

THE POWER OF A MICROGRANT

The Butterfly Effect suggests a small, seemingly trivial event may ultimately result in much larger consequences. The idea is that a single flap of a butterfly's wings could eventually impact weather thousands of miles and dozens of days away.

Tiny changes can also make a real difference in science and in our personal lives. In the case of a 2020 Livestock Conservancy Microgrant recipient, a small investment is having a big impact on the conservation of heritage breed poultry.

A $2,000 award may not seem like much. And in the multibillion-dollar American livestock industry, it really is not a lot. But for The Last Frontier Poultry Club, a small microgrant is having a ripple effect, strengthening heritage poultry breeds in Alaska for years to come.

A formal poultry group only became a reality in Alaska in 2018. As with practically every aspect of livestock husbandry in the state, challenges ensued, according to Lisa Marie Hansen, a poultry breeder who has served as a board member and association president.

"The state of Alaska is vastly huge and the population just really varies," she explains. "We could hold a poultry show at the state fair, but for the majority of backyard poultry owners, it's an eight-hour-plus drive just to get there. It became very difficult for them."

Even if they were willing to make the day-long drive, the facilities were lacking. "We applied for the Microgrant to get poultry cages we could take to different venues besides the state fair so we could have more shows around the state," she adds.

Opportunities to gather together were sorely lacking, says Hansen. "I would get hugely disappointed and a little jealous when I would see all those wonderful poultry shows in the Lower 48 that were sanctioned with judges and the opportunity to talk with other poultry owners."

Leaders of the Last Frontier Poultry Club (from left, Austin Hansen, Lisa Marie Hansen and Jocelyn Hansen) used a Microgrant from The Livestock Conservancy to improve poultry shows and competition conditions in Alaska, benefitting both heritage breeds and other poultry in the state. Photo courtesy of Lisa Marie Hansen

New cages, purchased with the Microgrant, allowed for new poultry shows in places like the Kenai Peninsula near Anchorage, an area rich with farmers and poultry breeders. "We had over 90 entries," Hansen recalls. "There were a lot of breeds there, and for people to be able to experience it was great."

The new show included another feature, one not found in Alaska for many years: a poultry judge. The Microgrant allowed the group to bring in Emmett Wild, a poultry judge licensed through both the American Poultry Association and the American Bantam Association, from the Pacific Northwest.

"It was absolutely wonderful to have that in our state again," she says, describing how competition was not possible in previous years. "We didn't get those opportunities before. You can't take four or five birds and fly down to the states for a show. It's hard in our economy and just not feasible. Having him here made such a difference."

Wild says he was taken aback by what he found in the Last Frontier. "I was surprised by the quality of the birds and by what kind of birds they had, and I was able to learn a bit more from them," he explains. "I was surprised and impressed with the quality of stock that was presented."

Hansen said there are no certified poultry judges who live in Alaska. "There's been interest, but the problem is a judge is required to attend a certain number of shows each year, and there's just never been anybody who has been able to do that." That meant the only Alaskan poultry event that may or may not have a sanctioned judge annually was the state fair, with a judge brought in from the Continental U.S.

Hansen said the Microgrant has breathed new life into heritage breed poultry in Alaska.

"It was a big lift for us to be able to say, 'Let's take these cages and use them throughout the state and let's bring in a judge. ' It allowed us to open things up and breathe new life into poultry and poultry education, as well as bring awareness of these breeds back to the people of Alaska. It's been great," she says. "The Microgrant meant all Alaskans now have the opportunity to engage, learn and be part of the poultry world that we were otherwise shut out of." ■

Applications for 2024-25 Livestock Conservancy Microgrants are being accepted through August 15, 2024. Categories include adult and youth divisions, as well as breed clubs and organizations like The Last Frontier Poultry Club. Microgrants are made possible by generous donors who want to support "boots on the ground" conservation projects that make a difference for one or more breeds on the Conservation Priority List. And new donors are always welcome.



The Last Frontier Poultry Club was able to purchase new cages for birds with a Microgrant from The Livestock Conservancy. The cages are used both for shows and transportation.

APPLY NOW FOR A MICROGRANT

Through the Microgrant program, the Livestock Conservancy has awarded more than $100,000 over six years to farmers, ranchers, homesteaders, breed associations and others to improve heritage breed programs, herds, flocks, outreach and more. Microgrants have been awarded to projects involving all 11 species on the Conservation Priority List and in nearly three dozen states.

"The Microgrant program was developed because there was a real need for money to be available for things that are just impossible to get with other grants," explained Jeannette Beranger, senior program manager for The Livestock Conservancy.

Beranger said Microgrants give conservationists a way to secure funding of up to $2,000 without a complicated application process. "Considerable good has been done with this money and it's also become a vehicle for educating people on how to seek out and apply for other grants," she said.

Funds are available in three categories: National Microgrants, available to residents of the U.S. working with livestock and poultry breeds on the Conservation Priority List; Youth Microgrants to fund projects by those aged 12-18; and Breed Association Microgrants for U.S.-based organizations and clubs working with CPL-listed breeds.

"Microgrants have reached all corners of the United States. It's a program that really impacts the grassroots part of our mission to save endangered livestock and poultry from extinction," she added. "The Microgrants are small amounts of money, but for a farmer or homesteader, it can make a big difference."