINE to update information** and submit ads for the Livestock Conservancy's 2020 Breeders and Products Directory. If needed, log in to update your information online here. Email Ryan Walker or call 919-542-5704 for more information about advertising in the directory.