



4787 KINNAMON ROAD  
WINSTON-SALEM, NC 27103

July 26, 2017

Mr. Alfred Almanza  
Administrator  
Food Safety and Inspection Service  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Room 331-E Jamie Whitten Building  
Washington, DC 20250

Re: *Petition to Amend Regulations for the Definition and Standard of Identity to create  
“Heritage Chicken” classification*

Dear Mr. Almanza,

Joyce Farms requests a petition to amend regulations for the definition and standard of identity of heritage chickens and, as necessary, to exercise enforcement discretion of the revisions to the standard 9 C.F.R. 381.170(a)(1)(ii & iii), as announced in the final rule Classes of Poultry, 76 Fed. Reg. 68058, 58056 (Nov. 3, 2011). In regards to current definitions, as to the effect on Heritage poultry not meeting the current standards, the following is noted:

- Currently, the definition and standard of identity for a broiler or fryer is a young chicken (less than 10 weeks of age), of either sex, that is tender-meated with soft, pliable, smooth-textured skin and flexible breastbone cartilage.
- Currently, the definition and standard of identity for a roaster or roasting chicken is a young chicken (between 8 and 12 weeks of age), of either sex, with a ready to cook carcass weight of 5 pounds or more, that is tender-meated with soft, pliable, smooth textured skin and breastbone cartilage that is somewhat less flexible than that of a broiler or fryer.

Joyce Farms believes adding the “Heritage Chicken” classification will benefit consumers and industry alike by enhancing the orderly and efficient marketing classes of poultry. Accordingly, Joyce Farms requests that the regulations defining a “heritage chicken” be added as follows:



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- “Heritage Chicken” is a young chicken (between 11 and 18 weeks of age) of either sex, with a ready to cook carcass weight of 1.5 to 5 pounds, that is a slow growing breed suited for outdoor production, with a more elongated carcass, smaller breast and larger legs than conventional carcasses.

### ***Support for the requested change***

The addition of the “heritage chicken” definition would provide consumers and the industry with a definitive classification for the production and marketing of whole chickens, reducing consumer confusion and enhancing farm to plant protocols. The industry must ensure that consumer requirements are determined and are met with the main focus of enhancing consumer satisfaction.

Heritage chickens are defined by the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy as recognized Standard breeds of chicken that are “naturally mating, long lived, and slow growing.” Standard breeds are not crossbred and the offspring breeds are true to the parents, allowing farmers to maintain the genetic lines of their own flocks. Heritage breeds such as the Redbro Cou Nu reach market weight (approximately 3-3.5 LBS) in 12 weeks while some Heritage birds such as the Jersey Giant or Columbian Wyandotte can take up to 16 weeks. Most of these breeds are also adequate egg producers and will live for up to seven years. They have healthier immune systems and are adapted to life on pasture, including the ability to forage for insects. While they are not as efficient at converting feed to muscle, their hearts grow at a proportional rate to their bodies and their skeletal structures are strong enough to support them.

### ***Market Effects of the Definition of “Heritage Chicken”***

Genetic improvements over the past 50 years have resulted in chickens reaching marketability about one day earlier each year. Commercial chickens reach market weight (five plus pounds live) in four to seven weeks, compared to the sixteen weeks it took in the 1950s. The physiological changes include the distribution of muscle mass (most of their weight is now located in their breasts) and the digestive and nervous system shift to give the birds “an insatiable appetite.”<sup>1</sup> This bird is highly susceptible to stress, cardiovascular failure, skeletal problems, and poor reproductive capabilities. One study showed that a modern chicken’s heart muscle was less developed than a heritage breed chicken of the same age and hypothesized that the “modern selection has diverted resources originally destined to maintain balanced heart growth into increased breast muscle mass.” The same study goes on to link the early development of the

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<sup>1</sup> See Attached “Delaware State University - Heritage Poultry Parameters”



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chicken's liver and the increased length of their intestines to their need to metabolize feed quickly.<sup>2</sup>

Because these chickens are slaughtered at an early age, most of these health issues pose only a limited problem. However, when other farmers raise these birds on pasture beyond the typical 6 weeks in which they are designed to reach market weight, the weak hearts and legs become more apparent since it takes longer to bring them to market weight. These farmers are showing a renewed interest in purchasing heritage breed chicks that are more suited to be raised on pasture. Individuals, specialty grocers and top culinary markets have sought out a bird that differs from the typical commodity chicken of today. Heritage slow-growing chickens reduce the instances of “woody breasts” and provide a more balanced carcass of white to dark meat ratio, preferred among chefs.

### ***Demands for Slow Growth Chicken Production and Distribution***

The increasing demand for slow growing heritage genetics has led to a developing market nationwide that is currently being supplied by a limited number of very low volume producers. Larger poultry processors have begun to offer slower growing birds that have yet to be defined by FSIS. There is a niche market for heritage chickens and they can sell for a higher price, but that market needs to be expanded. Increasing market demand also brings up a culinary aspect of chicken – as the biodiversity of chicken breeds narrows, we lose variations in chicken flavors. While this loss is unquantifiable, cultural history gets lost when flavors are no longer valued and when chemical additives in fast food replace natural variations in flavor. Though people have been subtly altering chicken genetics for centuries through domestication and hybridization, it is only in the past few decades that this has resulted in the vast dominance of birds that are not healthy past eight weeks old.

The number of Heritage chickens being brought to market is currently difficult to determine due to the majority of birds being slaughtered at very small establishments or locally by farmers. Given the growing market demands, once a definition is adopted by USDA, the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) will be able to track this data. Currently there are producers looking to expand their markets with slower growing birds up to and including Heritage breeds. These include but are not limited to Perdue, Allen Harim, Ozark Mountain, Pittman Farms, White Oak Pastures, and additional small processors.

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<sup>2</sup> See Attached “Delaware State University - Heritage Poultry Parameters”



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The potential for expanding production would lead to nationwide distribution and as it stands the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service does not provide regional advertising data for Heritage breeds. Many consumers throughout the country, who are likely to have less experience with "Heritage" chickens, rely on the labeling to inform them that a particular bird in the market is different from your standard commodity chicken that they are used to preparing.

### *Heritage Production and Genetics*

The National Chicken Council maintains historical data on the aggregate average age and average live weight at slaughter for all chickens processed annually in the U.S. According to this data, the average commercially raised chicken can reach a market weight of 6.24 pounds in as little as 47 days, averaging 1 pound gained every 7.7 days. This data shows the remarkable growth rate of the modern commercially raised chicken. In recent years, chickens held for the same time period are reaching increasingly higher market weights. The average number of days to gain a pound of live weight continue to decline. With this in mind, the ever changing commodity line will not accommodate a true Heritage definition standard. Unless USDA establishes a definition, Heritage chickens will continue to fall "between" categories, or in most cases, no definition at all.

