



# THE LIVESTOCK CONSERVANCY™

*Conserving rare breeds since 1977*  
*Winter 2026 | Volume 43, Issue 1*





# THE LIVESTOCK CONSERVANCY™

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### On the cover:

*Corrie Cooper of Orlando, Florida, with one of her Florida Cracker sheep. Cooper is among The Livestock Conservancy 2025-2026 Microgrant recipients.*

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## WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST LIFE MEMBER

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

Dean Meier

Fort Myers, Florida

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

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# IMPROVE TURKEY FLOCKS WITH NEW RESOURCES

One of The Livestock Conservancy's proudest accomplishments is preventing the heritage turkey from disappearing forever. Now, two essential reference tools are being reissued in new editions.

The second edition of ***How to Raise Heritage Turkeys on Pasture*** pulls together the best production information appropriate for heritage turkeys. Since its first publication in 2006, *How to Raise Heritage Turkeys on Pasture* has provided detailed information that just cannot be found anywhere else.

The book covers all stages of turkey production, from selecting a variety to building a safe and comfortable coop to dealing with predators or common health concerns. Readers will gain knowledge and confidence to raise turkeys for many years to come. Marketing, processing and even financial planning topics help the reader plan for profitability.

This second edition is available in a paperback version at <https://bit.ly/heritageturkeysbook> for \$17.00 (use the QR code below for convenient ordering)

Brittany Sweeney



*Jeannette Beranger reviews turkey feather coloring for inclusion in the revised **Breeding Better Turkeys** book.*

and as an electronic book for a tablet or e-reader for just \$4.95. The electronic version is available at <https://bit.ly/EBookRaiseHeritageTurkeys> or through its QR code below.

*The Livestock Conservancy is grateful for the financial support of Murray McMurray Hatchery for the revision of **How to Raise Heritage Turkeys on Pasture**.*

Final edits are underway for another revised work, ***Breeding Better Turkeys: A Guide to Choosing Your Best Birds***, which documents the knowledge of Master Breeders of turkeys for the benefit of today's turkey breeder. Originally published in 2009, the new edition will feature step-by-step instructions for evaluating growing and adult turkeys to select the birds with the strongest conformation. A chapter on managing your breeding birds outlines breeding plans and strategies as well as tips and pointers on management and incubation. New in this edition will be details on color in each turkey variety to help exhibitors make the desired improvements in their flock and choose which birds to take to poultry exhibitions and competitions. This book will be an essential tool for turkey breeder and long-term survival of standard-bred turkey varieties.

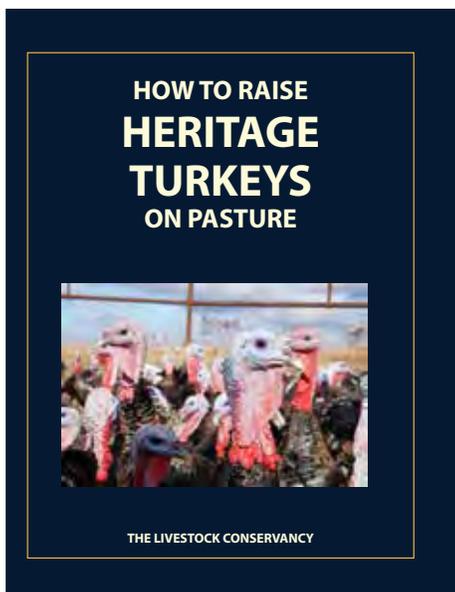
*Breeding Better Turkeys: A Guide to Choosing Your Best Birds* is scheduled for release later this year.

These books are important tools in efforts to conserve heritage breed turkeys, says Alison Martin, program director with The Livestock Conservancy, pointing to successes over the last two decades. "These newly updated manuals will help breeders not only improve their flocks but also continue the vital work of conserving these birds and the important genetics found within them."

In 1997, the first census of turkeys revealed that heritage varieties were on the brink of extinction. Only 1,337 breeding birds of the traditional varieties were found, and generations of careful breeding and knowledge were in danger of being lost. An initiative to reverse the trend was launched, in collaboration with Good Shepherd Turkey Ranch, Sandhill Preservation, the Society for the Preservation of Poultry Antiquities and Slow Food USA. Through a combination of research, training and promotion, new breeders were recruited and trained, and new consumers learned of the flavor advantages of heritage turkeys. By 2006, the census of breeding birds had risen to over 10,000, and in the most recent census of poultry in 2021, the breeding bird population remained over 15,000.

Martin notes that new breeders are needed to ensure that heritage turkeys, specifically standard-bred varieties, continue to thrive. "The bottom line is that as the breeders who saved heritage turkeys from extinction in the 1990s

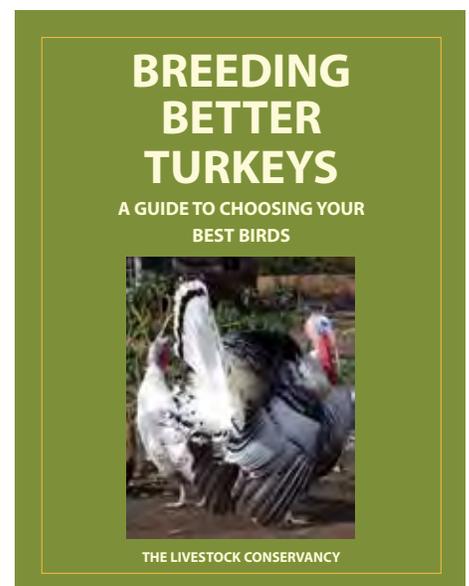
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# 2025-2026 LIVESTOCK CONSERVANCY MICROGRANTS AWARDED

By Jeannette Beranger

Interest in The Livestock Conservancy's 2025-26 Microgrants remained strong, with more than 150 farmers, ranchers, shepherds, homesteaders, breed groups and youth submitting applications. Now in its eighth year, the program has provided more than \$150,000 in funding to support over 100 rare breed projects nationwide, reaching 35 states and benefiting 97 of the Conservancy's 182 Conservation Priority Listed breeds. This year's program includes 11 grant recipients.

