

Bourbon Red Turkeys A Delicious Link To The Past

When Tom and Sara Austin added 25 Bourbon Red turkeys to their flock in 2006, they weren't sure there would be a market for them. The turkeys are a heritage breed, and have darker meat than hybrid turkeys.

"They sold so well we almost didn't get one for our Thanksgiving dinner," Sara says. They raised 65 of the heritage birds in 2007 and plan to raise more than 100 this year.

The Austins raise turkeys, chickens, beef and pigs on their 40-acre Fountain, Minn., farm and direct market it at a farmer's market and through newsletters that list dates when fresh meat will be available for pick-up on the farm.

Tom helped on his grandfather's farm, Sara says, and has farming in his blood, though he works a fulltime job. After the couple bought their property and built a home in 2003, he read books on how to develop a small-scale sustainable family farm. The Austins started with chickens and then added other animals. The beef herd is completely grass-fed and finished, and the other animals graze on pasture and are fed some grain.

Raising Bourbon Red - and white - turkeys from one-day-old to seven weeks in a brooder pen is touchy as they are vulnerable to disease.

"Once they hit seven weeks and you let them out, it's like nothing will kill them," Sara

says, noting that the Bourbon Reds seem to be harder and eat less grain and more grass than white turkeys.

Tom uses electrified netting to protect his poultry from predators. About once a week, he moves the fencing and poultry house on skids to new pasture. The birds follow the larger animals and pick through the dried manure to spread it and speed up the composting process.

Bourbon Reds take longer to put on weight than hybrid breeds. Around May 7, the Austins purchase day-old Bourbon Red poults from Hawks Valley Farm in Spring Grove, a nearby business. By Thanksgiving the turkeys weigh 8 to 15 lbs. Conventional domestic turkeys, started in August, weigh 12 to 15 lbs., and up to 20 lbs. when started in July.

Cost for the poults is higher, too. The Austins paid \$5.50 apiece for day-old Bourbon Reds compared to \$3.80 apiece for white poults. The Austins sell the processed, vacuum-sealed turkeys fresh to customers who pick them up on the farm the Saturday before Thanksgiving. In 2007, Bourbon Reds sold for \$3.29/lb. compared to \$2.39/lb. for conventional birds. Sara says she knows of others who sell the Bourbon Red turkeys for \$5/lb. and more. Due to high feed costs, per pound prices will likely increase this fall.



Tom and Sara Austin raise Bourbon Red turkeys, a heritage breed with darker meat than hybrid turkeys.

The Austins aren't concerned about finding buyers, however. Customers - many from the Twin Cities - love the rich flavor of the heritage bird. "The meat has a wonderful texture," Sara says. The Austins also sell fresh meat to area restaurants and grocery stores. They don't ship outside the area.

"We're more about local," Sara says. "We like the direct market because you meet your customers face to face, and they get to see how their food is raised. We find it very rewarding, providing a high quality product,

raised in good conditions."

For others interested in raising Bourbon Red turkeys, Sara suggests doing a lot of research to learn about raising them. For marketing, she recommends getting involved locally and setting up a website. The Internet is also a good place to find poults for sale.

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Giant pumpkin henhouse was built with 2-in. automotive exhaust pipe and old tin roofing. The 10-ft. tall poultry house is on wheels and is moved regularly to new pasture.

Pastured Poultry Live In Pumpkin Pen

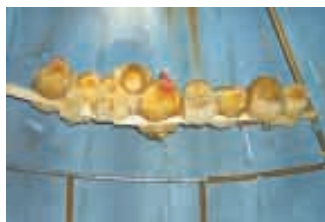
Bruce and Chris Balch's chickens live in a giant pumpkin pen built with 2-in. automotive exhaust pipe and old tin roofing. The 10-ft. tall poultry pen is on wheels and is moved regularly to new pasture.

Building the henhouse in a pumpkin shape seemed to be the natural thing to do, Chris says. Her parents had raised and sold pumpkins and gourds for the 49 years they had been on their 195-acre farm in Orford, N.H. Chris and Bruce continued the tradition when they sold their restaurant and purchased the farm a couple of years ago. "I try to grow different varieties every year," Chris says.

Bruce came up with the design for the pumpkin poultry pen and hired a welder to make the frame, which is attached to an old popup camper trailer. After creating the 9 1/2-ft. dia., 10-ft. tall pumpkin shape, they covered the outside with tin roofing scraps and painted it with two coats of bright orange latex paint.

A 3-ft. stovepipe stem, and screened holes cut for eyes, help vent excess heat. Painted leaves and facial features add the final touches.

The Balches screwed wooden bins to the interior pipes to create nesting boxes. Chick-



Chickens roost safely in pumpkin at night.

ens roost on a wooden pole secured high in the pen.

The chickens took to the pen immediately, eating grass inside the portable electric netting and finding shade under the trailer by day, and roosting safely in the pumpkin at night.

The pen pulls easily with a small pickup. It's not insulated, however, so the Balches move their chickens to a barn for winter. They plan to keep the pumpkin pen near the pumpkin patch and visible to customers.

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Stan Lichtenberg has a collection of about 300 original pedal tractors. He can display up to 80 of them at a time on this 8 by 48-ft. trailer.

Collector Displays Pedal Tractors On Special Trailer

Only original pedal tractors attract Stan Lichtenberg's attention. The Neligh, Neb., collector has managed to collect about 300 original pedal tractors with no reproductions. He and his son, Ryan, display them on a custom-built trailer and show them off at parades within a 60-mile radius of their home.

"The trailer is just 15 in. off the ground so the tractors are very visible," Lichtenberg says. The 8 by 48-ft. trailer can hold up to 80 tractors. The back tires of each tractor straddle wooden blocks secured to the trailer bed and a strap holds the tractors in place when the trailer is being pulled on the highway. Lichtenberg and his son plan to build a platform for a second deck to hold even more tractors.

The collection started in 1984 when a brother-in-law gave Lichtenberg a pedal tractor. Lichtenberg bought another and another, and so it went.

"At the time I was spending a lot of time on farms," the 40-year tire salesman says. "I saw them in yards and brought them for \$25 to \$50."

He enjoys completely restoring them — taking them apart, bead blasting off old paint,

priming and painting the pieces, assembling the tractors, priming and painting them again, and adding decals. He uses original parts when he can, including the wheels, but the tire salesman says he puts new tires on all of his tractors.

"They look nicer," he says, and it's appropriate since he has a Lichtenberg Tire, Inc. sign on the trailer.

It's a little about promotion, Lichtenberg says, but it's more about just sharing his collection. People gather around the trailer before and after parades to get a good look.

"My favorite ones are the Oliver's," Lichtenberg says. "Fewer were made so they are harder to find."

Know what you are buying, he advises people interested in collecting, to avoid paying a lot of money for reproductions and not originals. Pedal tractors are available on eBay and at toy shows and auctions, but the days of buying them for \$50 or less are long gone.

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