### *Conclusion*

As explained in our petition, Joyce Farms believes it is necessary for the Agency to create the above said definition of "Heritage" chicken, to clarify age and size requirements, and enhance consumer education. Joyce Farms believes the information provided in this letter demonstrates the importance to consumers, processors, and the marketplace, of ensuring the expanding market of Heritage chickens is clearly defined.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jimmy Mitchell  
Joyce Farms



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## *Attachments*

National Chicken Council - U.S. Broiler Performance

NCC - Spreadsheet showing average slaughter age for broilers 2005-2013

Joyce Farms - Customer testimonials

Photos of a standard Heritage Chicken house (population, spacing etc.)

R Heritage Farms - Testimonial and site information

Chowhound - Customer confusion and difficulty defining Heritage Poultry in marketplace

Delaware State University - Heritage Poultry Parameters

The American Livestock Breeds Conservancy – Rediscovering Traditional Meats


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## U.S. Broiler Performance



### 1925 to Present

Year	Market Age <i>average days</i>	Market Weight <i>pounds, liveweight</i>	Days Per Pound <i>average days</i>	Feed to Meat Gain <i>pounds of feed to one pound of broiler, liveweight</i>	Mortality <i>percent</i>
1925	112	2.5	44.8	4.7	18
1935	98	2.86	34.3	4.4	14
1940	85	2.89	29.4	4	12
1945	84	3.03	27.7	4	10
1950	70	3.08	22.7	3	8
1955	70	3.07	22.8	3	7
1960	63	3.35	18.8	2.5	6
1965	63	3.48	18.1	2.4	6
1970	56	3.62	15.5	2.25	5
1975	56	3.76	14.9	2.1	5
1980	53	3.93	13.5	2.05	5
1985	49	4.19	11.7	2	5
1990	48	4.37	11	2	5
1995	47	4.67	10.1	1.95	5
2000	47	5.03	9.3	1.95	5
2005	48	5.37	8.9	1.95	4
2006	48	5.47	8.8	1.96	5
2007	48	5.51	8.7	1.95	4.5
2008	48	5.58	8.6	1.93	4.3
2009	47	5.59	8.4	1.92	4.1
2010	47	5.7	8.2	1.92	4
2011	47	5.82	8.1	1.92	3.9
2012	47	5.95	7.9	1.9	3.7
2013	47	6.01	7.7	1.88	3.7
2014	47	6.12	7.5	1.89	4.3
2015	48	6.24	7.7	1.89	4.8
1/2 - 2016	47	6.18		1.87	4.8

\* estimated

**Fowl Tips**

- Chickens raised for meat are called "Broilers."
- Broilers are not raised in cages.
- Broilers are never given added hormones or steroids.

This graphic features a background image of a chicken's head and neck. The text is presented in a clean, sans-serif font.

**CHICKEN Roost**

Visit the Chicken Roost,  
your one-stop shop for all things chicken.  
Click here.

The graphic shows a close-up of golden-brown fried chicken pieces. A circular logo with a rooster silhouette and the word "CHICKEN" is overlaid, with "Roost" written in a red banner below it.

**What's Really in that Chicken Nugget?**

Click for the facts

This graphic features a close-up of several golden-brown chicken nuggets. The text is positioned in the upper left corner.

**1,339,900 JOBS SUPPORTED**

What is chicken's economic impact in your community?

Click for economic data

The graphic shows a map of the United States with a callout box over the Midwest region. The callout box contains the number "1,339,900 JOBS SUPPORTED" and a blue arrow pointing to the map. The map labels include WY, SD, NE, CO, KS, MO, IN, OH, PA, WV, and VA.

[The National Chicken Council](#) is the trade association, based in Washington, DC, for the companies that raise broiler chickens and make and market chicken products. Member companies of NCC provide about 10 percent of the chicken products on America's table.