## YOUTH GRANTS



**Benjamin Hartig** of Kentucky hopes to grow all of the heritage goose breeds on the family's farm, including Dewlap Toulouse, Sebastopol, American Buff and especially the critically endangered Pomeranian goose. The 16-year-old high school junior will do this by creating four new breeding pens to house each breed. Additionally, he will use the funding to purchase a Pomeranian gander to introduce new genetics into his breeding flock. "I fell in love with the breed and I love working with these beautiful geese,"

he explains. "I especially like the rare breeds. It's important to save the history of these geese alive and keep the breed going."



Indiana's **Elizabeth Hatcher** (also featured in the headline image above) aims to expand her flock of Horned Dorset sheep and its genetics. She hopes to breed all five of her eligible ewes this year, with resulting lambs raised as show sheep and potential breeders, for sale or lease by other participants in sheep shows. The funds will help her access higher-quality genetics to breed with and improve the next generation of Dorset Horn sheep. It will also enable her family to sell the resulting lambs to interested farmers and showmen at a lower price, making the breed more accessible to others with less financial flexibility. "The grant is so I can breed my ewes to a buck from Europe, buying straws of semen," the 15-year-old 4-H and FFA member says. "These are a multi-purpose breed that can be used for wool production, meat and dairy production, which I hope to expand here."

*All photos are courtesy of the Microgrant recipients.*



**Jacob Keller**, 13, of Missouri, raises and shows large fowl Cochin chickens in several varieties, with the white and buff varieties ranking as his favorites. His funds will be used to purchase a small backyard barn. "I'm going to build breeding pens," he explains. "They're pretty big birds and they need lots of space." He wants to produce high-quality birds that represent the best of the breed.

## BREED ASSOCIATION GRANT



The **Hotot Rabbit Breeders International** group will be using grant funding to publish and distribute a new physical guidebook to active American Rabbit Breeders Association judges via ARBA's continuing education programs. The secondary project will be to create an improved advertising system for breeders with a real-time website. This will enable people to find individual Hotots and breeding stock that are immediately

available. Melissa Thom, president of the HRBI explains that improving judging will benefit the breed in the long term. "This will keep the breed healthy, productive and well-typed," she says. "This is a concerted effort to make sure that all of us are focusing on the same things with the breed."

### PREMIER1 GRANT



**Corrie Cooper** will be incorporating an acre or more of land into her year-round rotational grazing system for her flock of Florida Cracker sheep. Grant funding will provide electric netting fences on the Florida property, creating flexible paddocks, supporting regenerative land management and increasing lamb production to meet growing demand. The improvements will give her access to a lake pump system to incorporate irrigation into the pasture during drier months. The fencing also enables year-round rotational grazing, with paddocks rotating every one to two days and resting for 60 days (45 minimum) to replenish forage and disrupt parasite lifecycles, such as the Barber Pole worm. "Anytime the sheep can graze more, that's less hay we must purchase. That gives us a better bottom line and have enabled us to have a bigger flock," Cooper explains.

### NATIONAL WINNERS



**Wilbur Hanley** plans to use the grant money to purchase upgrades for his Langshan and Aseel chicken breeding program, including an incubator, a hatcher and brooders to ultimately improve hatching success rates. He

will also be building larger grow-out pens and outdoor chicken tractors. Additionally, he will introduce new genetics to improve diversity in both breeding flocks. "I love these breeds; poultry is in my heart," says the North Carolina farmer. He says Microgrant-funded improvements also will improve protection against predators.



**The Genesee Country Village & Museum** in New York will modernize and streamline its livestock recordkeeping by purchasing an electronic handheld data-collection device and accompanying software. This integrated system will allow facility staff to record accurate and essential livestock information in real time, including breeding data, births, weights, treatments, movements and other key health and production metrics. Transitioning from manual or partially digital systems to a fully integrated RFID-based management system will provide a strong, sustainable foundation for building a more efficient breeding infrastructure from the ground up for their Kerry cattle, Hog Island sheep and Leicester Longwool sheep. "This is going to be phenomenal for us not only in record keeping, but in herd health and management, which is super important for us because the animals come first," says Rebecca Myers, manager of historic agriculture for the museum.



**Dara Gribi** of California intends to upgrade her aging cage system. Her current cages are more than 20 years old and pose a risk to the safety of her Blanc de Hotot rabbits. Replacing the cages will enable her to safely house

the rabbits and continue pursuing her breeding goals. The efforts will improve the breed by allowing for more space to accommodate multiple lines of Hotots. "The flooring in my cages is very old and falling apart," she says. "This is going to make such a difference in our rabbitry and allow us to grow out our animals in a safe environment."



**Andrea and Loran Mulnix** of Montana are focusing on preserving Bansky Line Colonial Spanish horses on their ranch. They will purchase a portable heavy-duty round pen, which will allow them to work with young stock more safely and train older stock under saddle. The portable round pen would also allow for better doctoring, as well as serving as an adequate area for bringing in and breeding outside mares to their stallions. "This new pen will be six feet tall, portable and easier to move so we can use it for separating stock, for weaning and handling in a safer area," says Andrea Mulnix says. "It will definitely help our infrastructure. This is a great addition for the horses and for us."

A sincere thank you to our judges for their time and expertise in evaluating applications and to the donors whose generosity makes this important program possible. Their support has had a lasting and meaningful impact on both the grant recipients and the rare breeds they steward.

Applications for the 2026-27 round of Microgrants will open in May, with completed applications due in August. Learn more about the application and requirements to apply at [www.livestockconservancy.org/microgrant-program](http://www.livestockconservancy.org/microgrant-program) or by scanning the QR code. Awards typically range from



