



THE LIVESTOCK CONSERVANCY™

Conserving rare breeds since 1977
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THE LIVESTOCK CONSERVANCY™

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WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST LIFE MEMBERS

The Livestock Conservancy thanks the following individuals who recently chose to support conservation programs by becoming Life Members:

Sara Noren
Glenwood City, Wisconsin

Karen Yeung
Hastings on Hudson, New York

To become a Life Member, contact contact Allison Kincaid at akincaid@livestockconservancy.org or (984) 208-9780.

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On the cover:

American Milking Devon (Critical on the Conservation Priority List) on pasture at George Washington's Mount Vernon estate in Virginia. Photograph by Lisa Pregent, senior manager of livestock at Mount Vernon.

ANNUAL MEETING SET FOR DECEMBER 3

The Livestock Conservancy's Annual Members' meeting will be 2:00 p.m. EST, Wednesday, December 3 via Zoom. During the meeting, The Livestock Conservancy's executive director, board, and science and technical advisor will report on activities of the past year and plans for 2026. All current members of The Livestock Conservancy are encouraged to participate. A Zoom link will be emailed to members prior to the meeting.

2026 DIRECTORY DEADLINE DECEMBER 31

The annual *Directory: Rare Breeds and Products Resource Guide* is an excellent reference and networking resource for heritage breeds. It can help you find and advertise breeding stock and find farmers, ranchers and homesteaders raising rare breeds, eggs, meat and milk, and selling other rare breed products. It also includes informative articles, a color copy of the Conservation Priority List,, breed association contact information and more.

One of the most-used parts of the directory is the listings of members who raise particular breeds or have specific products available for purchase. To ensure your listing is correct, make certain your membership information is up to date. Visit <https://livestockconservancy.org/account-update-form/> or call our office at (919) 542-5704 for assistance. The deadline for updates is December 31, 2025.

Directory listings are also used to populate our online Directory. This valuable tool for finding individual animals, herds, flocks, fiber, products and more is available to the general public 365 days a year. And more than 500,000 individuals visit our website annually.

Advertisers also find that the Directory is a great way to reach potential customers Full-color business card-sized ads start at just \$94. Email lodell@livestockconservancy.org for more information.

LEARN NEW SKILLS ON TEACHABLE.COM

A bounty of resources awaits at The Livestock Conservancy's online video training library. Utilizing the Teachable.com platform, the organization has developed teaching modules and lessons to assist individuals and groups with furthering their work with heritage breeds.

One area of particular interest to fiber producers and artists is a wide range of Shave 'Em to Save 'Em fiber challenges, introducing new projects and techniques ranging from shawls to weaving and mittens as well as instruction on the basics of buying and selling wool.

Those who are involved in breed organizations can benefit from an extensive collection of trainings offered through The Livestock Conservancy's "Cultivating Leadership for Breed Organizations" series. This collection of 13 modules covers a wide range of topics including board members' roles and responsibilities, communications, strategic planning and managing risk.

The Teachable platform also offers courses on equine DNA testing and equine reproductive technologies.

The courses can be found at www.livestockconservancy.teachable.com or by scanning the QR code below. The Livestock Conservancy's individual Teachable courses range from free to \$35 each.



REMEMBERING RICK BLANEY

Richard "Rick" Blaney of Live Oak, Florida, passed away September 4. He first reached out to The Livestock Conservancy in 2014 to participate in a gaited horse study being conducted by Mississippi State University. In the following years, he served as a member of the organization's board of directors, an officer and a Microgrant judge, and was a dedicated supporter.

A noted breeder of Galiceno horses, Blaney was co-owner of what is believed to be the largest herd of the Critically endangered equines in the world.

"These horses are unique. They are descendants of the first horses brought to the New World by Columbus and Cortez," he told The Livestock Conservancy in a 2024 interview. "I have a long history of working with endangered species, and when I found out how endangered this breed was, it was a natural transition to focus on saving the genetics of this breed. That really caught my attention."

The Livestock Conservancy extends its deepest sympathies to his family, friends and colleagues.

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CELEBRATING 250 YEARS OF AMERICAN LIVESTOCK AND POULTRY



Chris Klug Collection

As the nation approaches its semiquincentennial – the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence – efforts are underway to ensure that the role of livestock and poultry in American history is recognized.

“Celebrating 250: Heritage Herds and Flocks” is a year-long initiative honoring the rich history of endangered livestock breeds and poultry varieties that have significantly influenced our nation’s cultural heritage and economy. This year-long celebration, beginning this month, leads up to the 250th anniversary of our country’s Declaration of Independence and the 50th anniversary of The Livestock Conservancy’s founding.

“Increasing awareness and appreciation for the contributions and relevance of these animals is the first step toward ensuring their existence into the future,” Phil Sponenberg, scientific advisor to The Livestock Conservancy team, says.

Sponenberg adds that the role of many of these animals cannot be overstated. He says, as the name implies, heritage breeds are a critical contributor to American heritage.

“It is the interaction of people, place and animals that provides a full story and long history of contribution to American life,” he says, pointing to

horses as an example of the importance of heritage livestock and poultry to the nation’s development and providing a poignant summation. “No horse, no America, basically. They have been essential throughout our history.”

Utilizing special guest blog posts on the organization’s website, social media posts focusing on heritage breed species and a monthly “Celebrating 250” podcast featuring breeders, experts and scientists, The Livestock Conservancy is focusing on a single species each month during the year.

Through species-specific podcasts

Duck farms like this New York state farm in 1905 were commonplace. (Murray, William J. - Collection; Queens Public Library Digital Archive; Restored photo: Chris Klug Collection)

and blog posts, experts share a range of topics, including timelines and uses of livestock and poultry over the past 250 years, as well as conservation efforts to secure and sustain once common breeds that have become endangered.

