

American Treasures Award

Traditional American Chicken for the 4th of July!

Kansas Heritage Breed Producer Wins National Attention

CHRISTINE HEINRICHS

Frank Reese's Good Shepherd Poultry Ranch has been given a 2012 American Treasures Award from MADE: In America. The award recognizes "your leadership and dedication to your heritage preservation work which represents a singular and unique contribution to our Nation."

Reese will bring Barred Rock and White Jersey Giant chickens to Washington, DC to be part of the 4th of July American Treasures Culinary Experience of the Take Pride in America event at the Washington Design Center. He and chef Steve Pope will work with a celebrity chef to cook the chickens and serve them to guests. The tasting will introduce them to the rich flavor of heritage chicken.

"Every time I've entered a contest, my Barred Rocks have always won," Reese said. "Barred Rock was the chicken of choice for all the growers and producers in the 1930s and '40s. They used to be raised by the millions."

The American Treasures Award turned its focus from manufacturing to organic growers and crafts three years ago. Since then, farms producing lamb, beef, pork, poultry, cheese, milk and ice cream have been honored. A food distribution network connecting small producers with customers was one of the award winners in 2011. Wine and spirits have also been honored.

"Our advisory committee has not seen someone with the length and breadth of Frank's commitment," said James De Lorbe, chairman and CEO of MADE: In America. "What he's done is truly amazing. He's done this at a time and in an era when people thought this was ridiculous, that mass producing chicken was the only way to succeed."

MADE: In America is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit founded in 2008, dedicated to fostering a business climate that encourages "the free exchange of ideas and

information to revitalize and sustain the competitiveness of American commerce and industry in a global economy."

Awards will be presented at the American Treasures Culinary Experience. Later that evening, award winners and their guests will be honored at a reception at the U.S. Capitol and escorted to the reserved West Front Inaugural Terrace for the National Symphony Orchestra Capitol Fourth concert and the spectacular National Capital Fireworks display. They will go on to an After-Party hosted by Committee member Derek Brown at The Passenger /Columbia Room.

During the coming year, prominent Washington, DC chefs will feature Reese's chickens in events at their restaurants.

"They will tell the story of heritage chicken to their best customers," said De Lorbe. "Food is the way you really connect with people."

Heritage Breeds and Humane Treatment

Reese also raises White-Laced Red Cornish, Dark Cornish and New Hamp-



Frank Reese with his heritage turkeys at Good Shepherd Poultry Ranch.

shire chickens on his ranch. His White Jersey Giants are from the Golda Miller line. He is well-known for his Bronze turkeys, based on the Norm Kardosh strain. He also raises Rouen ducks and Toulouse and African geese. Table-ready poultry products are available locally from grocery stores near his Kansas ranch and online through his site. Eggs are also available through local grocery stores. His 600 laying hens produce around 80-100 dozen eggs for sale each week. He also hatches his own stock, setting them in batches of 1,000.

"I hope to have 12,000 turkeys available this year for Thanksgiving," he said.

Officers from the American Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals visited Good Shepherd in 2011, sponsored by Farm Forward, a nonprofit advocacy group for sustainable agriculture and humane farm animal treatment. That experience emphasized to them the importance of heritage breed poultry for high welfare standards. Industrially bred chickens create birds that are fundamentally inhumanely raised.

"Ninety percent of the suffering comes not from farming techniques but from the genetics we choose to produce on our farms," he said. "Any bird that grows to market weight faster than 16 weeks should not be sold as organic or humanely-raised."

The Cornish/Rock cross chickens raised in industrial sheds are all genetically similar, raising the issues of other agricultural monocultures: they are all subject to the same weaknesses. This hybrid has been bred for fast growth, to provide the lowest cost feed conversion to meat ratio. One of the genetic traits that makes that possible is the obesity gene, which makes their metabolism race along at 300 times the normal metabolism of traditional breed chickens. Because of their rapid growth — they reach market weight in six to seven weeks, the time it takes to grow a medium-sized traditional

breed chick – their bones and joints can't keep up with weight gain and physical imbalance due to overdeveloped breasts. They can hardly walk, balancing their obese bodies and out-size breasts on misshapen legs and strained joints. Their lungs and hearts can hardly keep up and they struggle to breathe. They suffer from heart disease despite their short lives.

"You have to raise standard-bred poultry," he said. "These genetically engineered chickens are going to be what they are. You can't make factory farming more humane by putting them out on grass."

Heritage Breeds in the Marketplace

The two organizations partnered to finance an expanded barn for Good Shepherd to increase Reese's operation. The new barn, currently under construction, will be 300 feet long. Reese will be able to raise up to 40,000 birds annually in it, while maintaining his humane and breed standards.

Hobby breeding can save rare breeds from extinction, but finding or creating a market for traditional breed poultry will generate economic con-

ditions that give them a more secure future. If breeders can sell their birds and earn income, they will raise more of them. Having an economic purpose fulfills one of the original purposes of domestic poultry.

Traditional breed poultry need to be more than living exhibits in museums. Offering the public the option of purchasing traditional breed meat and eggs will assure the future of traditional breeds as well as good food. Reese is proving that heritage breed poultry is a product that can be successfully marketed.

"My Barred Rocks are marketable. They look like Barred Rocks did 70 years ago, when they were the meat bird," he said. "The old guys who wrote the standards didn't write them to win shows. They wrote them so their birds would be productive."

Christine Heinrichs is the author of How to Raise Chickens and How to Raise Poultry, Voyageur Press, both of which focus on raising traditional breeds in small flocks. See the Backyard Poultry bookstore on page 56.

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