

Red Wattle Hogs Suit Small Farm Producers

After raising a few Red Wattle hogs, Kathy Bottorff turned from a skeptic into an enthusiastic owner and secretary/treasurer for the Red Wattle Hog Association (RWHA). She and her husband are among 98 members of the association that raise the heritage breed across the U.S. and Canada. Though interest and numbers are growing, Bottorff said the total number of Red Wattles is unknown.

Members of RWHA are dedicated to preserving the breed and educating producers interested in raising them. There's plenty to appreciate about the breed, Bottorff says. She recalls mean hogs from her childhood so she considers the Red Wattle's gentle, friendly nature one of its best qualities.

"They are a wonderful fit and choice for us. We're an older couple, and we needed something that was an easy keeper. We have plenty of pasture. They are hardy. They check off every box," she says.

The breed's name comes from the two pieces of cartilage that hang from inside the jowl area and the fact that the hogs are always some shade of red from strawberry blonde to deep cherry black. Despite false stories of it being crossbred from other breeds in the 1970's, Bottorff notes that there are mentions of the breed in books and newspaper articles dating back to the 1840's. Though hard to determine their origin, the most widely accepted theory is that Spaniards and Portuguese brought them to the Gulf.

"Red Wattles don't do well shut up

in a building," Bottorff notes, "so large confinement operations don't want them. They suit small producers who prefer raising livestock on pasture. At 6 months they are breeding age and weigh 250 to 260 lbs. Adult breeders are 500 to 600 lbs. and average 7 to 12 pigs/litter.

Breeders have different ways of raising them, but many feed on pasture. The Bottorffs supplement with a swine mix to provide necessary nutrients.

The meat from Red Wattles is outstanding and often wins in cooking competitions.

"The meat tastes different because they are pasture-raised, and it has more Omega 3's so it's healthier," Bottorff says. The flavor and quality attract customers who buy directly from them.

The couple also sells weaned pigs (about 2 mos. old). Costs are higher on the East and West coast, but prices for weaned pigs in the middle of the country average \$250 to \$275.

"They adapt to different climates very well. We have sent some to Canada and they do well in places like Florida, Texas and California," she says. "Hogs are herding animals. They need to stay in groups. If one is kept alone it can go off feed and become lethargic, and that may even bring on illness. We always recommend at least two hogs."

Producers provide shelter for cold and for shade from heat. Hogs are typically kept together as they like to sleep in a group.

Finally, like many heritage breeds, Red



Kathy Bottorff and her husband say Red Wattle hogs are ideal for small producers who prefer raising livestock on pasture. Sows average 7 to 12 pigs per litter.

Wattles are very hardy; many producers avoid using antibiotics and vaccinations.

"We've had them for 11 years and only called the vet once," Bottorff says. "That was when a sow was struck by lightning. She survived and raised her babies."

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"Moo Muffs" Keep Calf Ears Warm

A new design for cold weather ear protection for newborn calves has been getting a lot of attention.

"Moo Muffs are nylon on the outside with fleece on the inside so the calf stays warm and dry," says Holly Poad, co-owner of Moo Muffs. "One of my calves had one on in freezing rain and the inside stayed absolutely dry."

After a fire in January, 2016 destroyed the Poads' beef cattle barn, Poad looked for ways to keep calves warm when they were born in February. She tried to protect their ears with a calf cap made of fleece but it got wet, stretched out, and wouldn't stay on.

She collaborated with her business partner and aunt, Kim Ewers, who has an embroidery shop. Ewers used nylon and fleece material to create a prototype that Poad tested on her calves.

As soon as the calf is born, Poad either lets the mother lick the calf dry, or when it is extremely cold, she dries the calf herself. Then she puts the Moo Muffs on, generally for 2 or 3 days, until the calf is acclimated. Moo Muffs can stay on longer, and they fit every size calf she has had so far.

"It adjusts in three spots with industrial Velcro®," Poad says. The design allows the calf to nurse easily and yet is sturdy enough to stay on.

After making adjustments to get the design right, and testing it, she posted Moo Muffs on Facebook. She was showing cattle at a Denver stock show at the time and the response was immediate. A Wisconsin beef producer purchased five Moo Muffs and told a television news reporter about them, who was doing a story about keeping livestock warm during the frigid winter.

"It completely escalated from there," Poad says, about the huge response after the story aired. "We didn't have inventory, and my aunt, my mom and three retired ladies started sewing."



Moo Muffs are made with nylon on the outside and fleece on the inside.

In June, Poad contracted with a Milwaukee sewing company to make Moo Muffs. Poad takes care of orders and shipping from her farm.

One customer is a Japanese distributor who ordered 100 to test the market. Other customers include Western ranchers who don't even bother with taking the muffs off to save them. By protecting the ears from freezing at the tips, cattle aren't docked when they are sold, which more than makes up for the cost of the Moo Muffs.

Moo Muffs cost \$22 each, \$65 for 3, and \$100 for 5. Poad sells them through her website, and through a couple of dealers. She is open to adding more dealers, especially in Canada.

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Interseed Cover Crops And Sidedress, Too

The double-duty Biomass Builder from HFL Fabricating lays down 2 rows of cover crops while sidedressing the row crop. The design made sense to HFL owner Rick Hendrikx for his own farm use, as well as for others.

"I have a personal interest in interseeding cover crops and wanted something cost effective," says Hendrikx. "It seemed like a good idea to seed cover crops at the same time we sidedress fertilizer, but there wasn't a machine that would do both in a single pass."

HFL had worked with Salford Group on a banding tube to drop dry fertilizer behind a coulter. The tube has also been used to plant soybeans and some corn.

"The ability to plant with just a tube behind a coulter was an eye opener for keeping costs down," says Hendrikx.

He applied the concept to HFL's seed drill row unit. This allows the operator to set depth while press wheels to the rear preserve soil moisture and enhance soil/seed contact.

The row units can be equipped with a coulter and knives for either 28 percent or dry fertilizer with tubes to either side for cover crops. Each tube follows its own wavy coulter. If no sidedressing is needed, the fertilizer knife can be removed and a third cover crop tube added.

"We didn't reinvent the wheel, but it did require some work to produce the Biomass Builder," says Hendrikx. "What we have are multiple components that can be mixed and matched to the customer's needs."

Mounting systems can also be customized as needed with a 3-pt. hitch on the front and back of the row unit toolbar. This allows it to be mounted to a tractor and then used for lift assist to carry a liquid fertilizer tank or a Valmar seed tank. The entire system can also be turned into a pull-type system.

"We price everything out on an individual



Biomass Builder knives in fertilizer while cover crop tubes drop seed behind wavy coulters.

basis," says Hendrikx. "However, a 30-ft. toolbar with 12 row units would be priced at around \$70,000 with a simple seed and liquid fertilizer setup."

Hendrikx has used his system for dual seeding/sidedressing, as well as simply interseeding with 3 rows of cover crops 5 in. apart.

"This year we also used it to plant wheat inside soybean rows for relay cropping," says Hendrikx. "We went with twin row 30-in. soybeans with 3 rows of wheat in between them."

Hendrikx farms in Ontario and says the Biomass Builder provides the versatility and adaptability he needs. He thinks others will agree.

"We have dealers in Canada, but not as many in the U.S.," says Hendrikx. "We sell direct where we don't currently have dealers. Dealer inquiries are welcome."

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