

## “Black Oak Holler” Hogs Bred For Flavor

Chuck Talbot's pigs are bred to fatten on acorns and other scrounged material found in the woods near Black Oak Holler, West Virginia. He has crossed Ossabaw hogs with Large Blacks for his paternal line and now has added Eurasian Wild Boar to the mix.

“The Eurasian Wild Boar potential is exciting for its ability to put on fat in the woods,” explains Talbot. “Like the Ossabaw, these aren't just wild breeds. They are feral breeds with old, heritage genetics that put on fat.”

Unlike many states, West Virginia has no rules on breeding Wild Boar. The state actually released them at one time as a way to restore former strip mines.

“They make an excellent maternal line with good productivity and mothering,” says Talbot.

The males that result from breeding the wild boar to an Ossabaw/Large Black cross sow are a little more docile than their father. “I didn't let anybody in his pen,” he says. “We come and go around these two, although you always need to watch boars. We separate them before working them.”

A former professor at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, Talbot is trying to establish a swine production system for small farmers in the mountains of West Virginia. His goal is a

pig that can survive in the woods, feeding on acorns and hickory nuts in the fall to produce a flavorful meat.

This summer he put 30 head in a 16-acre woodlot with double strand electric fence. Last year he ran 100 head in the woods. He runs the pigs in sorghum Sudan pasture in the summer and supplements with barley.

“Europeans say our farm-produced pork is bland due to corn and soybean rations,” says Talbot.

Keeping the pigs contained in their forest pasture starts with training as piglets, notes Talbot's wife Nadine Perry. “We have a couple fields with woven wire and electric wire on the inside,” she says. “We train new pigs that way.”

Talbot adds that the daily barley supplement also helps. “When I whoop and holler, they know something good is coming,” he says. “That is part of the conditioning, but they also respect the 6,000 volts.”

Talbot's pigs are not the fast growing, “other white meat” pigs produced in confinement. His are ready for slaughter at a year's age, give or take a month. They weigh in at around 350 lbs.

“We're working with a group in the state to expand and upgrade meat processing,” says Perry. “We are trying to expand processing and dry curing for more products. If we could get dry cured product done locally, we could



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slice it and package it.”

Perry says the crossing of feral and domestic breeds combined with the barley and forest feed make for a flavorful meat. It is also lower in saturated fat.

“The flavor is fantastic with a sweeter taste and more depth,” she says. “It has a darker color, and there are more layers to the

flavor with a richness you don't get with conventional pork.”

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## She Caters To Groups Right On The Farm

Rural caterer Brenda Gorseth found a profitable niche hosting meetings for businesses and farm groups right on her farm.

At Woodward Farm in Cathay, N.Dak., Gorseth can accommodate up to 25 people at a time, serving meals fresh from her farm's commercial kitchen. When she's not catering, she's tending her big garden, or canning to sell at farmers markets, local stores and online. Her products' names reflect her passion for language and food. “Grapes of Wrath” is a hot grape jam. Her strawberry margarita jam is “Party in a Jar.”

Gorseth started her rural business selling her original recipes and “Frankenstein” combinations of recipes for her salsa, jam and baked goods sold at local farmers markets. She emphasizes that she uses locally grown foods and avoids artificial flavors, colors and stabilizers and corn syrup in her syrups, but instead uses the old-fashioned method of time. She custom

bakes cookies, cupcakes, pies and other treats for events and businesses, including a standing order of cookies every Monday for a local bank. In 2013 she received certification for the commercial kitchen that she and her husband, Dan, added on to their roomy farmhouse, along with a dining room suitable for meetings and gatherings.

“The house is big and spread out so we have breakout rooms. I will do breakfast, lunch, dinner, dessert and coffee—I'm really flexible,” Gorseth says.

So far most of her guests have been women's groups such as the Red Hat Ladies and birthday clubs. Some have asked for a cooking lesson in her commercial kitchen. Guests carpool and enjoy the country drive, even though the last five miles are on gravel road.

With three larger towns within 17 miles, Gorseth says she keeps busy catering all kinds of events. Since she can offer her home meeting space for free, she hopes to grow her



Brenda Gorseth hosts meetings for businesses and farm groups on her farm. She can accommodate up to 25 people at a time, serving meals fresh from her farm's commercially certified kitchen.

home-based catering space service by getting the word out to local chambers of commerce.

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## Website Connects Farmers To Food-Buying Customers

George Duggan knows that farmers are good at growing and producing food, but they often lack expertise when it comes to marketing direct to customers. That's why Duggan created Eat From Farms.com, a website created specifically so farmers can better manage the inventory, sales and distribution end of their business.

Duggan says EFF is very affordable for farms offering food products direct to consumers or restaurants. “EFF provides farmers with a website platform that allows them to manage their own online real time inventory of products for sale so customers know what's available at a glance,” Duggan says. “The system automatically organizes orders by neighborhoods, delivery dates or farm pickup.”

Customers can pay for products by cash, check or credit card, and also draw against a pre-paid balance. Transactions processed through the system by credit card are charged 2.9 percent plus 30 cents per transaction, and there is no monthly fee. An EFF account costs just \$150 a year to setup and maintain and carries a full money back guarantee for 90 days. EFF also charges a small fee per transaction, which provides an incentive to help farms grow their sales.

“We've had very good success with the program and have farm customers in 25 states,” Duggan says. “Many of our farmers can't believe how easy the system is to operate and how well it organizes their marketing efforts. The system works well for marketing to individuals, restaurants,

or anyone who wants to buy direct from farmers.”

Dale and Linda Hudspeth operate a grassfed meat farm in Texas and use EFF to market their products to families and restaurants. The Hudspeths like the scheduled opening and closing times for placing orders and say several of their chef customers like using the system because they can order day or night. “EFF has cut down our invoicing time because it does the math and we can just print the orders. Customers then have an online record of their past orders and invoices,” the Hudspeths say.

Ohio dairy farmers Jacob and Elizabeth Coleman like the EFF system because it gives them an easy-to-edit shopping cart/website system. The Colemans are a grass-based

dairy that participates in herd sharing, so other owners can easily look over their stock and order their biweekly selection. “We've expanded our direct marketing in a way we couldn't have done before,” say the Colemans.

EFF also has marketing materials to help promote direct sales to interested buyers. Brochures can be sent to targeted portions of neighborhoods within a farm's primary market area. EFF also helps farms with website content, logos, branding and pricing.

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