

# Pasture Raised Heritage Breed Turkeys

## Final Report for YNC08-001

Project Type: Youth

Funds awarded in 2008: \$400.00

Projected End Date: 12/31/2009

Region: North Central

State: Missouri

Project Coordinator:

[Williams King](#)

## Project Information

### Summary:

#### PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND RESULTS

I explored raising heritage breed turkeys on pasture. I gained most of my knowledge at a workshop put on by the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy (ALBC). I attended this with my own money, which cost \$125 total for three days of instruction. I also got two books and lots of print outs with information that I have kept.

#### BACKGROUND

Before receiving this grant, I had two different varieties of heritage breed turkeys, but had not tried to raise any turkeys on my own. Other than helping in the family garden, where we use a lot of mulch and no chemicals, I had no other experience with sustainable agriculture.

#### GOALS

One of my goals was to hatch and raise my own turkeys out of my existing birds. Another goal I had was to market my birds to the various ethnic groups that come to our farm to buy livestock and poultry. I also planned to cook one of my birds and do a taste test and a survey about how the bird tasted compared to store bought turkey.

My survey also asked if people were willing to pay more for a local, sustainable product and a few other questions like is the welfare of the bird important to you.

#### PROCESS

When my turkey hens started laying eggs, I put them in an incubator. I also put eggs under some broody chicken hens and towards the end of the laying season, I let two of the turkey hens set on a clutch of eggs. None of incubated eggs hatched. None of the eggs under the chickens hatched and only two eggs under the turkey hens hatched and neither one of them lived past day one.

At the ALBC workshop, I learned some things to do to help with the hatchability of my eggs. One is to increase the protein level of their feed from the sixteen percent that I was feeding to a twenty percent protein ration. I also need to make sure the eggs cool to fifty degrees Fahrenheit before putting them in the incubator. My turkey hens that were sitting should have been kept where the hatchlings couldn't

wander off and get chilled.

Since none of my eggs hatched, the only young birds I had to work with were the sixteen Royal Palm turkeys that I purchased with the grant money. Two of these died the first day due to the stress of moving them. The rest did fine. However, due to the fact that I didn't receive my grant funds till the first part of July, my birds didn't get to market weight in time for the Thanksgiving market. I did sell seven of them as future breeders for \$20 a piece to one of our regular customers. I also had a couple more die as they got older, of what I do not know. I have kept back a Royal Palm tom and four Royal Palm hens to use as breeders for next year. I did decide that although Royal Palms were not what I would have selected, I like them better than the standard Bronze turkey trio that I have. So, I may try to sell the Bronzes over the winter and use the money to buy more Bourbon Red hens.

Karla Deaver, Youth Specialist with Missouri Extension, asked me to give a presentation on my SARE grant at the Southwest Missouri Research Center at their Field Day held in September. There were between five to six hundred FFA students there that day. I told them what I had done so far and how they could apply for a Youth SARE Grant, also.

I did process one of my Bronze toms and my mother cooked it to serve at two Missouri Extension Council dinners. These were held in Stone and Lawrence counties. Both dinners had a diverse group at them, made up of people who serve on extension councils and other invited guests. It was different getting a turkey ready to cook when you are used to doing chickens. We had a hard time finding something big enough to scald the bird in so that we could pluck the feathers off. The bird tasted really good, though and most of the people who completed the survey thought that it tasted better than what they would buy from the grocery store. My survey results also showed that most people are willing to pay a little more for a local, sustainably raised bird. Almost everyone who took the survey thought that how the bird is raised and handled is very important. So, my survey results showed that there is a market for pasture raised heritage breed turkeys.

In November 2009, I gave a power point presentation on my project at the National Small Farm Trade Show & Conference, held in Columbia, Missouri.

Raising the birds on pasture was the easy part. They were kept in an old stock trailer until they were twelve weeks old. Then they were turned out in our big side yard. I kept feed and water out for them all the time. I didn't have any problems with predators, because we have three Great Pyrenees dogs on the farm. I did have a little problem with them flying over the four foot yard fence that is on one side of their enclosure, but they always came back in before night. They did fly up to roost on the porch roof the first night that they were turned out of their brooder trailer.

## PEOPLE

The people who have helped me were: Danny Williams, of the Good Shepherd Turkey Ranch, who was a presenter at the ALBC turkey workshop, Marjorie Bender of the ALBC; they both increased my knowledge about the whole process. Karla Deaver, Missouri Extension, for having me speak at the Research Center to all of the FFA students. My mom, Lesa King, Missouri Extension, helped by being my chauffer. The Missouri Extension Councils helped me by allowing me to conduct my taste test and survey.

## RESULTS

The results weren't what I expected. I had hatched chicks and ducks before and never dreamed that turkey eggs would be so hard to hatch.

I had planned to purchase Bourbon Reds, but by the time I received my money, there were none available, so I settled for Royal Palms. Since then, I have decided

that I really like the Royal Palms.

The taste test and the survey results were pretty much in line with what I expected. What I didn't expect was a couple of the comments about humane handling, that didn't matter because they were only birds or that it didn't matter because they were going to be eaten anyway.

I am going to try this project again. I will be using a higher percent protein feed, watching my handling of the eggs much closer and I purchased another Bourbon Red tom to put with the trio that I have. I also want to work on a brochure that can be left in the Extension offices and used at local farmer's markets trying to market my birds to a larger group. I think I may try to do some catchy phrase using my last name "King" and "royal" out of the Royal Palm name for my marketing scheme.

#### DISCUSSION

I went to Arkansas for two days and got to work on a commercial turkey farm. I helped get the brooder house cleaned and readied for the baby turkeys. I helped unload eighteen thousand baby birds the next day into the brooder house. I also went into the two grow out houses and got to see the living conditions of those twenty-five thousand turkeys. There is a vast difference in how these birds live compared to mine. My birds don't have any chemicals given to them, where the commercial birds drink chlorinated water. They are also very crowded compared to mine.

I learned that small scale poultry (turkey) production is possible and could be profitable. There is a demand for this type of product. But, I have lots left to do to increase my hatch rate and get the word out to more than just our regular customers that I have this product available.

## Research

### Participation Summary

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U.S. Department of Agriculture or SARE.



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