

# Heirloom breeds succeed today

By MICHAEL BRANTLEY

**F**OR livestock producer Linda Maggio-Kosko, history is an important part of making her farm work. "I love vintage farm books, and I pick them up at yard sales, flea markets ... wherever I can find them," she says. "There is a lot of great material to be found about raising [livestock]. I even found one recently that has some old [butchering] cuts that were common that I think we are going to try."

Maggio-Kosko, husband Steve Kosko, son Michael Maggio and daughter Madison Ramey operate the 36-acre S&L Farm in Louisburg, N.C., where they raise chickens, turkeys, dairy goats and sheep, as well as devote a small amount of acreage to heirloom vegetables. They butcher on-site, and also offer eggs and goat cheese.

Originally from New Jersey, Maggio-Kosko had no farm background. But, as dog kennel owners, the family needed more space, so they decided to move to North Carolina where they had relatives.

They saw photos of their current property, which was largely overgrown, but fell so in love with it that they bought it sight-unseen.

"I was a veterinary technician, with no experience in farm animals," she says with a laugh. "But my skill set had a lot of applications — animal care is animal care. They need fresh food, water and space, and you need to know when something is sick and what dosage of medicine to give it."

S&L Farm has a 75-hen laying flock of free-range, heritage breed chickens, the majority of which are Rhode Island Reds. They also have a larger breed, the New Hampshire, and other assorted breeds. In addition, they have an 80-bird meat flock of mostly Rocks.

The farm recently received a grant from the Animal Welfare Institute to create a new breed of meat chickens.

"The purpose of the grant is to develop a breed that is not reliant on the Standard Cornish breed. They're on the 'watch list' of breeds in trouble of no

### Key Points

- S&L Farm has received grants to help develop a new breed of chicken.
- The farm has tried a new way of selling Bourbon Red turkeys.
- S&L Farms processes its poultry on-site to better control product and cut costs.



**HISTORIC AND TASTY:** Bourbon Red turkeys were the primary table turkey in the U.S. prior to the 1950s. Many poultry growers raising their birds in pastures are trying to revive the breed.

longer being available," Maggio-Kosko says. "We've had trouble getting the roosters to breed."

A growing part of the farm has been another historic bird, the free-ranging Bourbon Red turkey. Last year, the farm sold 15. This year, they raised the number to 25 and were sold out for Thanksgiving by early August. "We could have sold double that," Maggio-Kosko says. They will push for another increase next year.

"This bird was developed in 1880 in Pennsylvania, and taken to Kentucky where it was further developed. I think the original birds it was developed from are both extinct now," Maggio-Kosko says. "Bourbon Reds were the table bird in America until the 1920s, and were sort of pushed out by the 1950s with the development of the double-breasted turkeys."

The numbers of growers of Bourbon



**A GOOD EGG:** Linda Maggio-Kosko (right) and her daughter, Madison Ramey, show off some of the eggs from their 75-hen laying flock. The birds range all over the farm, and the eggs sell out quickly at several local farmers markets.

Reds is still relatively low, and good breeding stock is hard to come by, as there is a lot variance in animal quality across the country. Maggio-Kosko likes to get toms to around 33 pounds and hens to around 20 pounds for breeding, and says there is a lot of potential in the marketplace for the product.

"They need to be branded like Angus beef," she says. "They taste better because they've developed traits with their skin and feathers that keeps the meat from drying out. They do have a smaller breast, but it is more moist, and it's about 50-50 white meat to dark. They have a taste, a flavor that is real turkey."

S&L Farm also developed a unique way to sell the turkeys that seems to please both farmer and customer. Instead of the traditional method of selling straight by the pound, they've gone to a system of small, medium and large turkeys. The small turkeys go for \$65 and are targeted to be 10 to 12 pounds; the mediums are \$70 and 12 to 14 pounds; the large, \$75 and 15 pounds and up. Clients know that should the birds end up finishing bigger than planned, they might get a bump up in size at no extra cost.

This is the first year for sheep on the farm. The family added six ewes and six lambs in the spring. They're going with an American breed from Maine known for being hardy and parasite-resistant.

"We've done well with goats, but we've always believed in starting small and working up," Maggio-Kosko says. "I've always loved lamb and there is a demand — we've already got orders. Right now, we're researching the best ways to cut it up — there are so many ways to do the cuts."

A grant through the USDA Organic Equipment Program is going to help convert the S&L sheep flock into organic meat as they transition their pastures. The cost and scarcity of organic feed has made such a move necessary.

The Alpine dairy goats have proven to be workhorses on the farm. Goat milk is known as the "universal milk" — almost anything can be raised on it," Maggio-Kosko says. These goats provide not only drinking milk for humans, but milk for other animals who drink it. The milk is also used in the farm's goat cheese. Alpines are prolific producers, giving about one gallon of milk per milking.

*Brantley writes from Nash County, N.C.*

### LIVESTOCK CALENDAR

#### DECEMBER

- 5 KMK Acrest 11th Annual Angus Bull Sale, Thompsons Station, TN
- 12 Heart of Alabama Brangus Bull and Commercial Female Sale, Uniontown, AL

#### JANUARY

- 2 Ray Cattle Co. Angus Sale, Hackleburg, AL
- 10 Carolina Charolais Sensations Sale, Clemson, SC
- 23 Central Kentucky Angus Assn. Winter Sale, Danville, KY

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