“Over the year, Celebrating 250 will emphasize the importance of heritage livestock and poultry, which have been selectively bred over centuries and are invaluable reservoirs of genetic diversity,” says Celebrating 250 Task Force Co-chair Cindy Dvergsten. “These animal breeds not only represent centuries of agricultural history but are also well-suited for modern homesteading and small-scale farming objectives, offering sustainable solutions for many of today’s pressing environmental issues and economic challenges.”

The Livestock Conservancy’s effort complements commemorative events and observances being organized by other groups and facilities. Stephanie Niswonger, director of agricultural initiatives at Conner Prairie, a living history museum in Fishers, Indiana, says



The Livestock Conservancy/Jeannette Beranger

Horses, including the Critically endangered Shire breed, have played an important role in American history.

CELEBRATING 250



Each month the Celebrating 250 observation is highlighting a species with social media posts, a blog on The Livestock Conservancy's website and the "Heritage Flocks and Herds" podcast.

2025

July – Horses
August – Ducks
September – Donkeys
October – Goats
November – Turkeys
December – Geese

2026

January – Pigs
February – Sheep
March – Chickens
April – Rabbits
May – International Heritage Breeds Month
June – Cattle
Poultry months are sponsored by Murray McMurray Hatchery and Metzer Farms.

Discover all of the Celebrating 250 resources at www.livestockconservancy.org/250

Cheryl Babik



Many breeds of livestock and poultry were invaluable to early American agriculture. Cotton Patch geese (*Threatened*), for example, could be found weeding cotton and corn fields up until the 1950s.

highlighting their role over the last 250 years is a worthy endeavor.

"Heritage livestock breeds have played an important role in shaping American history," she says. "From the earliest pioneers through modern times, Americans have relied on these animals for food, fiber, draft power and transportation. As we celebrate the United States' 250th anniversary, it is crucial that we recognize the contributions of the heritage breed animals who have played such a vital

role throughout American history."

Judy Brummer is co-chair of The Livestock Conservancy's Celebrating 250 Task Force. She says the initiative is aimed at filling what she sees as a gap in the national observance called "America250."

"I was surprised when I started researching what other organizations were doing and found that there really wasn't an agricultural component

planned," Brummer explains. "This is an opportunity for the agricultural industry to step forward and say, 'These are our roots, this is how we developed.'"

Celebrating 250 looks further back than 1776 in sharing the impact of livestock and poultry. So far, blog posts and podcast interviews have explored the arrival of Spanish horses and goats in the Americas five centuries ago and profiled how animals, including ducks and donkeys, were instrumental to survival and agricultural innovation.

Brummer adds that even though historical reflection will be a hallmark of the Celebrating 250 observation, it is done with an eye toward the future.

"Heritage livestock and poultry are far more than relics of the past; they are living symbols of our cultural heritage and vital reservoirs of genetic diversity. In a rapidly changing world, these breeds offer innovative solutions for sustainable agriculture and food security. While many modern agricultural practices have reduced genetic options, heritage breeds and varieties function as a buffer against diseases, climate fluctuations, and uncertainties that lie ahead," she says. ■

For more about The Livestock Conservancy's Celebrating 250 celebration and to find the latest blog posts and podcasts, visit www.livestockconservancy.org/250.

The Livestock Conservancy/Jeanette Beranger



Red Wattle hogs are a breed unique to North America. Threatened on the Conservation Priority List, they do well in a variety of settings and climates.

GEORGE WASHINGTON, FARMER

By Judy Brummer

When someone mentions George Washington, initial thoughts often are “first president” or “General Washington.” Few people recognize him as a dedicated farmer. However, Washington was a farmer before he assumed those other significant roles, and he remained passionate about agriculture even while admirably fulfilling those other responsibilities. His letters reveal that he found his greatest happiness on his farm, nestled along the Potomac River in eastern Virginia.

Washington was born and raised on his family’s farm, leaving in 1749 at 16 to initially work as a surveyor and later serve in the Virginia militia. He returned to manage the 2,000 acres of Mount Vernon in 1758, married Martha Dandridge Custis, and soon assumed the first office to which he was elected, serving 15 years in the House of Burgesses. In 1775, Washington returned to military service as Commanding General of the Continental Army.

Although he believed he had retired from public service in 1783, by 1787, he was presiding over the Continental Convention and hoping to retire again after its adjournment. Little did he know he would soon be elected as the first president of the United States, the only president in history to be elected unanimously.

Even while serving as general and then as president for two terms, Washington remained committed to his farm, relying on trusted caretakers to supervise both free and enslaved farm laborers, manage daily operations and provide a weekly report to him. He actively studied and implemented new farming practices and technologies to enhance the operation and productivity of his farms, which expanded to 8,000 acres by the time of his death in 1799.

While the specifics of all the breeds raised on his farm may not be fully documented, we know a diverse variety of animals were kept at Mount Vernon. Several of his breeding programs were inspired by Robert Bakewell’s theories of animal husbandry, which Washington admired. Washington focused on breeding to improve offspring with each generation – for better wool, better meat, more milk, etc. – making this a key aspect of his farm management.

Martha Washington’s cookbooks also provide insight as to what livestock may have been raised on the farm. Lisa Pregent, senior livestock manager at George Washington’s Mount Vernon, says



A George Washington reenactor at Mount Vernon poses with an American Mammoth Jackstock donkey. Legend is that Washington was instrumental in the development of the AMJ breed.

Martha’s Virginia hams and goose pie were particularly notable and were likely served frequently.