\$500 to \$2,000 at the discretion of The Livestock Conservancy. ■

*Les O'Dell contributed to this article.*

# FROM THE SCIENCE DESK: REAL WORLD SELECTION

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

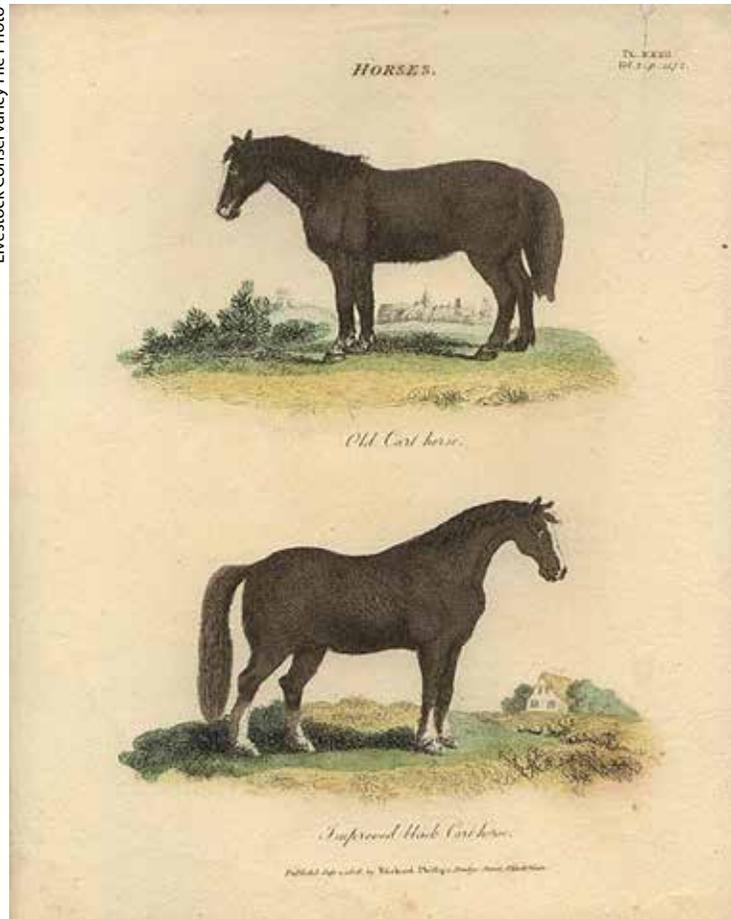
These are interesting times for animal science and animal production. New tools are arriving at a dizzying pace, including powerful tools that can unravel the mysteries of genomes – the complete DNA of an organism – to help breeders select the right animals for the production of the next generation.

The goal is to use an animal's actual genetic makeup as a main tool for selection. Genes are the bits of information that pass from one generation to the next, shaping the potential of offspring. Genes are, therefore, a sort of "ultimate target" for animal breeders, and these genomic tools might well eclipse all other tools used previously. Basically, the thinking is that the closer you can get to the actual target, the more accurate the information should be. Genomic selection is one of the more recent techniques that have been developed, and it can be helpful to have a brief look at the hows and whys of animal selection through millennia. Different tools have been used at different times, and these have yielded the breeds that we value so highly today.

The earliest selection of breeding stock was based on what an animal looked like or could actually do. This is a phenotypic approach, and while the phenotypic potential is shaped by genetics, the environment has an important influence on the final performance. The best set of genetic instructions in the worst environment is unlikely to perform all that well, while a mediocre genetic package in an ideal environment may actually do pretty well. This means that the tool of phenotypic selection is a step or two away from the actual genome and is therefore inherently a bit less accurate. Nonetheless it has served well in providing nearly all modern breeds, especially in their early development. It needs to be highly respected for that.

A few later developments have taken a strictly phenotypic approach and added in components from genetics. One good example is "progeny testing," where an animal's breeding potential was established not only by

Livestock Conservancy File Photo



This vintage illustration shows Bakewell's influence on the Shire breed. The top drawing depicts a Shire before his selective breeding work and the lower image reflects the "Improved Horse".

its own performance, but also by the performance of its progeny. Robert Bakewell, who is regarded as the first person to implement selective breeding of livestock, pioneered this approach more than two centuries ago with Leicester Longwool sheep as well as with English Longhorn cattle and Shire horses.

For the sheep, Bakewell leased out rams and observed their lambs in flocks that he did not own. For future breedings, he would use rams that produced what he considered the best lambs for use in his own flock. The key here is that he did not use *all* of the rams, but only those whose performance in lamb production were deemed to be superior. Over the years, this led to a productive and useful breed that had predictable performance.

Dairy bull selection has used progeny selection for years. Progeny, in this case, are heifers because bulls and bull

calves never produce milk. The daughters of a bull, along with his dam and other relatives, are therefore used to get around that limitation and to get closer to the bull's own genetic potential for milk production. The specific statistical protocol for this has varied, with the consistent goal of getting closer to the direct measurement of genetic potential rather than waiting to see what shows up in the milk bucket. These techniques greatly speed genetic selection and can be very effective when genetic change is the goal.

Genomic selection is one of the most recent of these developments, and when accurate, it can remove all uncertainty of environmental influences and focus solely on the genome itself. One potential drawback is an underlying assumption that the genome is well documented and understood, and that is not always the case. Data for these

techniques are usually developed in mainstream production breeds, and as a result, they may overlook genetic strategies used by or limited to rare or peripheral breeds. The danger is that using genomic selection in such breeds can eliminate some unique genetic solutions to production challenges by focusing only on variants documented as important in more mainstream breeds.

Aside from productive potential, it is also important to keep in mind the role of animals in actual day-to-day environments. Aspects of this topic became a lively and engaging point of discussion at the hemispheric conservation meeting in Veracruz, Mexico in 2023. Animals need to survive to perform at all, and the survival aspect of the issue is extremely important in environments that pose challenges.

Measuring and rewarding survival is a challenge. An example is the Chivo Neuquino and Angora goat breeds in Argentina. In easy years (with plenty of rain and resulting forage), the Angora breed brings in much higher returns.

Charlene Couch/The Livestock Conservancy



Leicester Longwool sheep (Threatened on the CPL) are among the breeds Robert Bakewell observed in his selective breeding studies more than two centuries ago.

In bad years when volcanic ash and drought are prevalent, the Angoras die in large numbers, while the Chivo Neuquino chugs along and achieves performance levels nearly equal to that in good years. As a result, many producers keep herds of Angoras, but also herds of Chivo Neuquino as a sort of insurance policy for bad years. They know the bad years are coming, but these instances are irregular enough that it is difficult to plan out long-term selection programs. The strategy, instead, is conservation of this adapted resource “just in case.”

Effective conservation of adapted resources is a huge challenge. Animal breeders like to make progress. A short generation interval speeds

that and is a target of many programs. Traits like longevity, survival and lifetime production take time to play out, and measuring these means a longer generation interval and slower overall genetic change. Further difficulties arise from the inherent real-world setting where all of this needs to occur.