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Phone (202) 296-2622

	Average Slaughter Age for Broilers Weighing 3.6 - 4.4 lbs.	Average Slaughter Age for Broilers Weighing 4.4 - 5.2 lbs.	Average Slaughter Age for Broilers Weighing 5.2 - 6.0 lbs.	Average Slaughter Age for Broilers Weighing 6.0 - 6.8 lbs.	Average Slaughter Age for Broilers Weighing 6.8 - 7.5 lbs.	Average Slaughter Age for Broilers Weighing > 7.5 lbs.	USDA Average Live Weight
<b>Jan-05</b>	39.78	42.96	49.34	52.66	56.74	61.39	5.37
<b>Feb-05</b>	39.88	42.37	49.24	53.34	56.78	61.88	5.33
<b>Mar-05</b>	39.98	42.23	49.14	52.79	57.34	61.65	5.31
<b>Apr-05</b>	39.98	42.14	48.89	52.66	58.00	61.19	5.37
<b>May-05</b>	39.81	42.11	48.54	52.53	57.66	61.71	5.36
<b>Jun-05</b>	40.02	42.84	48.85	54.00	57.36	62.32	5.33
<b>Jul-05</b>	40.13	44.05	49.51	55.45	58.91	63.09	5.27
<b>Aug-05</b>	40.02	44.67	49.63	54.89	59.64	62.99	5.28
<b>Sep-05</b>	39.86	42.16	49.10	54.05	59.38	62.70	5.41
<b>Oct-05</b>	39.09	40.69	47.93	52.85	58.25	61.79	5.5
<b>Nov-05</b>	38.74	41.14	48.38	51.47	57.07	60.67	5.49
<b>Dec-05</b>	38.96	42.00	48.39	52.23	57.34	60.85	5.48
<b>Jan-06</b>	39.43	41.34	48.82	52.64	57.35	61.67	5.5
<b>Feb-06</b>	39.45	40.50	48.57	52.31	57.14	61.08	5.45
<b>Mar-06</b>	39.29	42.75	48.43	52.48	57.41	61.42	5.44
<b>Apr-06</b>	39.18	41.32	48.77	52.93	57.68	61.63	5.46
<b>May-06</b>	39.10	41.19	49.06	51.85	57.65	62.29	5.48
<b>Jun-06</b>	39.06	41.19	48.58	51.66	57.95	62.68	5.38
<b>Jul-06</b>	39.26	40.98	49.02	53.67	59.88	62.99	5.38
<b>Aug-06</b>	39.22	42.19	49.13	54.97	60.54	62.69	5.36
<b>Sep-06</b>	38.74	41.84	48.88	53.01	58.65	62.56	5.52
<b>Oct-06</b>	38.28	40.73	47.86	51.95	56.33	61.73	5.58
<b>Nov-06</b>	38.48	40.52	47.96	50.78	56.31	61.44	5.52
<b>Dec-06</b>	38.85	41.01	47.63	52.25	57.18	61.69	5.48
<b>Jan-07</b>	39.06	41.53	47.82	52.41	57.27	61.98	5.5
<b>Feb-07</b>	39.25	41.79	47.63	52.27	58.34	61.53	5.43
<b>Mar-07</b>	39.26	41.12	47.75	52.10	57.80	61.59	5.45
<b>Apr-07</b>	39.04	41.02	47.83	52.86	57.39	61.37	5.51
<b>May-07</b>	38.67	40.54	47.75	52.60	57.80	61.49	5.52
<b>Jun-07</b>	38.77	41.30	48.42	51.39	57.11	61.79	5.49
<b>Jul-07</b>	38.80	41.25	48.41	52.66	58.83	62.12	5.47
<b>Aug-07</b>	39.06	41.95	49.11	55.11	60.60	63.40	5.39
<b>Sep-07</b>	38.87	40.97	48.87	53.15	59.36	63.04	5.53
<b>Oct-07</b>	38.13	41.86	48.29	51.98	56.95	62.24	5.61
<b>Nov-07</b>	38.06	41.70	47.95	51.42	54.88	61.94	5.64
<b>Dec-07</b>	38.45	42.76	48.31	52.48	56.57	61.82	5.59
<b>Jan-08</b>	38.86	42.08	48.40	52.77	56.01	62.14	5.57
<b>Feb-08</b>	38.98	43.85	48.64	52.10	56.68	61.31	5.53
<b>Mar-08</b>	39.12	43.51	48.99	52.12	57.43	61.56	5.56
<b>Apr-08</b>	39.07	42.82	49.11	51.70	56.06	61.93	5.59
<b>May-08</b>	38.51	41.88	48.27	51.61	55.51	61.91	5.6
<b>Jun-08</b>	38.49	42.97	48.08	52.33	57.24	62.65	5.56
<b>Jul-08</b>	38.75	42.68	48.92	52.16	57.25	62.94	5.54
<b>Aug-08</b>	38.92	42.77	49.21	52.86	57.06	62.77	5.57
<b>Sep-08</b>	38.61	42.29	48.53	51.82	56.43	62.47	5.62
<b>Oct-08</b>	38.11	41.33	47.91	51.03	55.27	61.52	5.65

	Average Slaughter Age for Broilers Weighing 3.6 - 4.4 lbs.	Average Slaughter Age for Broilers Weighing 4.4 - 5.2 lbs.	Average Slaughter Age for Broilers Weighing 5.2 - 6.0 lbs.	Average Slaughter Age for Broilers Weighing 6.0 - 6.8 lbs.	Average Slaughter Age for Broilers Weighing 6.8 - 7.5 lbs.	Average Slaughter Age for Broilers Weighing > 7.5 lbs.	USDA Average Live Weight
<b>Nov-08</b>	38.02	42.59	48.09	50.77	53.64	60.92	5.61
<b>Dec-08</b>	38.26	43.16	48.02	51.15	55.55	61.05	5.56
<b>Jan-09</b>	38.56	42.50	48.00	51.63	56.11	60.83	5.56
<b>Feb-09</b>	38.70	43.14	48.37	51.60	55.24	60.55	5.54
<b>Mar-09</b>	38.83	43.28	48.04	51.43	55.23	60.38	5.55
<b>Apr-09</b>	38.27	42.98	47.72	50.92	54.89	60.21	5.57
<b>May-09</b>	37.94	41.97	47.69	50.77	56.07	60.46	5.59
<b>Jun-09</b>	37.99	42.25	48.14	51.08	56.50	61.10	5.53
<b>Jul-09</b>	38.28	41.81	48.15	51.26	56.73	61.33	5.54
<b>Aug-09</b>	37.99	42.13	48.51	51.25	57.68	61.37	5.56
<b>Sep-09</b>	38.02	41.74	47.32	50.87	54.69	60.74	5.62
<b>Oct-09</b>	37.59	42.42	46.50	50.41	54.34	60.90	5.67
<b>Nov-09</b>	37.50	42.70	46.96	50.47	54.04	60.29	5.67
<b>Dec-09</b>	37.68	42.17	47.30	50.12	53.52	60.45	5.65
<b>Jan-10</b>	38.19	43.47	47.38	51.23	55.56	60.73	5.64
<b>Feb-10</b>	38.54	43.65	48.10	51.38	55.26	60.94	5.62
<b>Mar-10</b>	38.34	42.51	47.11	51.40	55.70	61.23	5.64
<b>Apr-10</b>	37.80	42.92	47.58	51.15	55.50	61.11	5.68
<b>May-10</b>	37.54	42.18	47.20	50.98	54.80	61.26	5.71
<b>Jun-10</b>	37.89	43.68	48.02	51.60	57.59	61.40	5.63
<b>Jul-10</b>	38.56	43.90	48.33	52.43	59.26	61.81	5.59
<b>Aug-10</b>	38.37	43.94	49.23	52.36	61.33	61.42	5.57
<b>Sep-10</b>	37.71	41.45	48.31	50.90	55.04	61.90	5.74
<b>Oct-10</b>	37.26	40.43	46.49	50.30	53.86	61.53	5.87
<b>Nov-10</b>	37.03	40.96	46.89	50.39	53.03	61.21	5.88
<b>Dec-10</b>	37.90	40.13	47.26	51.29	53.59	60.93	5.85
<b>Jan-11</b>	38.08	42.23	47.54	51.53	53.43	61.38	5.85
<b>Feb-11</b>	38.36	42.16	48.85	51.23	54.36	60.99	5.76
<b>Mar-11</b>	38.26	41.54	48.00	51.05	55.01	60.54	5.75
<b>Apr-11</b>	37.79	41.54	47.26	51.57	55.61	60.32	5.76
<b>May-11</b>	37.62	41.31	46.99	51.32	54.39	60.73	5.81
<b>Jun-11</b>	38.19	40.30	46.97	51.57	55.24	61.36	5.81
<b>Jul-11</b>	38.47	41.12	48.17	52.34	57.20	62.00	5.77
<b>Aug-11</b>	38.41	41.69	47.68	52.03	56.34	61.82	5.78
<b>Sep-11</b>	37.84	40.42	46.22	50.93	54.65	61.58	5.87
<b>Oct-11</b>	37.19	39.57	45.81	49.96	53.44	60.28	5.88
<b>Nov-11</b>	37.00	40.00	46.41	49.46	53.50	59.87	5.82
<b>Dec-11</b>	36.96	39.57	46.80	49.57	53.37	59.69	5.78
<b>Jan-12</b>	37.04	40.86	46.75	49.83	53.23	60.36	5.84
<b>Feb-12</b>	37.11	40.38	46.72	49.72	53.67	60.16	5.83
<b>Mar-12</b>	37.14	41.37	46.89	49.69	53.56	60.15	5.81
<b>Apr-12</b>	36.76	40.68	46.99	49.62	53.67	60.20	5.83
<b>May-12</b>	36.59	40.34	46.57	49.69	53.45	60.02	5.83
<b>Jun-12</b>	36.85	40.21	46.65	50.07	53.77	60.58	5.86
<b>Jul-12</b>	37.26	40.66	47.46	50.21	55.03	60.43	5.77