Cattle were imported from England to America as early as 1623, and Washington kept up to 300 head on his farms at any given time, including some Milking Devons. These cattle were used as draft animals and for producing meat, milk, cream, cheese and butter. His breeding efforts aimed to enhance both meat and milk production. Washington also raised chickens, ducks and geese on the farm. Chickens provided meat and eggs, while both wild and domestic geese and ducks were used primarily for their feathers, but also may have been served for dinner. Turkeys, both wild and domestic, also found a place on Martha’s table. The domesticated birds were most likely ancestors of today’s Bronze turkeys. Popular dishes included Yorkshire

Christmas pie (containing both turkey and chicken) and goose pie.

Hogs were allowed to roam freely on Washington's untilled land for much of the year to reproduce naturally and fatten up on the forest floor's vegetation, except for the 150 pigs kept near Washington's distillery, which fed on leftover fermented mash. Hogs were rounded up each autumn for butchering. In 1785, farm records show 128 hogs were processed, producing over 17,000 pounds of meat. Although there is limited information about the types of hogs Washington raised, Pregent notes, "a visitor to the farm from Poland described them in 1798 as 'guinea-type, with short feet and hollowed backs.'"

Washington took a particular interest in the breeding of sheep, donkeys and mules. He found sheep valuable for their wool, manure, meat and lanolin. Hog Island sheep, a rare breed native to Virginia since the 1600s, appear to match best with the characteristics noted in historical documents. Washington mentioned in his correspondence breeding his ewes to "a Bakewell ram", which may have been a predecessor of Lincoln Longwool sheep (Threatened on the Conservation Priority List).

According to his farm records from 1785, Washington owned 132 horses on his various farms, including an Arabian



Public Domain, Wikipedia Commons

An 1830 engraving of Washington's Farms at Mount Vernon shows the expanse of the former president's agricultural holdings.

stallion and his Revolutionary War mounts, Nelson and Blewskin. Toward the end of his life, he also owned two Narragansett Pacers, a now extinct breed originating near Narragansett Bay, Rhode Island. Washington's horses were used for transportation, farm labor and to tread wheat, his cash crop, in the farm's 16-sided treading barn, which he designed. A reproduction of the structure is at Mount Vernon today, with wheat treading demonstrations offered

on weekends from July to October.

Washington believed that the future of agriculture depended on the strength and endurance of draft mules. Around 1786, he sought and was gifted two sturdy jacks, one from France and one from Spain. Over the following decade, he, along with other local breeders, produced what became the foundation for the American Mammoth Jackstock breed (CPL status: Critical). Farm records from 1799 indicated he had 58 mules and 25 horses at Mount Vernon.

Today, George Washington's Mount Vernon estate is one of the most visited historic sites in America. It showcases not only his home but also his 18th-century farming methods. Interpreters in period costume, along with reproduction outbuildings and animals representing the breeds he raised, bring his farming practices to life. To learn more and plan a visit to northern Virginia, where George Washington lived out his farming ideals, visit www.mountvernon.org. ■

Judy Brummer, a former board member and past interim executive director for The Livestock Conservancy, co-chairs the organization's Celebrating 250 committee, highlighting the role of heritage herds and flocks in American history. Lisa Pregent, senior livestock manager at George Washington's Mount Vernon, contributed photos and information for this article.



Courtesy George Washington's Mount Vernon

Sheep graze not far from a collection of buildings at George Washington's Mount Vernon, including the 12-sided threshing barn Washington designed.

PREPARING OUR LIVESTOCK FOR WINTER

By Jenny Kahl

Here in Montana, our 14-hour summer days start getting noticeably shorter soon after the summer solstice. In fact, in the middle of summer haying season, we are thinking of winter!

What can we, as livestock producers, do to make sure that our herds and flocks are ready for winter's cold and storms – that they are ready to calve, lamb, kid, foal and hatch offspring successfully next spring? How do experienced heritage livestock breeders prepare for winter? Here are some tips.

Minerals

As a breeder of Red Devon beef cattle (Recovering on the Conservation Priority List), my first concern each year is fertility – calves for the next year. To that end, I use a balanced, high-quality mineral program for my cattle, as they cannot reproduce without the basic and trace mineral ingredients necessary for fertility. In my area of the Mountain West, for example, low selenium in soils and forages can lead to weak calves and the inability to rebreed the following year.

As breeders, we face a choice: either purchase the best animals available in our area or select herds and flocks that can thrive on our resources. This essentially boils down to a decision between investing in high-cost inputs or opting for lower-cost alternatives that require more labor. The second, low-input approach can result in numerous animals failing to breed initially. Those open animals are best sold for meat, as their genetics have shown an inability to thrive in the farm's breeding program. Those that reproduce without supplements will be perfectly adapted to your environment.

If you can afford the initial losses, the low-input system can work for breeders. On the other hand, I choose to provide good minerals (high-input) all year, as 20 years of breeding Devons have shown that my purebred animals need more care than the commercial cattle that my neighbors raise. Just two additional healthy pregnancies in my herd can pay for a year of good minerals.

Other species also benefit from minerals. Julie Behrens of Allenspark, Colorado, raises Icelandic chickens



Jenny Kahl, a member of The Livestock Conservancy from Montana, says poultry and livestock, including her Red Devon cattle, can thrive during cold weather as long as breeders plan and prepare.

(CPL status: Threatened). She finds that calcium needs in winter are very important, along with grit (coarsely-ground hard substances – often made from oyster shells, flint, granite or eggshells – that help with digestion and lead to stronger eggshells), because her ground is often frozen and snow-covered, preventing chickens from accessing natural sources of grit and calcium. During deep winter, it is also important to keep fresh, vitamin-rich foods for our poultry. These can be kitchen scraps, remainders from an autumn greenhouse or even sprouted seeds and grains.