Looking again at the example of goats in Argentina, in a bad year it may well be necessary to sell an entire kid crop as well as part of the goat herd to assure economic survival of the herd's owner. This means little or no retention of youngsters and, therefore, no genetic selection. A strategy to get around this is to ensure that those top-performing goats are identified so that the breeder can be sure to save their kids when the good years come along and it is possible to retain some replacement stock. This is slower than genomic selection, but in some environments can be much more secure.

The key point is that no single selection system is optimal for all settings. Each one brings its own challenges and needs. An important detail to remember is that not all change is improvement, so selection needs to be wise. ■

Jeannette Beranger/The Livestock Conservancy



A modern Shire mare. Shire horses are listed as Critical on the Conservation Priority List.

# OUR STORY: ADDING GEESE TO OUR FARM

## A DOZEN REASONS WE CAN'T BE TRUSTED AT THE FEED STORE

By Lisa Hansen, Hansen Heritage Homestead

There's a certain kind of unspoken danger that exists for us farm folk when we head into the local feed store. It's not the sharp tools or the hay bales teetering at odd angles. No... the real risk lies in the fact that my husband and I, two grown adults with farm to-dos up to our ears, have absolutely zero self-control once we walk through those doors.

Saturday morning, coffee in hand, we headed into our local feed store in Kenai, Alaska, like we always do. The plan was simple: grab some sheep minerals and feed, then hit the road for errands and chores. Innocent enough, right?

As we walked in, one of the regular employees caught sight of us and smirked.

"Hey, Hansens," he called, walking toward us. "Which one of you is the biggest sucker?"

Austin and I glanced at each other, already bracing for impact.

"Depends what you're selling," Austin replied, half laughing.

The employee gestured for us to follow him to the back room behind the register. We exchanged a knowing look... this is never good.

As we walked over, I heard a familiar peeping and immediately spotted the metal trough, heat lamp and fuzzy bodies. But it wasn't chicks this time. These were larger yellow and brown floofs. My mouth involuntarily let out a high pitched "Awwwww," and Austin followed with a dramatically exasperated "Explicit \*\*\*\*"

"Ducks?" I asked, already knowing I was done for.

"Nope," he said. "Baby geese. The hatchery sent us too many. We don't think we can find homes for all of them."

STOP! Sir? Sir! You cannot do this to us.

Austin, ever the voice of reason sort of, asked, "What kind of geese?"

"Chinese geese."

"How many?"



*Lisa and Austin Hansen raise a variety of heritage breed livestock and poultry on their farm in Nikiski, Alaska.*

"A dozen."

We told him to give us a moment while we pretended to be rational adults and did our shopping. Over by the sheep supplies, we immediately pulled up our phones and dove into research mode. Lifespan: 20-plus years. Temperament: loud, gentle, and hilarious. Housing needs: manageable...



*Lisa Hansen called these goslings, her new Chinese geese, "floofs." Chinese geese are listed as Watch on the Conservation Priority List.*

maybe. Are we really doing this?... Well, of course we were.

As we whispered back and forth about their care, how many, and whether this was a responsible life decision (which it wasn't), we heard the employee talking to another customer about the geese. The guy seemed unsure but interested. No, this customer was not about to take away the opportunity for us to purchase animals we didn't need! I locked eyes with Austin and raised an eyebrow.

He gave me a nod.

I stuck my head around the aisle and said, "We'll take them all!" I shouted a little too loudly.

What. Did. We. Just. Do?!

We grabbed starter feed, brewer's yeast, shavings and a proper waterer, and we were handed a box full of 12 peeping goslings. As we walked out of the door, we couldn't stop laughing at ourselves.

"Welp, we have geese on the farm now," Austin said.

Yep. Sure do.

### **Messy Yet Adorable Floofs**

While some folks say to start small, maybe two or three geese, we went all in. Twelve Chinese geese moved into our house, and looking back, I wouldn't trade it for anything.

They grew up in a tent brooder in our living room. Every morning or evening, we rolled out a blanket over the carpet because the poop load was real and sat down with our coffee, which we often forgot to drink, and just hung out with them. No phone scrolling. No chores. Just gentle peeping, little flappy wings, and a pile of feathered lovebugs clambering all over our laps.

And they grew fast. If you've raised chicks, you know they stay little for quite a while. But these goslings hit the growth gas pedal immediately. At two weeks old, they were already towering over the heat plates. They bumped into them, knocked them over, and acted like feathered bulldozers.

So we switched to Cozy Coop heaters because it gave them more room and fewer things to wreck. They were suspicious of the new setup, but the extra space felt like a win. Slightly less chaos is still a step in the right direction.

Speaking of chaos, let's talk water. With chicks, nipple waterers keep everything tidy. Geese? Absolutely not. They require to rinse their bills and swish water, blowing bubbles with their noses, and turning the brooder into a swamp.

We were soaking through shavings every day. So, I switched to wood pellets, which absorbed far more moisture and smelled way less awful. Now I could go three or four days between cleanings, and it felt like a miracle. Tip: If you're raising goslings, skip the shavings. Go straight to pellets.



On cleaning days, I scooped all 12 honkers up and marched them into our shower. I set a shallow dish for splashing. They chirped, flapped, bathed, and preened while I cleaned the brooder. It was like a tiny spa day. It worked. They got their splash time, I got a clean brooder, and we all came out happier.

### All That Personality

I heard geese were social, but I wasn't prepared for this. These birds didn't just coexist with us, they became our full-time entourage. They followed us everywhere, talking the whole time, chiming in as if they had strong opinions on feed choices, fence repairs and how we stacked firewood. If we crouched down to work on something, they'd waddle right in, poking their bills into pockets, tools and whatever project we were focusing on, fully convinced we needed their supervision.

And heaven forbid we walk away without proper notice. They'd honk dramatically, the kind of wounded, theatrical hollering you'd expect from a toddler denied a cookie, as if we had shattered their tiny goose hearts. They climbed into our laps, leaned on our legs and insisted on being part of absolutely everything, as loyal and curious as any farm dog, just... louder, and with more feathers.

### Geese as Farm Guardians

Some people buy geese for weeding. Others use them for eggs. Some for companionship. We accidentally bought 12 full-time security guards. From the

moment they were moved outdoors, we watched them chase off ravens that swooped too low. They've kept the moose at bay. To date they've run four moose off the property, including one mama with twins who looked confused and offended. They patrol the perimeter, honking warnings, and even the coyotes have noticeably stayed away. Despite their enthusiasm, they're incredibly manageable. Let them out in the morning, toss some feed and they handle themselves the rest of the day.

