

Old varieties compete for plate space

PITTSBURGH (AP) — While much of America will feast on turkey Thursday, a growing number of people are skipping the supermarket version in favor of richer-flavored breeds once near extinction.

Breeds such as the Narragansett, Bourbon Red and Jersey Buff were once common on Thanksgiving platters.

As large-scale farming evolved, interest in those breeds fell in favor of the dominant bird in supermarket freezers: the Broad Breasted White.

But interest in so-called heritage breeds is increasing for several reasons, including preserving biodiversity and supporting family farmers.

Bill Yockey didn't set out to become a heritage turkey breeder, but has found himself at the forefront of the movement.

Mainly as a hobby, Yockey, 50, raises about 500 turkeys a year, representing several heritage breeds in Linesville, about 90 miles north of Pittsburgh. His job as a social worker at a retirement center pays the bills.

He got into the turkey business at the suggestion of a neighbor and began raising Broad Breasted Whites about eight years ago. He then learned about heritage breeds and found they required less work.

"Your commercial birds pretty much have to be fed and housed inside. They don't do grass and they don't do bugs," Yockey said.

He started in 1997 with 15 Midget Whites, which at the time was the second-largest flock in the country.

"I almost fell over when I found that out," Yockey said. Now, he keeps a steady breeding population of about 50.

Marjorie Bender, who is researching heritage turkeys at the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy in Pittsboro, N.C., said the number of heritage turkeys has been doubling and tripling since its last census in 1997.

Yockey's turkeys sell for \$2.75 per pound. Around Thanksgiving, many supermarkets sell Broad Breasted Whites for pennies a pound or give them away as loss leaders.

Yockey might make \$1,000 or

\$1,500 a year and figures he's doing good if he covers his feed. "I don't figure I'm going to be a Rockefeller any time soon," Yockey said.

Now, a group is working to steer more business to small farmers such as Yockey.

Slow Food, whose mission includes preserving the biodiversity of food, developed a program a year ago linking heritage turkey growers with consumers.

"It's definitely a success. Every turkey was sold and there were plenty of people who called too late," said spokeswoman Erika Lesser.

Besides preserving a food that might otherwise disappear, raising rare varieties is often ideal for small family farmers, Lesser said.

"You can't raise (heritage turkeys) in a factory. It's just not possible," she said.

A diet of grass and insects and access to exercise means the meat of such birds has more texture and flavor, Lesser and Yockey said.

Bender said rare animal breeds are also important genetically.

"The same kind of biological diversity that exists within nature needs to exist in our agricultural system" to retain health within species, Bender said.

Heritage turkeys have greater biological fitness than their factory farm-raised cousins, Bender said. As their name implies, Broad Breasted Whites are raised to develop the most breast

meat possible in the shortest amount of time and that can lead to skeletal and ligament problems, she said.

Also, disease could wipe out a genetically uniform population if it struck, Bender said.

While supermarket turkeys grow to an average of 32 pounds over 18 weeks, Yockey's birds need six months to reach 18 to 20 pounds.

Bill Mattos, president of the California Poultry Federation, said that in America, the Broad Breasted White rules because it has the kind of meat that people want for their Thanksgiving fest.

"The Broad Breasted White is what the consumer wants, which is breast meat, or white meat," he said. "There are a lot of producers, especially in the east and south, that export the more dark-meat turkeys to countries like Mexico and Russia, where it is preferred."

Lesser and Bender, however, said more people are paying attention not just to what they eat, but how it's produced.

Linda Drowns agrees. She and her husband, Glenn, the secretary of the Society for the Preservation of Poultry Antiquities, raise 18 breeds of heritage turkeys, as well as ducks and chickens, to sell to breeders at Sand Hill Preservation Center in Calamus, Iowa.

"I think there is an awareness now that they are disappearing from our planet," Drowns said.



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PG: Some scary moments, some creature violence, mild language.



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Allergy Dr. Rumbyrt	Dec. 19	8:30 - 2:00	
Anesthesiology Gary Kliwer, CRNA-ARNP	Dec. 2		
Audiology Lisa Young, MA CCC-A	Dec. 11	8:30 - 12:00	
Cardiology Dr. Godfrey	Dec. 4 Dec. 19	2:00 - 4:00 2:00 - 4:00	
Colorectal & Laparoscopic Surgery Dr. Frankum	Dec. 2	9:00	
Dermatology Dr. Kornfeld	No Clinic in December		
Dietician Cardio/Pulmonary Rehab & Diabetic Consulting Tim Porter, MA, RD, LD, CHES	Dec. 19	Appts. (785) 346-0366	
Ear/Nose/Throat Dr. Barron	Dec. 11	8:30 - 12:00	
Gastroenterology Dr. Jones	Dec. 19	8:45 - 4:00	
General Surgery Dr. Frankum Dr. Roberts Dr. Robinson	Dec. 2 Dec. 12 Dec. 11	9:00 8:30 - 2:00 8:30 - 12:00	
Neurology Dr. Mazowiecki	Dec. 4 Dec. 18	9:00 - 3:00 9:00 - 3:00	
OB/GYN Dr. Womack	Dec. 11	8:30 - 2:00	
Oncology Dr. Rubinowitz	Dec. 4	11:30 - 6:00	
Orthopedic Dr. Friermood Bob Allen PA-C Dr. Reiss	Dec. 18 Dec. 11 Dec. 19	8:30 - 2:00 8:30 - 12:00 1:00 - 4:30	
Podiatry Dr. Ouderkirk	Dec. 12	8:30 - 2:00	
Pulmonary Medicine Dr. Weisiger	Dec. 3 Dec. 17 Dec. 31	8:30 - 2:00 8:30 - 2:00 8:30 - 2:00	
Urology Dr. Abernathy	Dec. 12	8:30 - 2:00	
Vascular Surgery Dr. Roberts	Dec. 12	8:30 - 2:00	

DECEMBER 2002 SPECIALTY CLINIC CALENDAR			
Mon. Dec. 2	Dr. Frankum 9:00 Gary Kliwer CRNA 9:00 Dr. Weisiger 8:30 - 3:00	Tues. Dec. 17	Dr. Weisiger 8:30 - 2:00
Tues. Dec. 3	Dr. Godfrey 8:30 - 4:30 Dr. Mazowiecki 9:00 - 4:00	Wed. Dec. 18	Dr. Friermood 8:30 - 2:00 Dr. Mazowiecki 9:00 - 4:00
Wed. Dec. 4	Dr. Rubinowitz 11:30 - 6:30 Dr. Barron Bob Allen, PA-C Dr. Robinson Dr. Womack 8:30 - 12:00	Thurs. Dec. 19	Dr. Jones 8:45 - 4:00 Dr. Godfrey 2:00 - 4:30 Dr. Reiss 1:00 - 4:30 Dr. Rumbyrt 8:30 - 2:00 Tim Porter, RD Appoint. (719) 346-0366
Wed. Dec. 11	Dr. Ouderkirk Dr. Abernathy Dr. Ouderkirk Dr. Roberts 8:00 - 2:00	Wed. Dec. 25	CHRISTMAS
Thurs. Dec. 12		Tues. Dec. 31	Dr. Weisiger 8:30 - 3:00

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