

Heritage Turkey Foundation

Heritage Turkeys



© American Livestock Breeds Conservancy. Photo by Frank Reese, Jr.

Narragansett

America's heritage turkeys were bred for fine flavor, beauty, and "thriftness" or good yield of meat from the food provided. They needed to be hardy, self-reliant birds. After all, they were sometimes herded to market in flocks. The Narragansett and Bourbon Red varieties are two beautiful representatives.

By the 1960s heritage turkeys had been driven from the market by the industrial Broad-Breasted White. By 1990 they were very near to extinction. Today's Broad-Breasted White turkeys cannot mate naturally. They don't even walk well. Their narrow genetic base make them vulnerable to catastrophic disease. Their meat is dry and lacks flavor.

The American Livestock Breeds Conservancy has acted to preserve the traditional heritage varieties of turkey our grandparents enjoyed, but these varieties are still seriously threatened. Slow Food is working with ALBC to broaden awareness of these precious, traditional farm animals, and to stimulate demand for their delicious meat.



© American Livestock Breeds Conservancy. Photo by Mike Walters.

Bourbon Red

Important Announcement!

We started a project more than ten years ago, with the objective of saving the traditional breeds of turkeys by returning them to the holiday tables of ordinary American families: Better food at an affordable price.

Production of Heritage Turkeys has been at a plateau since about 2004, due to various startup production problems. Now we can announce that we are producing enough turkeys to meet demand, and "ramp up" availability in the future. Now we just need to help our farmer contacts to sell them.

YOU CAN HELP!

We will help to coordinate wholesale sales, with retail groceries or chains, and with our farmer contacts. You can help by finding us interested groceries or communities of customers, such as Slow Food Conviviums, wine clubs, restaurants, and so forth.

We now work with three large producers of real Heritage Turkeys in the US:

- Pitman Farms. See Marysturkeys.com.
- BN Ranch. See BNRanchToTable.com.
- Frank Reese, usually represented by Heritage Foods. See HeritageFoodsUSA.com.

Beware of other firms selling "Heritage Turkeys" that are lab hybrids of other breeds, and beware of firms selling Broad-Breasted Bronze turkeys as "heritage" or "heirloom" turkeys.

One or more of these farms will be able to ship to anywhere in the US. Order quantities are a minimum of a pallet. A pallet contains 80 turkeys. In California, some Western States and Texas we can arrange to ship smaller wholesale quantities. We can't ship single turkeys at this time, but Heritage Foods USA does.

To begin a conversation about this, call Roger Mastrude at (831) 477-1501 or write Roger@HeritageTurkeyFoundation.org.

We are a non-profit organization. We don't raise any turkeys ourselves. For information about retail grocery chains already stocking Heritage Turkeys at Thanksgiving, see our web site at www.HeritageTurkeyFoundation.com.

What is a Heritage Turkey?

See our Heritage Turkey poster to the left. Prized for their rich flavor and beautiful plumage, Heritage Turkeys are the ancestors of the common Broad-breasted White industrial breed of turkey that comprises 99.99% of the supermarket turkeys sold today. But the Heritage Breeds still exist and are making a comeback. Most breeds of heritage turkey were developed in the United States and Europe over hundreds of years, and were identified in the American Poultry Association's turkey Standard of Perfection of 1874. These breeds include the Standard Bronze, Bourbon Red, Narragansett, Jersey Buff, Slate, Black Spanish, and White Holland. Later added to the standard were the Royal Palm, White Midget and Beltsville Small White.

Large corporations have dominated turkey production and breeding since the 1960's, choosing the Broad Breasted Whites because of high breast meat production in a short period. But Heritage Breeds have been quietly gaining a renewed market and respect due to their flavor and superior biological diversity.

Raising Heritage Breeds is more costly and time consuming than raising White Breasted Toms. While supermarket turkeys grow to an average of 32 pounds over 18 weeks, Heritage birds take anywhere from 24-30 to reach their market weight. But those who have tasted Heritage Breeds say the cost-and the wait-are well worth it.

The Heritage Turkey Foundation accepts the same definition of heritage turkeys as the the two organizations that inspired our work, the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy and Slow Food. They are traditional "standard" breeds of turkeys which have not been "industrialized" for efficient factory production at the expense of flavor and the well-being of the turkeys. These are the breeds of turkeys recognized by the American Poultry Association in its 1874 Standard of Perfection,

What is the Heritage Turkey Foundation?

The Heritage Turkey Foundation was formed to protect the surviving heritage turkey strains and re-introduce them to the American marketplace. The Foundation is non-profit but does not accept tax-exempt charitable contributions or seek members. We are food activists supporting this exciting project. The Heritage turkey project is a tremendous success in the making.

Small farmers who sell real Heritage Turkeys:

[Local Harvest](http://www.LocalHarvest.org) is a green business which allows small and larger farmers to list their products. This is the best way to find a turkey in your area, especially if you would like one raised on a small family farm. Many of these farms raise only a few hundred each year, and many are already sold out for 2013. (You can reach the Local Harvest web site at the live link above, or at <http://www.LocalHarvest.org>.)

For those looking for a turkey near November 2013, many retailers will have been sold out for a long time. Others will sell out in the first few weeks of November. When you read these words, you shouldn't let any time pass if you want a Heritage turkey, and you may very well not be able to find one for love or money. In the past, producers have had to refuse retail buyers who have offered to send private planes to pick them up.