Drinking Water

Fresh water is just as important in winter as in summer, but what to do when temperatures are below freezing? The answer can be as simple as a fresh container of water twice a day. All classes of livestock will learn to drink whenever fresh water appears. Another approach is to bury water lines to yard hydrants or other sources – a must in Montana. Some automatic waterers use ground heat and insulation to keep water from freezing. A continuous circulation system is suitable for many climates. Immersible water heaters inside stock tanks are another option. Regardless, always keep a large empty tub or pan on hand, along with

a hose long enough to reach every pen – you never know when a water line might freeze. There is no crisis quite like carrying water buckets to a herd of 25 thirsty cows and calves!

Shelter

Meike and Michael Meissner, of Lopez Island, Washington, raise Katahdin/Dorper sheep. (Katahdin sheep graduated from The Livestock Conservancy's Conservation Priority List in 2013.) One of their key winter preparations is selecting a lambing season that aligns with their available shelter and labor. They have a large barn for shelter, and time lambing for

January or early February, so that they can supervise lambing.

Meike and Mike's winter preparation includes having their birthing supplies and a few small pens ready in late autumn, in time for unexpected early births – well before winter truly arrives.

Lots of bedding helps livestock and poultry adjust their housing to their own comfort. I provided my Guinea Hogs (CPL status: Threatened) with a hoop house or calf shelter, with deep fresh straw in winter for nesting. When my older Guinea Hog sow farrowed one January and the temperatures dropped to -30 degrees three days after farrowing, her new piglets survived just fine in an uninsulated shed, deep in the dry straw she had piled around them.

Behrens' advice is to match poultry flock size to available indoor winter space. Evaluate your different housing zones to ensure there is enough space available if all your birds want to be near the heater, for example, while also making sure there is safety for the more timid ones to hide or escape, and all can access food without too much crowding. Julie's coop has a raised floor and is deeply bedded with shavings so her birds' feet are well off frozen ground. A deep bedding of shavings, chips from the wood pile, or even autumn leaves are all good for keeping birds occupied

and happy, scratching around during long cold, snowy or muddy months. She is also careful to keep at least part of her outdoor run shoveled clear of snow or covered with shavings for traction, so birds can always get outside if they choose. Their health and mood benefit from getting outside when they choose to do so.

Fertility and Health

In preparing for winter, I pregnancy test all my female cattle in mid to late fall. While it is more expensive, I opt to pay for ultrasound testing. That gives me full knowledge of which females are pregnant, the sex of the calf and the due date (which also tells me which cows settled from artificial insemination, and which are bull-bred). With this information, spring calving can be planned smoothly. I know which animals I must sell because they are open, which animals I want to keep and which animals I can sell to other breeders. Most importantly, when to expect the earliest calves, so my family and I can be on the lookout regardless of the weather.

Other health checks can be completed before the coldest weather sets in. No one wants to be treating animals in the coldest weather. Behrens advises checking poultry for mites and treating facilities and infested birds. She knows that the birds will be spending more time

indoors, in closer quarters. "If it's warm enough for chickens, it's warm enough for mites," says Behrens. She also knows that her flock will be expending more calories in the winter, and doesn't want to take any chances with mites robbing energy from any of the birds.

Feed

By July and early August, I have already planned the number of cattle I will carry over winter, and therefore the quantity of hay I must purchase. And, I have already squirreled away money from the spring's cattle sales to pay for next winter's hay!

Smaller flocks and smaller animals require less planning, but it is always important to think ahead to ensure our favorite feeds for our animals are available throughout the winter. In the West, we often carry almost two years' worth of hay in our hay yards over winter. One year, our winter started a month early and didn't quit. Another year, the intense cold required a lot more feed to keep my cattle warm and healthy. Plan ahead – the hardest time to find extra feed is when everyone else is having the same problem, when the snow is so deep your trailer is completely under a drift and your livestock are hungry.

Growth

As the winter days grow longer and warmer after the winter solstice, I wean

my calves across the fence from their mothers. Preparing for winter means keeping calves at their mothers' sides through the worst of the cold and storms. A day of howling wind? Mothers have taken their calves to shelter, taught them how to survive. Deep snow? Mothers have taught them where to go, and how to make it back to the hay feed line. And cows' higher cream production in late lactation provides the calories and fats that calves need for good growth and for efficient digestion of forages until their last two to three digestive enzymes kick in at 8-9 months of age. This should work for other livestock species. Likewise, Behrens culls all "floppy comb" roosters in her Icelandic flock, which selects for combs that don't freeze and cause extra stress.

Soil Preservation

In many parts of the U.S., winter means rain, and rain means mud for confined animals on winter feeds. Mud leads to compacted soils and the destruction of plants growing therein. Plan ahead for that mud. It might mean deep bedding confined under a roof, as is required in England. It might mean asking your local tree service folks for every scrap of their discarded wood chips, which can provide an island of drier warmth in a muddy corral or a run for birds. Or it might mean using your tractor or team in spring or summer to reseed that muddy confinement area with a multi-species cover crop to soak up all that excess water, nitrogen and manure potassium salts, converting them into premium forage for birds and mammals alike.

Like Aesop's ant, we livestock folks must think far ahead for our difficult times of the year. Carbon (dead plant material) can offset nearly all our excess nitrogen issues, and it can also turn into "black gold" as we compost it the following spring. Shelter comes in many forms; wind protection and the ability to stay dry are the most important factors.

Plan ahead and enjoy your heritage livestock all through the winter! ■

The Livestock Conservancy member Jenny Kahrl and her sons raise Red Devon cattle on their ranch near Harrison, Montana, where January low temperatures average 14 degrees.