	Average Slaughter Age for Broilers Weighing 3.6 - 4.4 lbs.	Average Slaughter Age for Broilers Weighing 4.4 - 5.2 lbs.	Average Slaughter Age for Broilers Weighing 5.2 - 6.0 lbs.	Average Slaughter Age for Broilers Weighing 6.0 - 6.8 lbs.	Average Slaughter Age for Broilers Weighing 6.8 - 7.5 lbs.	Average Slaughter Age for Broilers Weighing > 7.5 lbs.	USDA Average Live Weight
<b>Aug-12</b>	37.13	40.03	46.39	50.27	54.41	60.34	<b>5.81</b>
<b>Sep-12</b>	36.53	39.96	45.99	49.53	53.77	59.88	<b>5.88</b>
<b>Dec-12</b>	36.02	39.78	45.71	49.17	52.11	59.16	<b>5.95</b>
<b>Nov-12</b>	36.14	39.73	45.40	48.52	51.75	58.60	<b>5.95</b>
<b>Dec-12</b>	36.04	40.14	45.05	48.83	52.11	58.73	<b>5.91</b>
<b>Jan-13</b>	36.33	41.08	46.60	48.68	53.04	58.69	<b>5.92</b>
<b>Feb-13</b>	36.30	40.45	46.05	48.78	53.06	58.56	<b>5.91</b>
<b>Mar-13</b>	36.29	40.55	45.63	48.71	53.20	58.44	<b>5.87</b>
<b>Apr-13</b>	36.32	40.54	45.47	48.40	52.41	59.05	<b>5.9</b>
<b>May-13</b>	36.00	39.94	44.56	48.70	51.93	59.17	<b>5.87</b>
<b>Jun-13</b>	36.22	40.53	45.84	48.80	52.92	59.34	<b>5.88</b>
<b>Jul-13</b>	36.54	40.66	46.54	49.38	52.48	60.16	<b>5.84</b>
<b>Aug-13</b>	36.22	40.76	45.59	49.12	53.00	60.02	<b>5.9</b>

S

STEVE F. Verified Reviewer

09/29/16

**Poulet Rouge Fermier Whole Chicken**

By far the best chicken I've ever had the pleasure of experiencing, I'm hooked!  
Based on such, as a first-time customer I will without reserve be ordering more chickens as well as other products from Joyce Farms.  
Great People Producing And Offering, At Great Prices, Great Products !!!  
Great Packing / Shipping ( to California ! ), Too.  
Best REAL FOOD acquisition I've experienced to date, I'll be a repeat customer.  
" Go JOYCE " ! [Read Less](#)

A

ANNICK H. Verified Reviewer

03/28/15

**Amazing taste, incredible quality and very fair price**

Everything we ordered at Joyce Farms' has been literally delicious. We tried almost all of their poultry (chicken, duck, pheasant, guinee hen, poussin, rabbit...) and all of them have been as tasty as we expected them to be. We are French and are used to different birds than what is, unfortunately, sold in the US usually (i.e. huge, dry and very bland chicken). You can definitely tell Joyce Farms raise their animals the right way, for the quality of the meat (and that of the bones) never lies.  
Also, we love their chicken saussages and cordon-bleus, which are prepared with beautiful ingredients and taste wonderful.  
The ordering process is very well managed and, even if we live far away (New Mexico), everything was completely frozen at delivery. Very professional. [Read Less](#)

T

TONY B. Verified Reviewer

10/15/15

**Great People .... Outstanding Chicken**

Not only are the people at Joyce the most pleasant to deal with, but their chicken and guinea fowl are the best I've ever eaten. Apart from the fact that the chicken tastes like chicken used to, the size of the birds -- at around 3lb each -- is perfect. Who needs oversized birds with enlarged breasts that can hardly support their own weight!?

Fortunately for those of us in the New York city area, FreshDirect carries them at prices that are very reasonable.

Congratulations to all at Joyce. [Read Less](#)

PRODUCT	REVIEWER	CUSTOMER TYPE	REVIEW	
<b>Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken</b>	Michael Schwartz	Professional Chef, Michael's Genuine Food & Drink/Grand Cayman	Happy birds make for happy chefs. What Ron has done with Poulet Rouge is really special. I was lucky enough to make the trip to North Carolina to see the operation first hand, and you can't even compare...	
<b>Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken</b>	Brack May	Professional Chef, Cowbell/New Orleans, LA	My restaurant, Cowbell, has a slogan — Eat Happy. And people can't eat happy if we serve them sad, bland, ordinary chicken. So we looked around for the happiest, tastiest birds we could find for our recipes...	
<b>Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken</b>	Andre Soltner	Internationally recognized French chef and author	I prepared, tasted, and enjoyed your products. The Pintade Fermiere and the Poulet Rouge Fermier are of very high quality and flavor. I found again in your products the same quality and culinary characteristics of the best poultry available in France. Thank you and congratulations! I am now at last reconciled with poultry (in the U.S.) thanks to you. I already forwarded my comments to the French Culinary Institute. Bravo and keep on going!	
<b>Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken - Coquelets</b>	Karen J.	Web Customer	My husband & I do not eat chicken often, but, Joyce Farms' chickens completely changed our minds. Just absolutely amazing flavor & never gave any thought on what chicken should taste like because we've always purchased from our local grocery stores. Not any more. These little guys are the perfect dinner for two with no waste. These will always be a freezer staple for us. Thanks Joyce Farms! We will definitely be eating your chicken on a regular basis.	2015-12-02 04:00:00 UTC
<b>Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken - Semi Boneless</b>	Scott W.	Web Customer	fantastic	2016-09-16 04:00:00 UTC
<b>Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken</b>	Keith	Web Customer	I've never really been a chicken fan. I've found it mostly to be dry and flavorless. Recently, I had a heritage chicken from a local store, that said it was poulet rouge (which I later found out it wasn't, but that's another story). I tried it, and it changed my mind about chicken. When I went online, I found Joyce Farms. I ordered a few chickens, and was even more impressed by how juicy and flavorful it was, and how crispy the skin got. I have since made more orders, including the Coquelets. While I loved the standard sized, the little guys really drove it home for me, with a great skin to meat ratio. Thanks Joyce Farms for teaching me to love chicken.	2015-02-05 04:00:00 UTC
<b>Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken</b>	Mary G.	Web Customer	I remember when chicken actually tasted like chicken. Then big poultry producers turned chicken into something tasteless, but cheap. Finally, I've found Joyce Farms where I can get tender, juicy, flavorful chicken. And since these chickens actually taste like chickens are supposed to taste, I can make wonderful gravy, too. Can't say enough good things about these chickens. Oh, the heritage turkey, duck, and rabbit are delicious, too.	2015-02-12 04:00:00 UTC

