

The Kunekune Are Coming!

Potbellied pigs move over; the Kunekune are coming!

With a face only a mother or pig lover could appreciate and hair thick and long like the coat of a dog, these New Zealand pigs are truly unique. They are also very expensive, as befits a breed that was nearly extinct 20 years ago and today numbers only about 2,500 worldwide.

Kunekune breeder Katie Rigbee has tasted Kunekune pork at a native Maori cookout and declares it delicious. At \$10,000 a breeding pair or \$1,500 for a piglet, however, she doesn't advise including the rare animals on your menu anytime soon.

"The bulk of the animals are in New Zealand, although the United Kingdom has quite a few breeders and pet owners," says Rigbee. "There are 300 or less in the U.S."

Kunekune, which means short and fat in Maori, range in size from 100 lbs. to 200 lbs. when full grown. Unlike the commercial hog of today, which has been bred for leanness, the show quality Kunekune is described by Rigbee as being "unhealthy" fat.

Turned outside, the pigs don't root and dig like most pig breeds, but fatten on grass and have been used to control orchard grass. The average litter size is 4 to 6 piglets, although Rigbee has delivered one litter of 12. The pigs don't breed true to a single color. A single litter can include pigs that are orange with black polka dots, black with white and brown spots, creamy white or black with mahogany stripes.

Rigbee is founder of the original registry for the pigs and was the first importer of the animals to the U.S. Initially, she brought in four boars and 12 sows. In 1999, she brought in an additional four boars. Rigbee's breeding stock represents a cross section of available breeding stock in New Zealand and has been the source stock for most Kunekune in the U.S. today.

Milk Bottle Collecting An Offshoot Of Dairy Career

Pete Birchard's extensive antique milk bottle collection represents a big part of his own history. The Meshoppin, Penn., man has 1,400 designer bottles plus a variety of other dairy antiques that represent almost all the dairies in Northeast Pennsylvania and many in southern New York.

He started collecting while working in the dairy industry for 28 years. He retired in 1985.

"We delivered milk directly from a farm-based dairy to a store. The milk was so creamy that customers could scoop off the cream for their coffee or to make butter and still enjoy a fresh glass of milk," Birchard says. "Many farmers made their living bottling their own milk in the same way, using glass bottles and delivering them to stores and homes."

At that time, people paid a deposit on the heavy glass bottles and returned them to the store once they were emptied.

Birchard finds bottles at yard sales, antique shops, and over the Internet. He doesn't sell any of the bottles he has accumulated, but will trade with other collectors who have something he wants.

Birchard's oldest bottle is an 1889 model, originating from a Binghamton, N.Y. dairy. The glass is a deep purplish color and has no logo painted on it. He's also got some

The limited available blood lines makes a careful breeding program necessary to prevent problem genes from cropping up. Currently, Rigbee is working with Iowa State University on a breeding program to eliminate a strain of porcine stress that has shown up. She is also working on a software data base that will hold all the genetic records of the Kunekune.

Rigbee warns prospective buyers to check registration records carefully for possible inbreeding. Registry members agree to follow guidelines. Neutering of all but the best piglets is encouraged, and a breed-wide floor price is required.

Interest in the animals is high, says Rigbee. "I have had inquiries from Scandinavia, Canada, South Africa and elsewhere," she adds. "They are everything we hoped the potbellied pig would be."

While the potbellied has earned a reputation as a household pet, Rigbee warns that it tends to become aggressive if not properly handled and fed. She insists that the Kunekune is much more friendly, without any aggressive traits.

Rigbee currently owns 47 Kunekune along with potbellied pigs, South Pacific Nesting Pigs, and Captain Cooker pigs. She has authored two books on the nutrition and care of pet pigs.

A cheerleader for pet pigs, Rigbee won't sell hers to just anybody. She insists on knowing what the zoning is for a prospective owner. "I won't place a pig with someone who is going to be a backyard breeder or a closet pig owner," she says. "If I can't find good homes for them, I've decided that they'll stay here."

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Lancaster area bottles that are uniquely shaped and have faces molded right into the glass.

Besides the bottles, he has also collected many milk cans, signs, some of the first cottage cheese containers, antique milk crates and small coolers.

Birchard is building a new garage that will have a special 12-ft. by 24-ft. bottle room at the back of it to display his collection. He says that the collection will likely continue to grow, so if he runs out of room again, he can always move the room partition further back into his garage.

He occasionally displays a small portion of his bottles at various events and is diligent at keeping his entire collection shiny and dust-free.

"I never tire of looking at them and it's a constant challenge to see if I can find even better bottles to add to the collection," Birchard says. "I remember being a boy and using old milk bottles as bb-gun targets. Who would have thought that I would one day fill an entire room with a piece of dairy industry history?"

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Native to New Zealand, full-grown Kunekune pigs weigh from 100 lbs. to 200 lbs.



Kunekune pigs are said to be much more friendly than potbellied pigs.



Pete Birchard occasionally displays a small portion of his 1,400 designer milk bottles at various events.

Smoker Built Out Of Refrigerator

Used refrigerators make great smokers for meat and fish, says Dave Wessling, Breese, Ill. He installed a conventional flue pipe through the top of the cabinet and cut an intake hole for fresh air in the lower left side.

To create heat and smoke, he uses a simple electric hot plate with a metal pan on top to hold wood chips. As the chips heat up, they produce plenty of smoke.

Wessling mounted a thermostat on the outside of the refrigerator to control the temperature inside. He notes that because the refrigerator cabinet is so well insulated, it does a good job retaining heat.

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