Courtesy Lisa Richards

Even though some animals, like these Icelandic chickens, are well-suited for colder weather, special preparations are still necessary to ensure these animals thrive during the winter.

WEAVING THE STORY OF TURKEY FEATHER BLANKETS

By Don Bixby

Turkeys were one of the few domesticated animals in North America before Europeans arrived in the 1500s and 1600s. More easily domesticated than many other bird species, turkeys are social and non-migratory. They can be lured into captivity by food baiting. Turkeys had, and continue to have, a culturally significant role in the lives of Pueblo and other indigenous people.

Feather robes are believed to have originated during the Pithouse Period, around 700 C.E. when hunter-gatherers began to explore agriculture. This is also when people started to keep turkeys as livestock, raising them specifically for their feathers. Blankets or robes made with turkey feathers as the insulating medium were widely used by Ancestral Pueblo people in what is now the Upland Southwest. There are several types of feathers on birds, but semi-plume and down feathers are the primary insulators. The people who made such blankets were ancestors of present-day Pueblo Native Americans such as the Hopi, Zuni and Rio Grande Pueblos.

Archeological evidence indicates turkeys were generally not used as a food source from the time of their domestication in the early centuries C.E. until the 1100s and 1200s C.E., when wild game had become scarce. Prior to this period, most turkey bones reported from archaeological sites are whole skeletons from mature birds that were intentionally buried. This suggests that the feathers were harvested from the living birds during molting and were given a ritual or cultural significance. Such burials continued to occur even after more turkeys began to be raised for food. Turkey feather robes were found in burials, especially those that seemed to be high-status burials, as well as some child burials.

In 2018, Mary Weahkee, an archeologist and anthropologist with the New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs, was asked to try her hand at a reconstruction of a blanket made of turkey feathers.

Using ancient blankets housed at museum collections across the



Mary Weahkee, a descendent of the Comanche and Santa Clara peoples, poses with a shawl she wove from turkey feathers. Weahkee is an archaeologist and anthropologist with the New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs. (Martin Perea for the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. www.martinperea.com)

Southwest as guides, Weahkee taught herself the process of winding each feather around yucca cord. Yucca cord is made by extracting fibers from yucca leaves and then spinning the fibers into cordage. Weahkee says it took her about a day to grasp the basic technology of weaving with feathers and yucca cord. But the large, two- by three-foot blanket she produced took 18 months using 17,000 feathers from 68 turkeys to complete. "I looked at how the ancestors were creative and patient," says Weahkee,

who is of Comanche and Santa Clara descent. "It's a labor of love."

While there are a handful of other small samples in western museums, Weahkee's is the largest known blanket made in modern times. She has since been commissioned to produce smaller exhibit feather blankets for several museums in the Southwest.

Gathering that number of plumed body feathers required some help. She notes that modern turkeys have been selected for fewer downy body

feathers, which are no longer needed for insulation. She needed wild turkey body feathers, so she reached out to Storm Usrey, conservation education manager with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. Usrey, a turkey hunter, gave Weahkee the pelts from turkeys he harvested. His friends and family members, who also harvested birds, offered feathers to Weahkee. Jack Young, archeologist and tribal liaison with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, says the Department has an ongoing request from several pueblos for wild turkey feathers.

Weahkee says her weaving work has not yet included feathers from heritage breed turkeys, but she is interested in using plumes from White Holland and Royal Palm for decorative features in a recreation of a turkey feather blanket found in a Colorado cave structure.

Creating replications of ancient artifacts is one of Weahkee's specialties. As a lithic analyst – someone who studies ancient stone tools – she often makes replications of tools such as scrapers, drills, projectile points, arrows and bows.

Weahkee is replicating another item out of turkey feathers. She is weaving a feather raincoat for the New Mexico History Museum in Santa Fe to replace the one that has been on display for ten years. Rather than using turkey body feathers, however, she will be using wing fletch feathers. "Fletch feathers are better for being outdoors," she said, noting turkey fletch feathers have also been used for making mukluks, a type of footwear, as well as weaponry. "The fletch feathers repel water and don't hold it, unlike the body down feathers."

In 2020, a team led by Washington State University archaeologists analyzed an approximately 800-year-old turkey feather blanket from southeastern Utah, measuring about 39 inches by 42.5 inches, to understand how it was made. Thousands of downy body feathers were wrapped around nearly 200 yards of

Don Bixby



Yucca fiber cord, body feathers from turkeys and tools necessary for the ancient art of turkey feather weaving.

yucca fiber cord to make the blanket, which is currently on display at the Edge of the Cedars State Park Museum in Blanding, Utah.

The reverence for turkeys is still evident today in Pueblo dances and rituals. Turkey and eagle feathers are used in traditional regalia – symbolically and culturally important for ceremonial use and in prayers. Even though the feathers used in the first blankets were from wild and early domesticated turkeys, these birds are the predecessors of the heritage breeds we have today.

"The preservation of the history of the blankets is another great example of the cultural significance inherent in the livestock and poultry breeds we work to protect," explains Alison Martin, program director with The Livestock Conservancy. "The goal is to do more than preserve the animals themselves, to also conserve their history and the impact they have had for generations." ■
Don Bixby of Albuquerque, New Mexico, served as executive director of The

Don Bixby



Completed blankets from woven turkey feathers. Each weaving uses thousands of feathers from more than 50 turkeys.

Livestock Conservancy from 1988 to 2002. He remains passionate about rare breed conservation. Les O'Dell also contributed to this article.

Watch the process of creating a turkey feather blanket on a video created by the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture online at bit.ly/featherweaving.