PRODUCT	REVIEWER	CUSTOMER TYPE	REVIEW	
<b>Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken</b>	Annick H.	Web Customer	<p>Everything we ordered at Joyce Farms' has been literally delicious. We tried almost all of their poultry (chicken, duck, pheasant, guinee hen, poussin, rabbit...) and all of them have been as tasty as we expected them to be. We are French and are used to different birds than what is, unfortunately, sold in the US usually (i.e. huge, dry and very bland chicken). You can definitely tell Joyce Farms raise their animals the right way, for the quality of the meat (and that of the bones) never lies.</p> <p>Also, we love their chicken saussages and cordon-bleus, which are prepared with beautiful ingredients and taste wonderful.</p> <p>The ordering process is very well managed and, even if we live far away (New Mexico), everything was completely frozen at delivery. Very professional.</p>	2015-03-28 04:00:00 UTC
<b>Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken</b>	Ned	Web Customer	<p>The Poulet Rouge Fermier ranks alongside: caviar, foie gras, oysters, sauce béarnaise, blue fin tuna, Maine lobster, dry aged prime T-Bone steak, Francois Payard pastries, Le Bernadin dinners, perfect swordfish, Campari tomatoes, just-picked corn, just-picked peas, Lays potato chips etc etc. One should never eat any other chicken! NEVER!!!</p>	2015-08-21 04:00:00 UTC
<b>Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken</b>	Tony B.	Web Customer	<p>Not only are the people at Joyce the most pleasant to deal with, but their chicken and guinea fowl are the best I've ever eaten. Apart from the fact that the chicken tastes like chicken used to, the size of the birds -- at around 3lb each -- is perfect. Who needs oversized birds with enlarged breasts that can hardly support their own weight?!</p> <p>Fortunately for those of us in the New York city area, FreshDirect carries them at prices that are very reasonable.</p> <p>Congratulations to all at Joyce.</p>	2015-10-15 04:00:00 UTC
<b>Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken</b>	K.C. Soll	Web Customer	<p>We have now taken delivery of at least 4-4 packs of these remarkable chickens. Without a doubt "what chicken should taste like." Post defrosting, I soak in lemon/salt water, rinse, pat dry and roast with salt and pepper.. Oh my!</p> <p>K. C. Soll, Pacific Palisades, CA</p>	2015-12-13 04:00:00 UTC
<b>Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken</b>	Marcella W.	Web Customer	<p>Excellent taste. Definitely all chicken, no mystery meat here. This is the best tasting chicken I've eaten in a long time. I love the chicken and Angus beef products as well.</p>	2016-05-31 04:00:00 UTC
<b>Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken</b>	Pascale G.	Web Customer	<p>Superb, a bird of excellence!</p>	2016-06-02 04:00:00 UTC
<b>Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken</b>	Margaret S.	Web Customer	<p>Not the first time for us, that's why we reorder. So tasty.</p>	2016-06-03 04:00:00 UTC
<b>Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken</b>	Lirija P.	Web Customer	<p>looks and tastes fresh</p>	2016-06-04 04:00:00 UTC
<b>Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken</b>	Rolf G.	Web Customer	<p>I have ordered well over a hundred chickens from Joyce Farms. Exceptional quality and taste.</p>	2016-06-07 04:00:00 UTC

PRODUCT	REVIEWER	CUSTOMER TYPE	REVIEW	
Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken	Alexandra R.	Web Customer	Flavorful chicken is a misnomer when applied to the factory farmed selection at the grocery. I ordered Poulet Rouge Fermier at Victoria & Albert's in Disney World and was blown away by how tasty it was. I was able to order a supply when the shipping costs were lowered for the holiday weekend. This made the chicken comparable in price to an organic one in the grocery. I roasted two, Zuni style, for my family of five and we were able to make 3 meals out of it and stock. Delicious and fantastic for dinner guests.  My order arrived quickly and solidly frozen.	2016-06-18 04:00:00 UTC
Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken	Temitola K.	Web Customer	Thank you for the great tasting chicken at affordable prices and excellent customer service.	2016-06-25 04:00:00 UTC
Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken	Nitin N.	Web Customer	This is the hands down best chicken I have eaten in a very long time. I would buy more often if the shipping was free :)	2016-07-13 04:00:00 UTC
Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken	Deborah B.	Web Customer	Simply the best!	2016-07-16 04:00:00 UTC
Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken	Mika K.	Web Customer	This chicken cost a few dollars more than the whole "Organic" chicken we were buying from Costco. But remember, Joyce chicken is not soaked in water it's air chilled so it evens out to similar pricing and not only that it's twice as filling. I love using the bones for making broth afterwards.	2016-07-23 04:00:00 UTC
Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken	Deborah D.	Web Customer	If you are looking for chicken that actually tastes like chicken than Joyce Farms chickens are for you. After buying them the first time, we cannot ever buy chicken from any other source. Just rub them with some good olive oil, salt & pepper them and stick them in the oven. Voila - the perfect and most tasty roast chicken you will ever taste.	2016-08-17 04:00:00 UTC
Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken	Nancy M.	Web Customer	So that's what chicken should taste like. Absolutely delicious! Very tender & juicy. I ordered 4 so I could try different recipes. Now, I must order again because they are so good. I preordered a HeritageTurkey also. You don't want to miss out on that.	2016-09-25 04:00:00 UTC
Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken	Steve F.	Web Customer	By far the best chicken I've ever had the pleasure of experiencing, I'm hooked ! Based on such, as a first-time customer I will without reserve be ordering more chickens as well as other products from Joyce Farms. Great People Producing And Offering, At Great Prices, Great Products !!! Great Packing / Shipping ( to California ! ), Too. Best REAL FOOD acquisition I've experienced to date, I'll be a repeat customer. " Go JOYCE " !	2016-09-29 04:00:00 UTC
Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken	Denyse P.	Web Customer	Both chickens and Cornish Game Hens are superb. Once tasted, even a decent organic chicken such as Bell&Evans pales in comparison. Meat is tender and juicy - just delicious!	2016-10-09 04:00:00 UTC
Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken	Jim R.	Web Customer	Chicken is very flavorful, much like the chicken I raised as a child	2016-10-10 04:00:00 UTC
Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken	Christine G.	Web Customer	I am French and missed the flavorful poulets fermier i can find in France . Joyce Farms chicken and pintade are firm and have a good texture and flavor .	2016-10-30 04:00:00 UTC