### Heading Into Their First Winter: What Geese Actually Need in Alaska

As the temperatures dipped into classic Alaskan freeze-your-nose weather, we prepared the geese for their first winter. Thankfully, geese are naturally cold hardy. Still, they have a few non-negotiables once the snow flies.

First: Shelter. Geese don't need anything fancy, but they do need a dry, draft-free space to escape the wind. Think sturdy shed with good airflow and deep bedding for insulation. Geese don't mind cold, but they do mind being wet in the cold.

Second: Water. Chickens can use tidy heated nipple waterers. Geese cannot. They must swish water through their bills to keep nares clear. So we use a heated bucket. Not deep enough to become a splash zone, just deep enough for face dunking. Winter with geese is a negotiation between enough water and creating an ice rink.

Third: Enrichment. Geese are intelligent, and boredom is their enemy. Winter becomes the season of boredom busters: hanging cabbage, treat balls, branches and small daily tasks.

And finally: Space. They need room to stretch, flap, walk and be themselves. They don't have to spend all day outside in brutal cold, but they need fresh air whenever possible.

Once you dial in water, shelter and enrichment, geese handle Alaskan winters like seasoned locals.

### Our Favorite Addition to the Farm

We love all our animals and livestock. But these geese...they're in a league of their own. They've become woven into the fabric of our days. Affectionate without clinging, bold without being dangerous, hilarious without meaning to be. They follow us everywhere, our waddling shadows with feathers and opinions. They've become the soundtrack of the farm. We had no idea how much we needed geese until we had them. Now we can't imagine the farm without their honking chorus. ■

*The Hansens raise a variety of heritage breeds. Follow them on Instagram, @hansenheritagehomestead*

*All images courtesy of Hansen Heritage Homestead.*



## SKIDMORE JOINS PROGRAMS STAFF

Amanda Skidmore has joined the programs staff of The Livestock Conservancy as outreach coordinator, working with the organization's new Small Farms: Healthy Herds and Flocks project. The grant-funded effort, a partnership with Iowa State University, aims to protect heritage breed animals and other livestock and poultry from infectious diseases by educating producers on proper prevention measures.

In her new role, Skidmore will work on project development and the creation of resources to communicate risk and best practices for breeders.

"We are fortunate to have found such an experienced communicator and project leader to develop and implement farm education for this important topic," says Alison Martin, program director with The Livestock Conservancy.

Skidmore holds a bachelor's degree and a Ph.D. from the University of Kentucky. She lives in Crestwood, Kentucky.

## WEBINAR TEACHES FIBER MARKETING

"Connecting Shepherds with New Markets," a webinar offered through the Save 'Em to Shave 'Em program, drew more than 100 participants looking to find new ways to market fleece and wool

to fiber artists and consumers. Featuring savvy shepherd-marketers, the webinar covered everything from new product-selling channels to proper branding and social media promotion techniques.

The recorded webinar is available on The Livestock Conservancy's YouTube channel at [www.youtube.com/@TheLivestockConservancy](http://www.youtube.com/@TheLivestockConservancy) or by scanning the QR code.



## 'CELEBRATING 250' EXPLORES TURKEYS, PIGS AND GEESE

Looking to learn more about heritage livestock and poultry and their impact on American history, culture and agriculture as well as these animals' roles today? The Livestock Conservancy's Celebrating 250 initiative focuses on one species each month with social media posts, a special blog post and a monthly podcast.

In recent months, the spotlight has been on turkeys, geese and pigs, sharing interesting tidbits of history and facts about heritage breeds. "Follow along and learn more as we highlight sheep, chickens and rabbits in the coming months. Learn more at [www.livestockconservancy.org/250](http://www.livestockconservancy.org/250).

## REMEMBERING MARION STANLEY

Former Board member Marion Stanley passed in October. He was 93. Marion was a loyal member of The Livestock Conservancy, and he led the rescue of Santa Cruz Island sheep from the island, preventing them from disappearing altogether.

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



## PLAN NOW FOR INTERNATIONAL HERITAGE BREEDS WEEK

The global celebration of rare and endangered agricultural breeds, International Heritage Breeds Week, is set for Sunday, May 17, through Saturday, May 23. Now is the time to begin planning special events for your farm, venue or community, highlighting your breeds and their importance. With the nation recognizing its own 250th anniversary, International Heritage Breeds Week is a perfect opportunity to showcase the role and importance of rare breed livestock and poultry.

## NEW TURKEY RESOURCES

### Continued from page 3

age out of raising turkeys, new younger breeders must replace them if we hope to keep heritage turkeys going," she says.

Additionally, Martin points out that consumer demand continues to outstrip supply, and raising heritage turkeys for the holiday market can be a lucrative enterprise for breeders who do their homework. Whether raising

heritage turkeys for the family or for the marketplace, each farm and breeder plays an important role in the future of these turkeys.

"Credit for the success we have had in growing the heritage turkey population goes to the dedicated breeders who care for these turkeys and work diligently to ensure their survival for generations to come," Martin adds. ■

# FOOD: GIVE HERITAGE CORNED BEEF A TRY

Looking for a great main dish to serve for a special event this winter? The Livestock Conservancy Program Director Alison Martin shares this recipe for Heritage Corned Beef.

Corning your own beef, especially heritage beef, is easy and gives you control over your ingredients. All you need is space in your refrigerator for 10 days and some flavorful heritage beef.

The corning brine in this recipe uses food-grade saltpeter (potassium nitrate), which is readily available online and at many country stores or small hardware stores. If you prefer to avoid nitrates in your diet, you could substitute celery juice, a natural preservative. Using celery juice probably won't give you the bright pink color most people associate with corned beef, but the results are just as delicious.

Next is the beef. We recommend heritage beef, preferably grassfed for the maximum flavor and nutrition. Corning is traditionally done with tougher cuts, and nowadays most people use brisket. Round roast is a good alternative to brisket for those who prefer a leaner cut.