2025 HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

It's time to pick out the perfect holiday gifts! To make shopping easier, expand markets for heritage breed products and to connect shoppers with other members of The Livestock Conservancy, our 2025 Holiday Gift Guide is here.

Stuck on what to get a loved one for an upcoming holiday or birthday? We've compiled a few heritage breed gift ideas from members of the Livestock Conservancy and items from our store that they'll be sure to love.

Since launching the effort four years ago, the Holiday Gift Guide has given members a way to promote – and sell – their products in addition to the annual printed *Directory: Rare Breeds and Products*.

"The Holiday Gift Guide is a great way for our members to promote their retail items and for other people to find the perfect gift, while supporting the conservation of rare breeds at the same time," says Les O'Dell, communications manager for The Livestock Conservancy. "It's a win-win scenario."



Suffolk Punch-Harvested Wood Products

Haulin' Hoof Farm Store, New Marshfield, Ohio. Suffolk Punch horsepower allows this family business to access dead and dying trees with little disruption to the forest floor and begin the process of turning nature's waste into a variety of wood items, including knitters' shelves and artisanal buttons.

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Visit www.ebranchfarmstead.com



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High Ground Farm, Holly Springs, North Carolina. From farmer and artist Deborah Underwood Brown come beautifully packaged sets of six notecards featuring her original watercolors of the Java chickens on her farm. Also available are unique Java-inspired Christmas cards and prints of original watercolors. Learn more about the farm and Java chickens at www.highgroundfarm.com. To order cards or prints, email deborah994@gmail.com.



Gulf Coast Native Sheep Yarns, Fleeces and Rugs

Easy Acres Gnomestead, Abington, Connecticut. Featuring products from Critically-endangered Gulf Coast Native sheep, Easy Acres offers yarns in natural colors or botanically dyed colors, fleeces for hand spinning and made-to-order rugs. "Each rug is a unique, hand-made treasure," explains owner Stacey Beck. Inventory is always changing; see the collection at www.EasyAcresGnomestead.com.



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Continues next page



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Dyers Wool, Durango, Colorado. Pam Dyer and Kelsey Reeder are mother and daughter who enjoy running their family fiber shop, Dyers Wool. Pam has over 30 years of experience in the fiber arts and is an expert on a fiber technique called locker hooking. They raise Shetland and Navajo Churro sheep using predator-friendly and sustainable farming practices and offer locker hooking kits, sheep ornaments, yarns and more. Visit www.dyerswool.com



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Shave 'Em to Save 'Em Passport

A Shave 'Em to Save 'Em Passport is the a perfect way to introduce fiber artists to new wools for their projects – some with unique characteristics – and helps to save endangered breeds of sheep at the same time. For each project, artists earn a "stamp" for their passport, and the more "stamps" they collect the more prizes they earn. Visit www.rarewool.org

By D. Phillip Sponenberg, D.V.M., Ph.D.

Die-hard conservationists (including this author) can run the risk of overlooking issues of profitability in their quest to save all rare breeds and all of the bloodlines within those breeds. One detail often missing from the die-hard approach is the concept that some breeds or bloodlines are "rare for a reason." These reasons may include a lack of profitability, physical weakness or some other characteristic that makes the animals problematic in a sustainable agricultural system aimed at supporting itself through sufficient financial return.

A few breeds are undeniably problematic in terms of financial return, but the aspect of profitability is multifaceted and warrants a closer examination. Rare breeds and their products can be marketed in several different ways. Each of these has advantages and disadvantages, so the final choice is highly individual for each specific breed and producer. A summary of marketing strategies includes a few

common choices, such as mainstream channels like local livestock markets or the wool pool, as well as direct-to-consumer sales for products or seedstock sales for other breeders.

Not all rare breeds or their products reach mainstream market channels smoothly and profitably. One example is cattle that do not fit the current "polled solid black" profile seemingly preferred in many regions. Cattle that do not fit the popular profile can be discounted in many markets, despite their underlying high quality. This has no easy solution other than constantly trying to educate the market – a very uphill slog. Another example of the limitations of easily accessible mainstream markets is relevant for wool producers. Relatively small batches (under 10,000 pounds) of specific and unique wools move through commercial channels poorly. Small wool producers (such as small-scale ranchers and homesteaders) simply do not have easy access to the mainstream markets for their products.

The Livestock Conservancy/Phil Sponenberg



Breeders can turn financial profit with heritage breeds by taking advantage of opportunities such as seedstock sales or taking a direct-to-consumer enterprise, an approach that many producers of Jersey Buff and other varieties of turkeys use.

Despite these details, some rare breeds actually do fit into mainstream channels reasonably well. Reasons for their rarity are somewhat perplexing in that light because they are “ready to go” right “off the shelf.” Red Poll cattle are an excellent example, and the reasons for their rarity are perplexing.

A lack of a warm welcome in mainstream channels does not mean they are off the table for serious profit-minded breeders. One way to gain an advantage despite any negative market bias is to take advantage of the efficiency or low-input ability of many rare breeds. The efficiency of the production system can offset any market discount. A stunning example is from Argentine Patagonia, where the market prefers Hereford cattle over the local Criollo cattle. Due to the fertility and longevity of the Criollo it turns out that breeders can take a huge hit in discounted prices (up to half!) and can still come out ahead on overall profitability because of the efficiency of production. This can be the secret to success for many rare breeds that excel in reproductive efficiency over a long life span. The focus must be at the level of the whole enterprise, rather than the individual animal.

