



## Heritage Breeds Livestock

Approximately **75%** of the genetic diversity of agricultural crops has been lost since 1900 and nearly **30%** of livestock breeds are nearing extinction. Worldwide, on average, one breed of domestic livestock is lost every two weeks (Gourmet Magazine, 2007).

 **Heritage Breeds** Breeds are breeds of domestic livestock, which have evolved over centuries in particular geographical areas and are adapted to area-specific climatic and topographical environments. Once a vital part of the rural landscape, many of these farm animals are now endangered.

 These traditional breeds of livestock have been bypassed by intensive post-war hybridization (selective inbreeding, artificial insemination, egg-flushing and/or cloning). Hybridization aims at the mass production of animals that grow abnormally fast and exhibit specific body traits that are commercially valuable.

 Often, **intensive inbreeding** results in structurally unsound animals. For example, hogs bred to be so long that the backbone can no longer support their mature body weight, modern turkeys that have breasts so large they can no longer mate naturally and must rely on artificial insemination and dairy cows that are not able to carry the weight of their udders, becoming lame years before their unhybridized counterparts. These hybridized cows are sold for meat when they have had, on average, fewer than two calves, whereas traditional-breed cows have ten or more calves during a natural life span.

 **Heritage Breeds** are generally hardy and thrifty animals that do well on pasture. The high-protein, high-carbohydrate diet required for the rapid growth of a hybrid animal is unhealthy for traditional breeds. Naturally slow to mature (about twice the time to market as their hybridized counterparts), traditional breeds have naturally slower metabolic systems, which make them unprofitable for concentrated animal farming operations (CAFO's), better known as **factory farms**.

**Ayrshire Farm**  
www.AyrshireFarm.com

## Why You Should Care

 Each year **70%** of the U.S. supply of **antibiotics** ends up in animal feeds. ("Gourmet" magazine, February 2007) This practice leads to bacteria becoming resistant to the antibiotics, making the drugs ineffective against human disease. The drugs are necessary to keep food animals alive in the overcrowded, stressful and unsanitary conditions of factory farms.

[www.sierraclub.org](http://www.sierraclub.org)

 CAFOs are a major source of **air and water pollution**. There is no solution for the safe disposal of the massive amount animal waste created by the millions of food animals confined at factory farms. One hog farm in Arkansas produces more waste daily than the entire city of New York.

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 Heritage breeds are optimal on **small, family farms**--the environment they have been adapted to for centuries. Their disease resistance is high, they are structurally sound, have good mothering and reproductive traits, all of which mean that they can provide a sustainable profit to smaller acreage farms. In the U.S., **farms disappear at the rate of 1% per year**. In 1800, 98% of Americans were employed in agriculture. In 1900, that number was 45%. By 2000, fewer than 2% of working Americans were farming. Saving small farms helps to ensure the viability our domestic **local food supply**, preserve **open space** and **sustain America's traditional rural communities**.

[www.newfarm.org](http://www.newfarm.org)

 Providing a market for traditional breeds food animals maintains a demand for **genetic diversity**. In turn, a healthy gene pool for food plants and animals helps to prevent catastrophic species-wide loss due to variety-specific disease.

[www.albc.org](http://www.albc.org)

 Because heritage breeds are ill-suited to factory farms, they are raised on small farms which typically observe a high degree standard of animal welfare, although this is not guaranteed. If you care about the conditions in which your food was raised, look for the seal of the **Humane Farm Animal Care** Association. HFAC is the only USDA-, ASPCA- and HSUS-endorsed farm animal care certification, and the only humane certification which requires regular on-premises inspection.

[www.hfac.org](http://www.hfac.org)

 Most importantly, **heritage breeds taste better**. These food animals have not been hybridized away from the natural flavor and texture of their meats. Native American rare breeds represent a specific geographic locality and their **unique food cultures**, all of which are rapidly disappearing in fast-food America. Eating heritage breeds helps to conserve and promote these special **regional and ethnic food traditions**.

[www.slowfood.org](http://www.slowfood.org)