Then there are the spices. This is a basic recipe that you can adapt to your own family's tastes. The author prefers less sugar and a touch less spice than other recipes that we have seen. But sugar is a natural preservative too, so if you like it, there is no reason to hold back. Try it out, and make notes for when you repeat it. ■

**Do you have a favorite recipe** that features heritage breed meat or eggs? Share it with us and we might feature it in a future issue. Send your recipes to [lodell@livestockconservancy.org](mailto:lodell@livestockconservancy.org) and don't forget to include a photograph of the completed dish!

Courtesy BeefItsWhatsForDinner.com



## HERITAGE CORNED BEEF

*Allow 10 days to cure*

### *Ingredients*

3 – 4 lbs beef brisket or round  
1.5 – 2 quarts water, divided  
3/4 – 1 cup kosher salt  
1/4 – 1/2 cup brown sugar  
2 tablespoons potassium nitrate (food-grade saltpeter)

### *Spices*

1 cinnamon stick, crushed  
1 teaspoon black peppercorns  
1 teaspoon mustard seeds (whole)  
6 – 8 whole cloves  
6 – 8 allspice berries (or substitute 1/8 tsp ground allspice)  
1/4 teaspoon celery seeds  
2 large bay leaves, crushed (the fresher the better)  
1/4 – 1/2 teaspoon ground ginger

### *Curing container*

A 2-gallon plastic zip-lock bag or a 2-gallon-capacity sealable glass bowl or container may be used to hold the beef and the brine during the curing process.

### *Instructions*

In advance, thaw the meat if it is frozen. Keep in the refrigerator until the brine is prepared.

In advance, boil a half quart (2 pints) or more water on the stove or in the microwave to sterilize. Bring to room temperature, seal, and chill in the refrigerator.

On day zero, in a large pot, combine 1

quart of water, salt, sugar, saltpeter, and spices.

Heat stirring until sugar and salt are completely dissolved.

Remove from heat and add the cold water from the refrigerator. Then, cool the brine in the refrigerator until it reaches 40 degrees Fahrenheit.

Place the beef in the bag or glass container. Cover with brine, seal, and refrigerate.

Stir the brine daily for 10 days, turning the beef over every day or two.

After 10 days, remove the corned beef from the brine. Rinse in cold water. You can now freeze your corned beef for later use or cook it right away.

To corn your beef without saltpeter, simply substitute 2 cups of celery juice for 2 cups of water when preparing the brine. You can also add a little celery salt in place of some of the Kosher salt. Delete the sodium nitrate from the recipe (but keep the Kosher salt).

Enjoy your corned beef by slow cooking. Cover with water on the stove top or in a slow cooker, and add an onion and root vegetables such as potatoes, carrots, and parsnips. You may choose to add a bay leaf and more mustard seeds to the cooking water. Simmer on low or slow-cook for 2 to 6 hours, until fork-tender. Serve with steamed cabbage and a hearty brown bread. Leftovers are great for sandwiches. ■



## FIBER MILLS KNIT TOGETHER BREEDERS AND FIBER ARTISTS

By Les O'Dell

For many wool producers and artisans, the gap between raw fleece and finished products can be intimidating. Not only are there multiple steps involved in transforming recently shorn wool into yarn and other ready-to-use products, but the process can also be labor-intensive and time-consuming. That is where fiber mills come in.

"Fiber mills are so valuable," explains Jeannette Beranger, senior program manager with The Livestock Conservancy. "Without them, breeders are likely to struggle to find the resources to make their wool into a usable product."

Simply put, these mills are processors, taking bulk wool and using a range of technology and methods to process it into fiber and finished products for craftspeople, artists and consumers.

"We take fiber from animals and turn it into whatever products our clients want," says Christian Davies, co-owner of C&M Acres, a Maxwell, Iowa, full-service fiber mill, "whether it be yarn, roving, rugs or something else."

To make the transition, commercial mills use massive, high-speed machines and processes, Davies outlines. For example, rather than carding fleece with a 4- or 8-inch hand carding tool, his mill uses a 32-inch carder which weighs nearly three tons.

"Also, instead of hand-treading a single spinning wheel, we spin eight threads at 5000 RPM," Davies says. "It's exactly the same as hand spinning, just commercialized and streamlined."

Davies says he has learned over his 13 years as a mill owner how to work with heritage breed fibers.

"There are only one or two breeds on the Conservation Priority List where I've not worked with their wool. Working with some of them for the first time was quite surprising," he says. "I was used to thinking of more standard crimp and normal staple length, and then suddenly, I'm working with super long fibers with very little crimp and a very stout micron count."

He says he had to learn to make the proper adjustments to machines and processes when working with heritage-breed fiber, adding that he has also embraced the role of educator, both with producers and consumers.

For breeders, Davies says mills can provide insight on the health of herds just from the wool they process.

"There are times I've had to call a client after looking at a fleece and tell them that we can't make yarn from it because something must have happened during the growth cycle, and the fiber is breaking," he comments. "They will tell me, 'Oh, yeah, the animal was sick or there was a dog attack or something.' We can see that health plays a huge part in hair. When the animal is sick or fighting something or stressed, the animal's body focuses on taking care of itself and not the hair. The hair gets thinner during stress and then goes back to normal, but that thinner part is what breaks."

*Round Barn Fiber uses three 88-spindle Whiting/Roberts long staple spinning frames to spin wool. Courtesy Round Barn Fiber Mill*

Davies and other mill operators also serve as cheerleaders and connectors for unique fibers.

"A big part of what we do is education, helping people discover what they actually have with their fiber and how they can make it better," he explains. He also encourages breeders and artists to try new things. "I don't claim to be an expert, but we've been exposed to so much that we will try to connect people to other breeders or breeds that complement what they have."

Roy Clemes of Clemes and Clemes, a California manufacturer of fiber art equipment, says a big part of what his company does is connecting customers with fibers that perhaps they may not have tried yet – especially when it comes to heritage breed wool.

"I think the interesting thing is that you can find rare breed fiber in all styles; some are really fine and crimped, others are nice, medium wools, while some of the primitive breeds are multi-coated," Clemes explains. "So, if somebody tells me what they want to do, but do it with a heritage breed – almost any project – I'm able to say, 'Go try this one, and they'll be happy.'"

Mills play a vital role for sheep breeders and fiber artists.

"Using a mill can be great," explains Amy Barnes, a Wisconsin sheep breeder.