PRODUCT	REVIEWER	CUSTOMER TYPE	REVIEW	
Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken	Rodica P.	Web Customer	I longed for chicken flavor I grew up with in Europe. I have to say, your Poulet Rouge comes closer in flavor to any I've tried thus far in the States. I think I will order the larger chickens next time, since the breasts of the smaller ones tend to dry out during roasting. The naked thighs were delicious and moist.	2016-11-21 04:00:00 UTC
Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken	Alexander P.	Web Customer	We had these for Thanksgiving and they were truly delicious. Not sure I've ever tasted chicken so good.  Thanks! Alex	2016-12-05 04:00:00 UTC
Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken	Suzanne W.	Web Customer	The chicken I have eaten so far has been excellent. The roasting chicken was succulent and moist with wonderful flavor. I have recommended it to my friends.	2016-12-06 04:00:00 UTC
Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken	Kay G.	Web Customer	I ordered these heritage birds for my husband as I generally do not eat fowl. However, even I recognized these are far from the fat awful commercial birds so widely consumed and they are very delicious-even if you don't eat fowl!!!	2016-12-11 04:00:00 UTC
Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken	Marc G.	Web Customer	Very happy with my purchases from Joyce farms. Beautiful tasty birds that you will not find anywhere else!	2016-12-31 04:00:00 UTC
Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken	Zurab T.	Web Customer	Superb chicken. The taste, meat texture, bone strength makes me feel that I eat a chicken that my grandmother raised in the back yard of my summer house. Thank you for your hard work for giving me and all other customers such pleasure of enjoying your great offerings. B.w. Heritage turkey was perfect as well.  Sincerely, Zurab	2017-02-20 04:00:00 UTC
Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken	Margaret H.	Web Customer	awesome!	2017-02-21 04:00:00 UTC
Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken	Susan B.	Web Customer	Will buy again. Good flavor.	2017-02-23 04:00:00 UTC
Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken	Prosperanta C.	Web Customer	Made for an excellent meal!	2017-02-27 04:00:00 UTC
Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken	Donald M.	Web Customer	When I was younger (I'm almost 70 now), I remember that chicken tasted like ... well ... chicken. Modern methods of raising chickens (antibiotics in the feed ... really?) and crowding them together in a packed building (culling the dead ones out every morning ... really?) Has produced the worst chicken imaginable. No flavor , mushy texture. Ugh. Not Joyce Farms. No. They do it right, totally right, like chicken raising used to be with one of the finest breeds ever. End result? One amazing chicken. Period!	2017-03-01 04:00:00 UTC

PRODUCT	REVIEWER	CUSTOMER TYPE	REVIEW	
<b>Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken</b>	Randy M.	Web Customer	<p>I first had poulet rouge birds in France. I remember being astonished at how much better they were than any chicken I ever had before. I attributed this to the amazing skill of the chefs who prepared and sauced them. Only later as I became a chef did I realize that, all things being equal, it was the breed that made the difference.</p> <p>I bought two to try them out. One I used in a coq au vin and the other I roasted, Absolute bliss.</p> <p>The color, texture, skin and flavor are like night and day compared to other fowl.</p> <p>Don't even hesitate. Just get them and see for yourself.</p>	2017-03-04 04:00:00 UTC
<b>Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken</b>	Becky S.	Web Customer	It was fabulous and everyone loved it! You guys were great to work with.	2017-03-12 04:00:00 UTC
<b>Poulet Rouge Fermier Chicken</b>	Angelita R.	Web Customer	Served it to guests and they loved it. Tasted DIFFERENT!	2017-04-26 04:00:00 UTC













<http://www.rheritagefarm.com>

# R Heritage Farm

<http://www.rheritagefarm.com>

- [Welcome to our farm! » \(/\)](#)
- [Get To Know Us » \(#\)](#)
- [Visit Our Farm » \(#\)](#)
- [Buy From Us » \(#\)](#)
- [Farm Happenings » \(#\)](#)

- [Contact \(/contact\)](#)
- [RSS Feed \(http://rheritagefarm.com/dynamic\\_content/xml/rss.xml\)](http://rheritagefarm.com/dynamic_content/xml/rss.xml)

## Get To Know Us

- [Our Story \(/our-story\)](#)
- [Our Family \(/staff\)](#)
- [Our Raising Practices \(/our-raising-practices\)](#)
- [Heritage Breeds \(/heritage-breeds\)](#)
- [Organic vs Naturally Raised \(/organic-vs-naturally-raised-a-must-read\)](#)

## Organic vs Naturally Raised

Understanding organic, naturally raised and the benefits of pasture raised

### [Benefits of Pasture Raised](#)



Animals raised on open pasture and woodlands enjoy a much higher quality of life than those confined in factory farms. They roam freely and are able to carry out their natural instincts and behaviors. Confined animals are more prone to disease, injury, are depressed and stressed, and who wouldn't be living a life in confinement.

Not only are pastured animals happier and healthier, but they are also nutritionally superior to commercially and some organically raised animals. It is well documented that pastured livestock produce meat with lower levels of saturated fat and total fat, and higher levels of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants, Beta-Carotene, heart-friendly Omega 3's, and cancer/ heart disease fighting CLA's (Conjugated Linoleic Acid).