Many breeders sidestep mainstream channels by marketing directly to consumers. This cuts out varying numbers of middlemen, each of whom takes out a slice of the overall profit when animals go through mainstream channels. The success of this approach can be dramatic because more of the profit comes back directly to the producer. The downside is that marketing directly to consumers requires extra work in generating demand for the product. Especially in the initial stages, this can be daunting and time-consuming. Once those customers are hooked on the superior product, though, the system can be nearly self-perpetuating and can therefore require a more reasonable commitment of time and energy than was true at the outset. The secret to success lies in consistent quality and customer service, which help build a reliable and constantly growing base of loyal customers.

Of course, different products require different strategies for any direct-to-consumer approach. Meat sales, for example, are tightly regulated by both

state and federal rules, and producers must investigate these and then comply with them. In most cases, this involves working effectively with a slaughterhouse and butcher who can meet the requirements and ensure a consistently high-quality product.

Wool sales are governed by few, if any, regulations, and while this makes them “easier,” direct marketing of wool nearly always involves small units and, therefore, many more individual customers. This means that promotion, harvesting, packaging and shipping can all be hurdles that need to be overcome. While this is true, the return from specialty wools can be quite high for the producer, many multiples of what is available from mainstream channels.

Breeding stock sales are another avenue for profitability. For some breeds, rarity in its own right is a reason for brisk demand. This can become uncoupled from any productive potential, which can raise long-term problems for the breed and its breeders. This is a relatively minor concern for most breeds, and it is generally true that most breeders of rare breeds should be selling at least some breeding stock. Broad participation

in such sales ensures the breed is not reliant on a small pool of future breeding animals from limited programs. Participation in the seedstock market is not free from all effort, though, and breeders should be careful to keep good records, keep registrations up to date and also monitor herd health closely so that they are not selling disease problems along with breeding stock!

One useful detail on seedstock sales is that the goal should not necessarily be to sell a specific individual animal to a specific individual buyer this year. The goal should be for the buyer to be so pleased with the purchase that they return multiple years later to buy more animals that will work well for them. Breeders should avoid a mindset that focuses on short-term gains because these can defeat long-term demand for their stock.

These various channels offer opportunities for all breeds and all breeders. The challenge is to figure out which one is the best fit for the breed, and also for the producer’s goals, skills, and interests. ■

The Livestock Conservancy/Jeanette Beranger



All heritage breeds, like Oberhasli goats (Recovering on the Conservation Priority List), can be profitable for farmers, ranchers, shepherds and homesteaders.



THROUGH THE LENS: PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS

Heritage breed enthusiasts are not just conservationists and stewards; many are outstanding photographers as well. Our recent social media photo contest garnered a collection of exceptional images of heritage breed animals. The panel of judges faced difficult choices among so many fine photos to select these winners.

FIRST PLACE (above): Jasimine McCarthy of Urban Ark Conservation, Towanda, Pennsylvania, took this of Arapawa goat kids. "This photo was taken when they were just a few days old in July. They're not registered yet, but both of their parents are," explains Chad McCarthy, Jasimine's husband and a member of the Arapawa Goat Breeders Association's board of directors.

For submitting the winning image, the McCarthys will receive a copy of *Managing Breeds for a Secure Future* autographed by the authors. (Find this book and other valuable heritage breed resources at <https://bit.ly/livestockconservancystore>)

SECOND PLACE (right): Also an Arapawa photo by Jasimine McCarthy of Urban Ark Conservation. "This picture was taken in the first actual pasture that this buck was ever in," Chad says. "He came to us from the Philadelphia Zoo."





THIRD PLACE (above): Rocky Mountain stallion “R2, The Real McCoy.” The five-year-old horse is owned by Katie Galish of Lindstrom, Minnesota and was photographed by Alyssa Smolen Photography. “It was one of our first major snowfalls of the year,” Galish recalls. “Alyssa is a family friend, and it was an impromptu photo shoot. I think it is a great snapshot of the versatility of the Rocky Mountain horses. It shows how strong and versatile they are.”

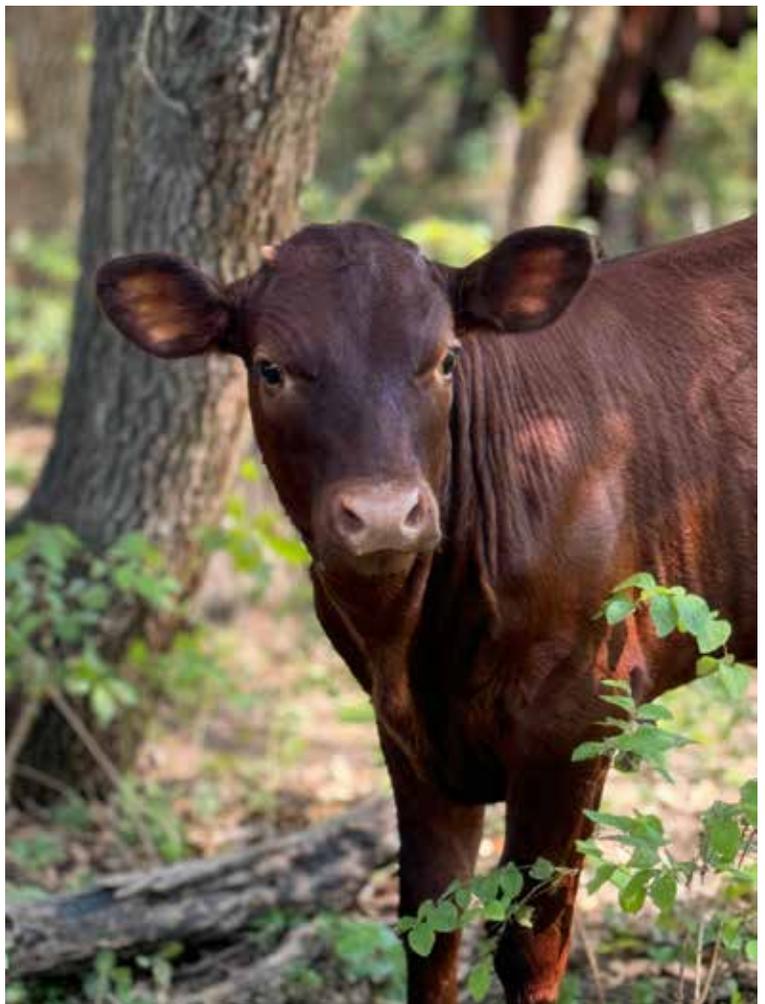
HONORABLE MENTION (right): This Milking Devon heifer at the Midwest Center for Regenerative Agriculture at Powell Gardens in the Kansas City suburb of Kingsville, Missouri, was photographed by Cassandra Everly.