"They can do bigger projects, and the fiber comes back more uniform. Plus, it's easy to send it off and have it come back as a finished product."

But – and it is a big but – there are a couple of kinks in the wool works: the workload on mills is, at times, overwhelming and, perhaps more concerning, some in the industry say the number of mills is shrinking like a poorly washed wool sweater.

Davies says his customers must routinely wait as long as 22 months for their finished products. For that reason, some producers prefer the time-consuming task of spinning their own fiber.

"It's easier to send it to a mill, but sometimes the waiting list is years long," Barnes says.

Margie Schafer of Round Barn Fiber Mill in Durand, Illinois, who also raises Jacob-American sheep, admits the processing wait time can be lengthy, but she says reports of fewer mills might be threadbare.

"There have been a lot of mill closings, especially in the last six to 12 months," Schafer explains. "However, there are always new mills opening, and there has always been a big turnover in mills. Just from my looking at it, though, I don't think it is signifying a big seismic shift in the fiber mill industry."



Jeannette Beranger/The Livestock Conservancy

Schafer says it may appear that there are fewer mill operators because many of the new mills are much smaller than those that have recently closed. She says many of these fiber providers simply need to broaden their search for a mill.

"It's true that some people feel a little panicky because they haven't been able to get a relationship with a mill, but I think that maybe some of them just don't realize that there are a lot of other mills around," Schafer says.

She says the demand for millwork may continue to increase in part due

to growing demand for fiber, thanks to new fiber artists and programs like The Livestock Conservancy's Shave 'Em to Save 'Em initiative.

"The backbone of most small mills in America is assisting small farmers and shepherds with adding value to their wool," she adds. "Fiber artists, hand-spinners, weavers, knitters and crocheters are looking for high-quality yarn produced and processed in America. The textile industry in this country primarily resides in small fiber mills." ■

Jeannette Beranger/The Livestock Conservancy



Courtesy C&M Acres.



Three of the stages in wool processing:

Top: Wool emerges from a mechanical picker at Battenkill Fibers in Greenwich, New York.

Left: Following washing, fiber mills place wool on drying racks as the next step in the process.

Right: Dyed wool comes through a mechanical carder at C&M Acres.

## OUR WORKING DOGS: PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS



Our most recent photo contest went to the dogs – and we wouldn't have it any other way. Dogs are an essential part of life on farms, ranche, and homesteads, playing a vital role as trusted partners in caring for heritage breeds. In the Autumn edition of *The Livestock Conservancy Newsletter* and on our social media channels, we invited you to share photos of your hard-working dogs in action. Our followers did not disappoint, submitting nearly 100 pictures.

Our judges – many of them devoted dog lovers – delighted in every photo and faced a tough task narrowing the field. In the end, these images rose to the top.

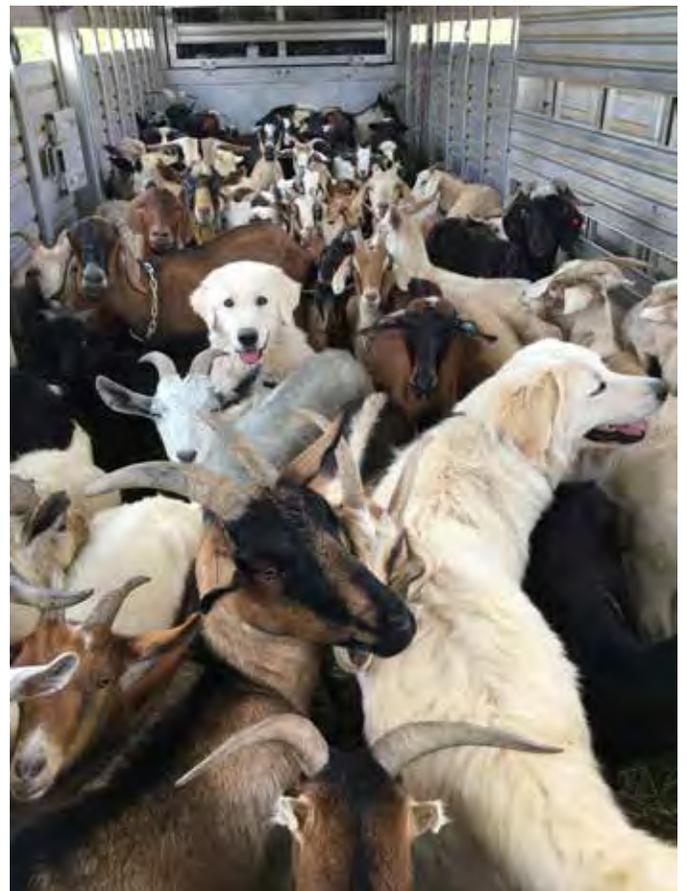
### **FIRST PLACE** (above):

Dr. Rachel Eken shared this photograph, taken by Hannah Moore of Piece By Piece Images, of "Bristol," a Central Asian Shepherd that works on her small ranch with American Mammoth Jackstock donkeys, Meishan hogs and American Yaks. "I picked all my breeds from The Livestock Conservancy's Conservation Priority List, and I also raise the guardian dogs," the Lake George, Colorado, chiropractor explains.

For submitting the winning image, Dr. Eken will receive a copy of *An Introduction to Heritage Breeds* autographed by the authors.

### **SECOND PLACE** (right):

From Amanita Berto of Santa Fe, New Mexico, is a photo of Blue and Namaste, Maremma sheepdogs, along with Spanish and other goats, all moving to their next job as part of Horned Locust Goatscaping.





**THIRD PLACE**

Dr. Eken also submitted this photograph by Falon Hibler photo of "Wick," her Central Asian Shepherd, working with "Y-Fi," an American Yak. "All of my dogs are full-time guardian dogs and have been orthopedic and genetic tested to make sound, long-living guardians," she says.



**HONORABLE MENTION**

Jennifer Langenohl of Delavan, Wisconsin, says her Corgi, Ludo, has appointed himself the official duck and goose guardian and companion on her homestead. He spends a lot of time with the Welsh Harlequin ducks and Sebastopol geese.



**HONORABLE MENTION**

Bailey Hirschboeck of Country Critters Farm in Sterling, Connecticut, sent this image of her dog Zeus, with Shetland sheep and Nigerian goats.