As an example, pastured pigs have on average 300 percent more Vitamin E and 74 percent more selenium (an antioxidant) [1], and pastured poultry produce eggs that contain 1/3 less cholesterol, 1/4 less saturated fat, and are richer in Vitamin A and D than commercial eggs.[2]

### [Organic vs Naturally Raised](#)

Many people are confused between the two farming methods, and most consumers are not aware that organic doesn't mean the meat is more nutritious or that the animal was raised humanely. In fact, organic practices for raising animals are centered more on the management of the land and how the feed is produced instead of how the animals are raised.

Organic certification mainly refers to what an animal has or has not consumed. The USDA AMS National Organic Program does not specifically outline the humane raising practices of animals.[3] This is actually governed by the Humane Farm Animal Care Scientific Committee which is a non-profit charity that is supported by outside private animal protection organizations. Entry into this program is entirely voluntary, so it is up to farmers

to practice good animal husbandry practices on their own. (R Heritage Farm is currently in the process of becoming certified.)

Organic farms are still permitted to raise their animals in confined spaces, and it is not widely known that many of the largest organic producers do just that. [4] Additionally, even if these animals are fed organic grain it does not mean this is the natural type of food their bodies are designed to consume and derive nutrients from. Raising animals in confinement and feeding them an unnatural diet even if it is organic jeopardizes human health because an organic feedlot operation has the same increased risk of E. coli infection. [5]

For the most part the term “organic” is simply a guarantee that the food does not contain pesticide residues, synthetic hormones, antibiotics, or other additives which does provide some peace of mind that your meat is safe to eat. However, the organic label does not guarantee good nutrition, and it has



been widely documented that organically grain fed animals may still be deficient in nutrients, or contain a higher amount of bad fats within the meat. If the animal is lacking in nutrients it's guaranteed that the meat you are eating from that animal isn't nutritionally complete either. As Jo Robinson, the editor of eatwild.com and a New York Times Bestselling author said “Animals need more than an organic diet – they need their original diet!”

The standards for “Naturally Raised” as defined by the USDA states that animals raised for consumption are prohibited from consuming growth promotants, antibiotics, or animal by-products.[6] Despite the inaccurate and biased information that is displayed on the internet by those trying to promote 100% organic the USDA does have standards for naturally raised meat. Again, the USDA does not outline humane practices, so it's important to be diligent when buying meat that has any claim to being “natural” or “organic.” (To further complicate matters “All Natural” just means that the finished product is minimally processed (ground), and does not contain any artificial colors, additives, preservatives, etc, so be careful when buying these products.)

R Heritage Farms' claim to All Natural, Naturally Raised, Pastured Pork and Poultry is genuine, justifiable, and authentic. Our animals have unlimited access to the outdoors, clean water, and fresh air. They are free to move about wherever and whenever they choose. By providing them with pasture and forest land they live in a habitat that is conducive to their needs and resembles their natural environment. There is no better source of organic food than naturally cultivated and unaltered pasture, plants, and woodlands, or insects, bugs and grubs foraged freely from the natural dirt floor.

We have done extensive research on the principals of both organic and natural practices of raising animals, and because we believe both elements are important we practice a combination of both organic and natural methods. We also believe in educating consumers that while organic can be an important component of farming the way in which the animals are raised and their welfare are of greatest importance. It's a benefit to the animals, consumer, and the farmer.

[1](Mutetikka, D.B., and D.C. Mahan, 1993. Effect of pasture, confinement, and diet fortification with vitamin E and selenium on reproducing gilts and their progeny. J. Anim. Sci. 71:3211.) [2] <http://www.motherearthnews.com/eggs.aspx> [3] <http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/ofp/ofp.shtml>[4] <http://www.eatwild.com/articles/whygrassfed.html> [5] <http://www.eatwild.com/articles/whygrassfed.html>[6] <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/ams.fetchTemplateData.do?template=TemplateN&navID=NaturallyRaisedMarketingClaimStandards&rightNav1=NaturallyRaisedMarketingClaimStandards&topNav=&leftNav=GradingCertificationandVerification&page=NaturallyRaisedMarketingClaims>

## Customer Comments

...this is the best pork in my life. Really. The meat is savory, rich with porky flavors, and excellent collagen for a beautiful mouth feel. The fat really sets it apart. It's delicious. It melts, and crisps perfectly...it's just really good pig! I'm so glad you are raising such high quality animals.

~P. Goldberg

Our first free-range, non GMO, organic, heritage breed bird from R Heritage Farm (<https://www.facebook.com/RHeritageFarm?ref=stream>) was fantastic! The texture and flavor of this meat is second to none - this will be the first of many!!

~V. DiMercurio

Everybody loved the pork chops! I served them at a party, and they were a hit! Start with good product and end with a good result! R Heritage Farm is the secret ingredient! :)

~B. Idol

The chicken turned out great! It had a delicious flavor. The meat was firm and juicy, not mushy like the supermarket chickens can be.

~L. Littrell

We went out to a fancy restaurant in downtown [Seattle] and we ordered their roasted pork. It was cooked perfectly and it was delicious...but...it wasn't YOUR pork...

~M. Sofsak

The chicken was wonderful- so yummy!

~D. Copple

I feel like I just had real bacon for the first time...it's the best I've ever had. Your sausages are primo. Thank you!

~L. Owen

We picked up your garlic brats at last night's Kirkland market...best we have ever had. Seriously unbelievable. Thanks!

~R. Kline

Our turkey was amazing!

~B. Hodgins

Cooked your Andouille sausage last night...AWESOME!...AWESOME!...AWESOME!!

~LFP Customer

Your sausages are yummy!! Best Andouille I've ever had.

~C. Callender

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R Heritage Farm

Proudly specializing in raising rare heritage breed chickens, turkeys, and Berkshire hogs the good old fashioned way...roaming freely on organic pasture and woodlands. We let our animals be...well...animals.

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7/4/2017

# Don't Get Duped on Heritage Turkey

By Lessley Anderson | Published on Wednesday, November 11, 2015



Whether it's turkeys or tomatoes, heirloom varieties are hot, hot, hot. **More people are looking for foods that hark back to an era before industrial agriculture and genetic manipulation.** You might be one of those people opting for a “heritage” turkey this **Thanksgiving**. But are you sure you're getting a *real* heritage turkey? SHOCKER: You might not be.

**First of all, a quick lowdown on what *heritage* actually means:** It does not mean *organic*, *all natural*, or *free range*, though a true heritage bird is probably all of those things. *Heritage* refers to 10 specific breeds of turkey (if you want to know what they are, click [here](#)). These breeds were raised in the U.S. prior to the 1950s, when the poultry industry began to genetically engineer (through cross breeding) the commodity, broad-breasted white turkeys most people eat today.

