

Demand Booming For "Wooly Pigs"

Demand for Mangalitsas, the wooly pigs from Eastern Europe, is exploding. Initially the only Mangalitsas in the U.S. were part of a monopoly (see Vol. 33, No. 4). Heath Putnam, the importer, sold no breeding stock and tightly controlled animals going to market. That changed in 2010 when Wilhelm Kohl and Marc Santucci of the company Pure Mangalitsa, imported their own breeding stock, two boars and four gilts. Breeding stock from their company and others now is available, though limited and expensive. One reason is the red tape.

"Originally we had to get our animals from Austria, but since last year, animals from Hungary are also available," says Kohl. "We are now in the process of introducing the fresh breeding lines. However, it is a long process. A first generation is sent to Holland where the second generation is produced. Those are the pigs that are then allowed into the U.S."

After 4 months in quarantine, Pure Mangalitsa will then breed the boars to their existing herd. Kohl expects to have offspring available to sell in about a year and a half.

"Initially there will be quite a waiting list," he says. "A few existing breeders are waiting to get new bloodlines."

Pure Mangalitsa will have breeding stock available from their existing bloodlines this summer. Boars and an initial gilt are each priced at \$1,500. Additional gilts are priced at \$1,000. Kohl says the price can vary around the country, based on local supply and demand.

"Prices on the West Coast are more like \$1,700," says Kohl. "Our new boars will be \$2,000 to \$2,500 because they represent new bloodlines and are registered in the Hungarian breed book."

Robert Laitsch says the high-priced pigs are worth it. He bought two bred Mangalitsa

sows that produced 18 purebred piglets between them. He then bred them to a Duroc/Hampshire cross boar.

"I'll soon be butchering my first purebred," he says. "I'm confident of what the meat will be like. I've cured conventional hogs, and you can drive a fencepost with a ham. These pigs produce a ham that just melts in your mouth."

Laitsch also likes the way the Mangalitsa pastures. He turns his 20 head out on 5 acres of irrigated alfalfa/grass pasture to graze, and turn over the sod lightly as they graze. He supplements with wheat and protein concentrate, and by-products from a local flourmill.

"They revitalize the pasture with their rooting and working in the manure from the feed I put through them," he says. "I calculated the cost of fertilizer, and I got the same nutrients from the manure and at a lower cost."

When he pulled the hogs off at the end of the summer, he ran 20 head of sheep on the acre for another month to clean up remaining grass. Laitsch says the reason the Mangalitsas can utilize pasture is they have a higher percentage of large intestine - where the forage can ferment to be digested - than conventional confinement hogs. He cites research that shows it is the large intestine that produces the high-quality fat Mangalitsas are known for.

"Conventional hogs have been selected for a corn and soybean diet and produce a harder fat, easier to process, but that goes rancid faster," says Laitsch. "Pigs like the Mangalitsa actually need roughage. They produce a fat that is better for you than wild caught salmon."

Laitsch says the Mangalitsas are good mothers. He notes that the crossbred litters have a much higher growth rate than straight Duroc/Hamp. Though farrowed in 5°F



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weather, the baby pigs did well with a simple heat lamp, and were outside daily at 3 weeks.

Kohl endorses the hardiness of the breed. Pure Mangalitsas raised in Michigan are kept outside year round. He says they are natural foragers and prefer pasture.

"If you put a Mangalitsa and a Berkshire in a pen with the gate open, the Mangalitsa will be the first outside," he says. "Some breeders in California graze them in oak forests. In the fall, ours eat hickory nuts, acorns and even black walnuts. They crunch them up."

Laitsch sold some of the purebred litter with gilts, bringing \$1,100, with boars priced higher. He expects to see a lot of hybrids like his second set of litters in the market and notes that some pigs now being sold as Mangalitsas are 3/4 or 7/8 pure. He is concerned that genetics will be lost if records are not well kept. He is encouraging people interested in the breed to get a few gilts and

share a boar with friends.

"The biggest problem we have is there isn't enough supply," he says. "Restaurants need a regular supply."

Kohl agrees. He notes that demand for Mangalitsas is growing in Europe as well as in the U.S. His company has also sold breeding stock to Canada, which has its own quarantine restrictions.

"Charcuterie or cured meats (Vol. 38, No. 1) are rapidly growing items in the U.S.," says Kohl. "As even more people become familiar with it, demand will be stupendous."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Robert Laitsch, 10906 Road 26, Cortez, Colo. 81321 (ph 970 529-0403; robertlaitsch@gmail.com); or Pure Mangalitsa, 4360 Hagadorn Rd., Okemos, Mich. 48864 (ph 517 712-9589; contact@puremangalitsa.com; www.puremangalitsa.com).