**HONORABLE MENTION**

Cheyenne Franklin, owner of Lone Roan Ranch in Windsor, Missouri, shared this photograph of Daisy & Dusty. "They are our hardworking Maremmano-Abruzzese Sheepdogs at our mid-Missouri ranch. They have proven to be faithful, intuitive and dedicated to protecting their flock. We raise Navajo-Churro sheep here at Lone Roan Ranch and could not continue doing what we do without this magnificent duo."



**HONORABLE MENTION**

Rhona, an English Shepherd dog, meets the first Tunis lambs of 2023 in this photo sent in by Janae N. Foss of Lyles, Tennessee.



**HONORABLE MENTION**

This photograph of a livestock guardian dog with Gulf Coast Native sheep was submitted by Stacey Beck of Pomfret Center, Connecticut.



**HONORABLE MENTION**

Katie and Griffin Newell of Edgar Springs, Missouri, submitted this photograph of their Anatolian Shepherd livestock guardian dogs watching over a flock of Barbados Blackbelly sheep.



**HONORABLE MENTION**

Our Second Place winner Amanita Berto also submitted this photo of Pip keeping a careful watch on Horned Locust Goatscaping’s flock as they transform a field.



**HONORABLE MENTION**

From Jamie More of Shelbyville, Tennessee, comes this picture of Shy, a two-year-old working Border Collie, with Gulf Coast Native and Shetland sheep.

**OUR NEXT PHOTO CONTEST**

**Help us protect rare sheep— one photo at a time.**

Share your best high-quality sheep photo to support conservation education and outreach. For this contest, we’re especially seeking images of Dorset Horn, Oxford, Shropshire, Teeswater, Soay, Wiltshire Horn, Black Welsh Mountain, Santa Cruz, Barbados Blackbelly and Romeldale/CVM sheep.

The top entry will receive a Shave ‘Em to Save ‘Em canvas tote bag.

**Contest Rules**

Send your high-resolution photo (300 dpi minimum) to lodell@livestockconservancy.org by Sunday, March 1, 2026.

By entering, you grant The Livestock Conservancy royalty-free, perpetual and non-exclusive rights to use, display, edit, publish or archive the image in whole or in part, online or in print.

Please, no filter-manipulated or artificial intelligence-enhanced or altered photographs.

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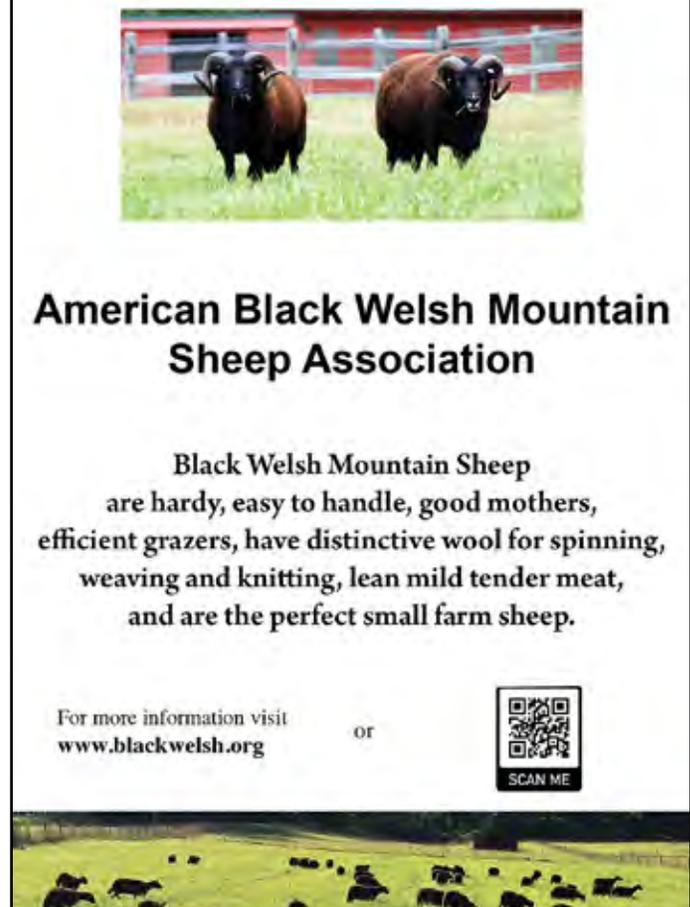


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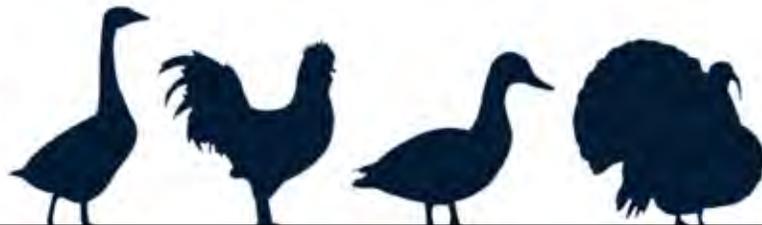
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THE LIVESTOCK CONSERVANCY

# 2026 POULTRY CENSUS

Coming Soon! It's time once again for The Livestock Conservancy's Poultry Census. This year, we are excited to be partnering with the American Poultry Association to ensure we are reaching the broadest audience of poultry breeders for this important effort.

Conducted every five years, this critically important project focuses on breeding populations of domestic poultry (purebred breeds or landraces), including chickens, ducks, geese and turkeys. The census will enable us to understand how poultry populations are faring in North America and guide future conservation efforts and upcoming

editions of the annual Conservation Priority List.

Many poultry breeds are historically significant and represent irreplaceable genetics that may be essential to the future of animal agriculture. Even as backyard poultry keeping becomes more popular, many of the less common or more challenging breeds are in real danger of extinction.

Once the 2026 Poultry Census is launched in a few months, anyone who manages breeding flocks, small or large, is invited to complete the survey. The greater the participation, the more precise the picture of poultry populations in North

America. Responses will remain anonymous, but you may opt to share your contact information with us. This will help us identify breeders who hold flocks of high conservation value, which are important to the long-term genetic diversity of endangered poultry breeds. A detailed summary of census results will be shared following careful analysis of the collected data.

Get ready to start counting your chickens, ducks, geese and turkeys! Watch The Livestock Conservancy *Newsletter*, our eNews and our social media channels for the 2026 Poultry Census. ■