OUR NEXT PHOTO CONTEST: We know your dogs are as important on your farm, ranch or homestead, and they are a valuable part of your team. Share with us photos of your hard-working dogs helping with heritage breeds, and you could win!

The best images (as chosen by our panel of judges) will be featured in the Winter edition of *Newsletter* and on our social media channels. Plus, the first-place winner will receive a copy of “Introduction to Heritage Breeds” autographed by the authors.

Contest Rules:

- Send your high-resolution photo (300 dpi +) to lodell@livestockconservancy.org by December 31, 2025.
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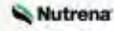
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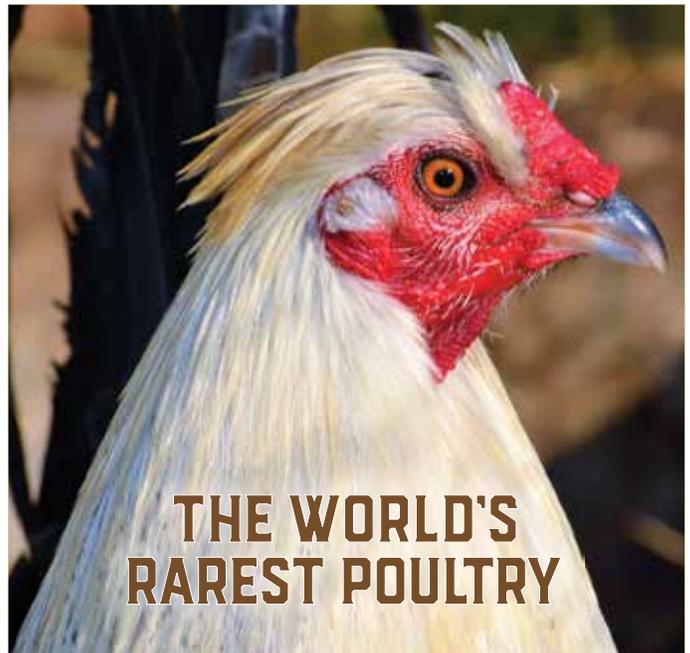
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SMALLHOLDERS CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE

By Winifred Hoffman

Editor's Note: This article is adapted and reprinted from the August 2025 edition of "Dutch Belted Bulletin," the publication of the Dutch Belted Cattle Association of America. Although written specifically about Dutch Belted cattle, the information and sentiment apply to all heritage breeds, regardless of species.

"I only have one or two Dutch Belted cows, so what can I do for the breed?" If this is you, let us assure you, you are not alone, and your contribution can be more valuable than you think.

Certainly, we appreciate and encourage breeders with sizable herds in dairy production, who may have more extensive breeding programs and can prove how practical and profitable the breed can be on a commercial scale.

At the same time, many of our registered Dutch Belted cattle (Critical on the Conservation Priority List) are now held by smallholders with a handful of animals at best. Consequently, whether those owners make a point of breeding to registered sires and registering the offspring has a great impact on breed numbers and our genetic pool. Likewise, when they sell an animal and transfer the registration papers, the new owner can continue the breeding program.

For example, one cow, Mud Creek CrysAnn #015374, was bred in Texas from stock originating in Illinois, then went to a new owner in Washington and then to Montana.



Heritage breed animals from small herds and flocks like Mud Creek CrysAnn, a Dutch Belted cow, play an important role in preserving genetics.

"CrysAnn is in her second lactation and peaked at over eight gallons a day. She's fabulous, and I'm trying to get another like her," explains her owner, Samantha Jones.

It is wonderful to see Dutch Belted cows fulfilling their destiny as top-notch, practical milk producers. And it's good to see their owner going to the effort of breeding them to registered sires and, hopefully, registering the offspring to continue their legacy.

Sometimes, Dutch Belted owners need to sell their animals due to retirement, health issues or family circumstances. That's okay, life happens. Ideally, there will be new breeders ready to pick up the baton.

Retired Dutch Belted breeder Mary Lou Shaw is an example of someone with just a few cows who contributed greatly to the breed in her many years of involvement. Along with her husband, Tom, she studied pedigrees and breeding patterns, selected and purchased solid foundation cows and made sound mating decisions, always registering the female offspring. She helped her cows fulfill their potential on her family-scale dairy.

Mary Lou also strongly believed in mentoring new breeders, recognizing how vital this is for the breed to continue. She remembered how much she had to learn when she started out, so she was always eager to share her experiences and insights she had picked up along the way.

"We are on a continuous learning curve and should continue to look to each other for assistance. Continue to support your heritage livestock by continuing to support their association," Mary Lou stressed in an interview in the January 2019 *Dutch Belted Bulletin*.

Whether you're an established breeder whose family has had these cattle for generations, or a brand-new breeder with your first heifer calf, you matter to the breed and the association. ■

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