

Florida Business Breeds Giant Tortoises, Iguanas

By Dee Goerge, Contributing Editor

Owning a \$65,000, 500-lb. male Galapagos tortoise may not fit your budget, but if you are fascinated with tortoises - or iguanas - there are smaller, less expensive species to consider.

Florida Iguana & Tortoise Breeders sells hatchlings and adults of breeds that president Sam Pascucci has carefully purchased from around the world for more than 30 years.

The Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., resident says he has been infatuated with tortoises since he was 5. As he grew up and talked about wanting his own, he remembers being told they cost a lot of money, and you had to be a zoo to own one.

After a successful career, Pascucci had the finances to pursue his tortoise dreams and has become well known for his expertise of successfully breeding rare tortoises and iguanas.

"My goal is propagation of the species," Pascucci says, noting there wasn't a lot of readily available information when he purchased his first reptiles from a well-known breeder in the early 1980's.

So he researched, talked to veterinarians and studied everything he could. Now his business is an approved and accredited breeding facility by the Zoological Association of America. The ZAA asks him to write articles about his experience in recognizing behaviors that lead to successful breeding.

"There is a way to introduce them, that they will be compatible. You have to know how to put animals together and take them

apart," Pascucci says.

Just as in livestock breeds, genetics are important, and some buyers want offspring from specific parents.

"I have a following for some iguanas, like Humphrey, a Cuban iguana," Pascucci says. "People want a hatchling from him because of his appearance and behavior."

The business is known for its giant land tortoises and West Indies Cyclura Rock iguanas, specifically the Cuban, Rhino and Cayman Brac. Hatchlings sell for \$295 to \$895 and live about 80 years, the longest of all iguanas.

There is a waiting list for some species and some require a special permit to ship across state lines. In addition to zoos from around the country, many customers are breeders from Texas and California that have large outdoor spaces that are warm year-round to accommodate the reptile's needs.

But some species are suitable for outdoors/indoors living in northern climates.

The elongated tortoise, for example, only grows to about 12-in. and sells for \$175 as a hatchling. Many iguanas are also suitable as indoor pets. Their diet is greens, and Iguana Chow. Tortoises are also herbivores and can eat alfalfa and timothy grass, as well as Tortoise Chow.

Staff at Florida Iguana & Tortoise Breeders work with customers to make sure they understand the care and commitment that is required. Some Galapagos tortoises have been known to live more than 250 years, for example.

The business's website includes photos and



Sam Pascucci sells hatchlings and adults of rare breeds that he has purchased from around the world for more than 30 years.



Pascucci has become well known for his expertise in breeding rare tortoises and iguanas (left). Elongated tortoises sold as hatchlings (above) make suitable indoor pets.

information about the tortoises and iguanas available for sale, as well as educational articles and videos.

Live arrivals are guaranteed and come with a one-year health guarantee. Plus, the business offers a 30-day exchange.

While he runs a business, Pascucci, says his passion is for conservation and disseminating information to prevent species

from becoming extinct.

"As I get older, I want to help others so we can save endangered species," he says.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Florida Iguana & Tortoise Breeders, Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. (ph 754 444-1710; www.floridaiguana.com; sam@floridaiguana.com).



Rare Black-hoofed Iberico hogs are found only in Spain and Portugal, where they're pasture-raised and finished on acorns from oak trees.



Photos courtesy Iberian Pork Products

Natural unsaturated fats turn the ham creamy with a nutty flavor. The centuries-old curing process that is used can last 4 years or more.

High-Priced Spanish Hogs Raised On Acorns

Black-hoofed Iberico hogs make some of the highest priced ham in the world. The rare breed, found only in Spain and Portugal, is pasture-raised and finished on acorns from oak trees.

A medium to small-sized pig with dark hair and almost black hooves, the Iberico hog is known for its intramuscular fat, which makes the meat juicy and flavorful. Finishing on acorns with natural unsaturated fats turns the ham creamy with a nutty flavor. Long curing reportedly takes it to another level.

The ham is available in 4 grades. The highest grade cured ham, Jamon Iberico de

Bellota, sells in specialty food stores in the U.S. for as much as \$72.95 for 3 oz. of paper thin slices hand cut by a master meat carver. Whole hams can range from \$750 to \$1,200 for a 14 to 15-lb. ham. That price may seem less out of line when you consider the work involved, not only in pasture production, but also in a centuries-old curing process that can last 4 years or more.

One company describes their process as having 5 stages: salting, washing, settling, drying and ripening, aging and tasting.

During the curing process, the hams lose almost half their weight. The traditional process allows natural outside air into the

curing room, giving ham from different areas a local flavor. Over the years, the variation in warm and cool weather breaks down muscle fibers, tissue and fat, releasing monounsaturated fats high in oleic acid. Iberico ham has been shown to contain about 55 percent oleic acid. The only natural fat higher in heart healthy oleic acid is olive oil.

Although the Iberico is one of the oldest breeds and can be seen in pre-Neolithic cave paintings, it is extremely rare today and not found in North America. The Ossabaw hog from Ossabaw Island, Ga., are sometimes thought to be descended from Iberian hogs. However, DNA sampling has revealed that

the Ossabaw are related to Asian pigs, not European.

If you search the internet you'll find a wide variety of sources for the hogs, including Iberian Pork Products, a Spanish producer. To try them out, check out La Tienda, a specialty food store in Virginia.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Iberian Pork Products, C/ Ciudad Real, 83; 28600 Navalcarnero, Madrid, Spain (ph 34 91 8132779; www.iberianporkproducts.com); or La Tienda, 1325 Jamestown Rd., Williamsburg, Va. 23185 (ph 757 253-1925; catalog request ph 888 331-4362; www.tienda.com).