Ossabaw Pigs Unchanged In 300 Years

When you see an Ossabaw pig, you're seeing what pigs were like hundreds of years ago. That's because the pigs were left on Ossabaw Island off the coast of Georgia by early Spanish explorers.

"They would drop pigs off on islands to breed, so when other ships came through and needed meat, they could find it," explains Dirk Hildebrandt, farm manager, Old World Wisconsin. "DNA indicates the Ossabaw were of Canary Island origin. For centuries, no one bothered them."

Hildebrandt explains that the island-bred pigs became smaller over the years, a process called insular dwarfism. They also adjusted to the food cycle of the island, storing a larger proportion of fat during times of plenty than other pigs can. They then metabolize the fat, living on it when food is short. Along the way they developed a low-grade diabetes, making them valuable for medical research.

It wasn't until the 1970's that some Ossabaw pigs were brought to the mainland. While there are many Ossabaw pigs on the island, they have since been quarantined there. According to the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy, there are fewer than 200 available in breeding programs on the mainland. Many of them are at historical farms like Hildebrandt manages.

"We've had Ossabaws here for about 20 years," he says. "The numbers have varied. We were down to one barrow, but recently got two sows and a boar, and one sow has already farrowed. Litter sizes tend to be large. They are excellent mothers, so most piglets survive."

According to Hildebrandt, the spotted pigs, which rarely get larger than 200 lbs., have very long legs and a long nose. "They have



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real bristly hair and are amazing jumpers," he says. "The little ones can jump and climb."

Hildebrandt reports that prices for Ossabaws can vary, but their popularity is on the rise. One breeder's website listed a breeding trio of 7-month olds, consisting of two gilts and boar, priced at \$550.

"There have been times you couldn't give them away, but now high-end restaurant demand is adding value," he says. "We will try to sell our excess stock to interested individuals, as well as offer them to other museum farms like ours. If not, we always butcher three hogs, some chickens and sheep to use in cooking demonstrations. They'll go in the freezer."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Old World Wisconsin, W372 S9727 Hwy. 67, P.O. Box 69, Eagle, Wis. 53119 (ph 262 594-6301 or 262 594-6310; dirk.hildebrandt@wisconsinhistory.org; www.wisconsinhistory.org).

Bluefaced Breed Rare, Productive

Bluefaced Leicester (pronounced lester) sheep are an uncommon breed raised for both meat and wool production. After Margaret VanCamp in Swartz Creek, Mich. got her first look at them, she decided to add a few head to her flock.

"A longtime friend was interested in the breed and found some in Canada," says VanCamp. "She also brought semen in from the U.K. and, with the help of two or three others, she got the breed going in the U.S. in 1995. We finally decided to try a couple head in 2006."

VanCamp liked the blue-faced sheep so much that she is now an officer in the breed association, Bluefaced Leicester Union of North America. Once she got her hands on them, she realized that not only did they have fine, very shiny, long wool fibers, but they also were very meaty.

"They have little legs, but a great carcass with a good length and width of loin, with great muscling on the leg," says VanCamp. "They are a very thick-bodied animal and tend to put on and keep weight. If overfed, they will get fat, but generally they are excellent keepers."

The ewes tend to twin and frequently produce triplets, according to VanCamp. She says the ewes are excellent mothers, putting everything into the lamb.

"They look starved because they milk so well," she says. "They have a nice tight udder that stays high."

VanCamp reports some ewes still lambing at 8 or 9 years, with anything over 10 considered gray. Ewes will reach 150 to 175 lbs., with rams topping out at 25 to 30 percent more. The first shearing commonly produces 4 to 5-lb. fleeces.



Bluefaced Leicester sheep are an uncommon breed raised for both meat and wool production.

"It is a wonderfully fine fleece used by spinners for wool lace and 'next to the skin' cloth," says VanCamp. "It is more of an open fleece that doesn't grow on the belly and has very low grease weight. If it rains, the sheep get wet to the skin, and if dirt or hay drops on them, they usually shake it out."

She says full-grown Bluefaced Leicesters can handle the cold fine, though their bare ears can freeze. She reports selecting her animals for cold weather survival. However, she notes that the light, open fleece makes the breed ideal for Southern breeders looking for heat tolerance.

She reports having no problem finding buyers for lambs culled from the breeding herd. Bred or proven breeding ewes sell for around \$500, with a yearling ram selling for between \$500 and \$600.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Pitchfork Ranch, 4190 W. Cook Rd., Swartz Creek, Mich. 48473 (ph 810 655-4091; mavaca@usol.com; www.pitchfork.org).