

Showgirl Chickens Catching On Fast

Lyn Dunsmuir of Bull Shoals Lake, Mo., and Brenda Gambill of Paradise, Texas are friends who are working to develop a new chicken breed called Showgirls.

The birds are a cross between the Turken, which has a naked (featherless) neck, and the Silkie, which has fluffy, soft, fur-like feathers, dark colored skin, a head plume, and feathered legs.

The women have been selectively breeding the birds since 2004 and, to date, have produced 13 generations and well over 1,000 Showgirls chicks between the two of them. They've interested many other breeders in the new breed.

Dunsmuir recalls how she felt the first time she saw a Showgirl and became aware of the breed: "Wow, that's so ugly it's cute. It's something only a mother would love. I was in love instantly with them and just had to have one."

Gambill says the goal is primarily to produce a Silkie-type bird with a naked neck.

"We're working with several colors including white, buff, blue, splash, and black. Our next challenge is to create some lavender Showgirls, but first we have to get enough lavender Silkies to be able to cross over," she says.

From their experience, the women say it's best to start the breeding process with a Turken hen and a Silkie rooster. They then keep breeding the offspring back to Silkies, rather than breeding Showgirl to Showgirl.

The women call their roosters "Showgirl guys," although some people have suggested it would be more appropriate to rename the breed.

"Someone made the remark to me that it's like the name 'lady bugs,' seeing that there are male and female lady bugs. I think you just accept a name and flow with it," says Gambill.

Dunsmuir and Gambill recently began entering poultry shows with the new breed. From the assortment they took to the Silkie National Show in Missouri last year, they were "very proud" to win Champion AOV (All Other Varieties).

"Bren and I both feel we are still not quite ready for the breed to be accepted into the standard. We need more conscientious breeders to work on type and get a consistent hatch. We also need more breeders to show these birds at local shows so we can eventually petition the American Poultry Association and American Bantam Association to accept them in the standard."



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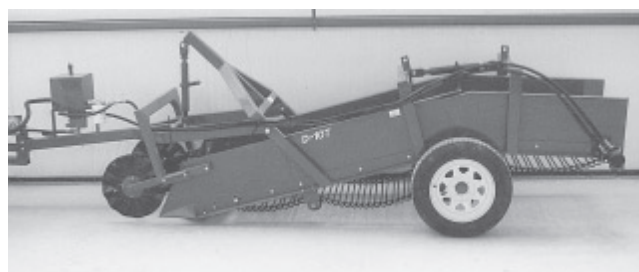


Dunsmuir says. "I'm leaning toward asking the American Silkie Club to help us sponsor them as a variety of Silkie, as we really do need to keep Silkies in the mix. Unfortunately, when we've bred Showgirl to Showgirl, we've come up with some pretty naked birds."

This is the first season they feel they can offer quality-started chicks and adults for sale. Prices start at \$50 each for pet quality birds, and go up for breeding or show quality birds.

The broodiness of both Silkies and Showgirls means they sit faithfully on eggs and do a great job of hatching and raising chicks.

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U.S. Small Farm designs and builds planters, diggers and other equipment for small potato growers. Photo shows potato digger with sweet potato option.

Spud Equipment For Small Farms

Growing a few acres of potatoes for market is a great sideline, but finding good quality equipment can be tough. U.S. Small Farm has changed that. The Wyoming-based company designs and builds planters, diggers and even a seed potato cutter that can cut 200 to 300 lbs. per hour.

"I had been designing potato planters for companies that sold to large growers and decided to try to fill the void for smaller growers," says Larry Anderson. "Our target market is the 1 to 10-acre market gardener."

Originally, he designed and manufactured a one-row, cup-type planter with a Cat. 1 3-pt. hitch. It holds up to 200 lbs. of seed potatoes from 1 to 4 in. deep. It can be mounted off center to produce two-row spacings or directly behind the tractor. A two-row unit consisting of two single row assemblies is also available. The cup planters start at \$2,800 for a single row and double that for the 2-row units. Anderson suggests a 20 hp tractor to lift the loaded planter, though it could be pulled by one as small as 10 hp.

Anderson's one-row digger is available with a 3-pt. hitch and a 48-in. cleaning bed. It sells for \$2,800. A pull-type design with a 102-in. cleaning bed costs \$4,850. Both diggers can be used directly behind the tractor or offset to the side. A moveable tail section lets potatoes drop on the ground or they can be lifted to drop them into a trailing cart or mounted box. Neither unit requires more than a 20 hp tractor.

"All our diggers are really customized to the buyer," says Anderson. "For example, we make adjustments in the design of the chains on the cleaning bed based on your soil type. Spacings are wider for really heavy soil, but if the soil is sandy, you can use a real narrow spacing in the chain."

Anderson says he works closely with customers to meet their needs and that leads to new products, such as optional custom made



Ground-driven potato planter

fertilizer units, a picking table extension, a bagging platform and a sample accumulator. The addition of a sweet potato option came from a Kansas customer's request.

"I made a prototype and sent it down. He tried it, and I took it back and made changes," recalls Anderson. "He tried it again, and we changed it again to what it is now."

The sweet potato digging attachment sells for \$600 and includes coulters to cut the vines. It also has a longer blade to go deeper into the ground.

Another customer-inspired product is a hand-powered seed cutter that sells for \$120, including freight. The tabletop unit lets a single worker pick up a potato and slice it into 2, 4, 6 or 8 pieces depending on tuber size. The seed pieces fall into a container beneath the tabletop or are deflected into a larger container at the side.

A recent addition to the product line is an assisted feed planter with seats for riders who hand feed the planting units. It can be used with large flower bulbs, large seeded plants and even walnuts. The two row assisted seeder starts at around \$8,000. An automatic feeder is also available.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, U.S. Small Farm, 5428 Road 57, Torrington, Wyoming 82240 (ph 307 534-1818; toll free 888 522-1554; fax 307 534-1812; ussmallfarm@yahoo.com; www.usmallfarm.com).

Pack Goats Generate Profits

"I have had a herd of Nubian goats for the past 6 years and recently decided to diversify to try to make a little more money out of them," says Rebecca Lange, Brambles Nubian Goat Farm.

"I used to sell all my wethers at a local auction barn but now I keep some for use as pack goats. They're great as pack animals because they love human attention and make great pets. Goats cause far less damage to the environment than horses and are easier for people of all ages to handle. They also cost much less to feed and maintain than any other pack animal.

"Wethers make the best pack animals. Does can be used but don't have the body mass of wethers. Bucks are not recommended. Most important: choose a goat with a quiet, gentle nature rather

than ones that are skittish.

"Training begins when the kids are young, with basic leading and tying. The best pack goats have been bottle and pail fed, because of the human contact. Actual packing begins when the goats are around a year old.

"There are several types of saddles available to fit goats, made of wood or aluminum and leather. Panniers fit the saddles and come in various sizes. Day packs, which require no saddle, are also available.

"Goats are wonderful to work with. If you live in an area where hiking or agrotourism is possible, they can be a big attraction to customers."

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Pack goats cost much less to feed and maintain than any other pack animal, says Rebecca Lange, who raises Nubian goats.