

BY Kendall Slee



A Narragansett tom courts a hen on Purple Moon Farm in Yellow Springs, Ohio.

DENNIE EAGLESON

## Poultry from the Past

Land trusts and farmers find new promise in heritage breeds

**N**arragansett and Bourbon Red turkeys are the odd birds out when it comes to a typical club sandwich or Thanksgiving buffet. But there are reasons aplenty farmer and biologist Chris Entler selected these largely forgotten breeds to populate his three-acre family farm near Yellow Springs, Ohio.

Unlike their heavy-breasted, industrial-bred cousins that usually end up on our plates, the heritage breed turkeys are hardy birds with sharp foraging skills, as

well as better breeding and chick-rearing abilities. They require minimal grain supplements and can feed themselves much of the year by foraging in the farm's fields, Entler explained. "The animals of the past were more self-reliant," he says.

Entler and his wife, Jessica, also have heritage breed hogs, sheep and chickens on their Purple Moon Farm, a stop on Tecumseh Land Trust's summer farm tour.

Not far away in Northeastern Ohio, a handful of farmers are reintroducing the Buckeye chicken to their flocks. A breeder named Nettie Metcalf developed the breed in the region in the late 1800s. Much of their reintroduction was facilitated by the Cuyahoga Valley Countryside Conservancy, a nonprofit focused on restoring and revitalizing the area's historic farms and developing farmers' markets and other business outlets for small farms.

Executive Director Darwin Kelsey envisions a niche market for the bird someday. "We happen to think some of the heritage breeds are well-suited to small-scale, highly diversified farm businesses," he said. While smaller and slower to grow, the birds are well adapted to a free-range lifestyle and their meat "has a better flavor and mouth-feel" than the hybrid chicken that dominates today's market, he said. If high enough volumes of Buckeye chickens are raised, Kelsey believes they would be a hit in locally focused restaurants.

Maine Coast Heritage Trust's Aldermere Farm preserve touts its heritage breed of Belted Galloway cattle for their ability to forage, even in winter. The farm has the oldest continually operated herd in the U.S.

The American Livestock Breeds Conservancy (ALBC) promotes

heritage livestock breeds like the Belted Galloway and Buckeye in part to protect a gene pool that has been largely lost due to industrial-scale agribusiness, says Jennifer Kendall, communications manager of the ALBC. "If you had a disease that one of these [industrial-bred] animals was prone to, we would need something to fall back on," she said. "We are trying to create a market for these animals as food and for sustainable agriculture," she said, noting that heritage sheep now weed some California vineyards, and certain heritage goats and cows are also good at keeping areas mowed or weeded.

The ALBC keeps a database of breeders and releases an annual conservation priority list that ranks heritage breeds from "critical" to "recovering." For more information see <http://albc-usa.org>.

## Defense Insurance Update:

Alliance Board Votes Yes!

**A**t its annual meeting at Rally, the Land Trust Alliance board voted to raise the necessary \$4 million in startup capital from foundations and individuals to fund the proposed conservation defense insurance program. Your land trust still has time to join the 450+ land trusts from 47 states committed to the program. See who's committed in your state at [www.lta.org/cdinsurancelist](http://www.lta.org/cdinsurancelist).

# Partnering with Conservation Districts

**W**ith more than 3,000 local conservation districts across the country, there's a good chance you are familiar with one in your region. (See NACDnet.org.) Land trusts are partnering with conservation districts for many purposes:

**Restoration work.** Conservation districts vary, but their staffs usually have expertise in restoring natural lands and implementing best practices on agricultural lands to protect water quality and prevent soil erosion.

**Water quality monitoring.** Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) in California partners with the San Mateo Regional Conservation District (RCD) and equestrian tenants to monitor the quality of water passing across its conservation land, helping to safeguard a nearby marine reserve.

**Funding.** As government entities, conservation districts can enter into agency-to-agency funding agreements that land trusts cannot. For example, the San Mateo RCD entered into an interagency agreement with the California Department of Transportation to facilitate a habitat restoration grant obtained by POST. Other potential funding sources include the California Coastal Conservancy and state water board.

**Landowner education.** In Ohio, the Union Soil and Water Conservation District hosts landowner information sessions with the Land Heritage Trust of Union County that feature agricultural conservation easements and other programs such as the Ohio Century Farm designation.

**Matchmaking.** Be sure your local conservation district knows your land trust's conservation priorities. When two agricultural landowners talked with the Santa Cruz RCD about their chronic flooding problems, the staff referred them to the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County. Their land was within a priority coastal wetland area, and the land trust purchased the property from the landowners. Now it is working with the RCD to restore the land's slough and to reestablish wetlands.

**Planning.** Conservation districts can offer assistance on management plans for specific parcels, but they also often partner with land trusts and other stakeholders on regional conservation prioritization and planning.

Such collaborations are even more important at times when resources are tight, said Karen Christensen, executive director of the Santa Cruz RCD. "There is an opportunity for conservation districts and land trusts to come together on their visions and strategies, and to leverage each others' strengths and resources." •

## A Helping Hand

### Foundation supports accredited land trusts in its regions

**G**aylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation will award a \$10,000 grant to each land trust that it supports upon successfully earning accreditation from the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance. Accreditation provides public recognition of land trusts that are engaged in the long-term protection of the land in the public interest, increasing public awareness of, and confidence in, land trusts and land conservation.

"Accreditation is rigorous, useful and important," said Judith Stockdale, executive director of the foundation. "It provides each land trust with an important management tool and assures landowners that the land trust will responsibly monitor land in perpetuity. People who put their land into long-term protection deserve to have that confidence."

The foundation supports the work of land trusts in the Chicago region and in the Lowcountry of South Carolina. It established this special grant award after the Edisto Island Open Land Trust in South Carolina earned accreditation last year.

"We were proud to recognize their dedication with a special \$10,000 grant, and we want to do the same for you," said Stockdale in a letter to each of the land trusts about the special grant program. 🌱

The Santa Cruz RCD is working with the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County to restore this farmland to natural wetlands and upland after the agency matched the landowner with the land trust.

JIM ROBINS