<https://www.chowhound.com/food-news/66738/dont-get-duped-on-heritage-turkey/>

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**Heritage birds differ from broad-breasted whites in a number of ways:** They're smaller and prettier, often with elegant dark or colored feathers. **They mature more slowly** (24 to 30 weeks, versus about 12 to 18 weeks for a commodity turkey), **and can live longer**—up to 15 years, as opposed to a year and a half. Broad-breasted turkeys are engineered to grow so big that they cannot reproduce on their own, and at times even have trouble walking. Therefore, they must be artificially inseminated. **Heritage birds can have sex normally, and have big, strong legs that can walk just fine. Heritage birds are gamier-tasting, have darker meat, and can be much tougher and harder to cook** ([we've got some tips here](#)). They're closer to wild birds than the mushier, whiter turkeys bred for obesity and early youth. **And heritage birds are more expensive to raise, and more expensive per pound to buy.**



*The Natural Trading Co.*

**So how do you know you're getting a heritage bird? You don't.** **There is no official certification program for the identification and labeling of heritage birds the way there is for organics.** Although turkey producers are required to submit documentation to the USDA showing that the turkeys they're going to call heritage

<https://www.chowhound.com/food-news/66738/dont-get-duped-on-heritage-turkey/>

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are one of the officially recognized heritage breeds, this process is not as strict and regulated as needed to be dependably reliable. For instance: “I have seen people think they have heritage birds because they have dark feathers,” says Frank Reese, a heritage turkey farmer in Kansas. “But the color of the feathers don’t mean a thing.”

Some grocery stores sidestep the labeling issue by advertising “heritage” birds in circulars, or on signs, but then the birds they’re actually selling are standard fast-growing industrial turkeys.

**Read the fine print.** Others imply that the bird is heritage on the package, when it really isn’t. In Whole Foods in San Francisco, for instance, you can buy Diestel “American Heirloom Collection” turkeys, which, the fine print says, are “derived from a Bronze and an Auburn” turkey. (Bronze and Auburns are two heritage-breed turkeys.) However, the heirloom turkeys sold by Diestel are actually an organically raised crossbreed that incorporates both heritage genes and nonheritage. “We have those old breeds, and cross them and tweak them to get a turkey that we think performs well on the table,” says President Tim Diestel. The actual heritage breeds, Diestel correctly notes, don’t have a lot of meat on them, and can be “disappointing” to customers who are used to big, fat, juicy commodity birds. His bird, he says, is like the best of both worlds: It contains a bit more dark meat and rich turkey taste than a typical bird, but is still big and juicy. And though Diestel didn’t say it, his birds no doubt also deliver a higher pound-for-pound feeling of virtuousness among those who feel they’re buying something more natural.

True heritage farmers like Frank Reese are at a disadvantage to farmers like Diestel if customers aren’t educated as to the difference between real and faux heritage. It’s much more expensive to raise an actual heritage turkey, despite the higher sale cost. And the wild-west world of heritage labeling we’re living in now isn’t helping matters. However, Patrick Martins, the founder of Heritage Foods USA, which grew out of Slow Food USA (though it’s now an independent company), says he thinks the growing interest in heritage turkeys will eventually lead to stricter rules: “In order to get any term officialized, it first has to go through a blurry phase, and then it starts getting legalized and officialized.”

Until then, anybody wishing to get their hands on an actual breed of bird that looks and tastes pretty much as it did 100 years ago is advised to (1) read the fine print and apply critical thinking, and (2) call the farmer and ask what their definition of *heritage* is. Be sure and mention the natural sex part—don’t be embarrassed.



Small flock enterprises continue to increase in popularity in the United States. Consumer interest in heritage poultry breeds for meat is resulting in increased production. Research to help farmers price their product appropriately will help them in the creation of business plans for their enterprises. Increasing the market share of these poultry entrepreneurs will aid them with both profitability and heritage breed preservation.

## Poultry Production Parameters: The Heritage Delaware

### Who cares and why?

The raising of small flocks in the United States has increased significantly in popularity. Small flock owners keep chickens not only for egg production but also for meat. Along with this increase in popularity, small enterprises have emerged that raise heritage breeds for meat production.



There has been some research done on fast vs. slow growing commercial hybrids, but very little research is available to assist growers in deciding upon which heritage breeds to raise. The lack of information about performance characteristics means that farmers have very little information to use in order to make pricing decisions or when creating a business plan. Heritage meat chickens are very slow-growing. Farmers do not know how long it takes to grow a flock to a final body weight that is similar to that of a broiler. Therein lies a risk that farmers may underprice their product by basing prices on production data for commercial hybrids.

### What has the project done so far?

The objective of this study was two-fold. The first objective was provide farmers with data on performance characteristics, feed efficiency, and carcass yield for Delawares in comparison to fast-growing broilers using modern feeds. The second objective was to determine the additional amount of time it would take to raise the Delawares until they achieved the same live body weight as 6 week-old fast-growing broilers. The production information

Starting in the 1920's and 1930's, the newly emerging meat chicken industry started by breeding pure lines of several different breeds of chicken.

By 1935, there were efforts at crossing Barred Plymouth Rocks males with New Hampshire hens resulting in what was called Barred Cross chicks. The Delaware chicken breed was developed in the 1940's on the Delmarva Peninsula as a result of the specific breeding efforts of George Ellis in Ocean View, DE. Shortly thereafter the breed fell out of favor as a meat bird as the Cornish cross was further developed by the broiler industry.

The breed is once again in demand, but is difficult to locate as good breeding stock for meat production because the breed has been selected only for show. Little data about the growth performance of the breed is available after 1940's and 1950's as there was greater interest in the breed for its unique plumage genetics. Given the significant changes and improvements to poultry diets, growth performance data is out of date in relation to the Delaware birds that are available for purchase today.

may be used to write their business plans, make good management decisions, and to price product accurately.

Our study was able to determine that, given the modern feed available at today's feed stores, it will take a Delaware 15 weeks to grow to the same live weight as that of a 6 week old broiler chicken which is 2.5 times longer. The overall FCR for broilers

and Delawares in this study was 1.75 and 3.46, respectively. That means it took broilers 1.75 lb. of feed to create a pound of meat while it took Delawares 3.46 lb. of feed to make a lb. of meat. For a pen of 30 broilers to reach market weight it took an average of 230 lb. of feed, whereas it took Delawares 460 lb. of feed.

Based upon the amount of feed consumed by the two breeds, and the price per bag of feed at the time of the trial, the cost to feed the broilers was \$87.58 and the price to feed the Delawares was \$170.13. It is estimated that it would cost 1.94 times more to feed the Delawares. Since the cost of production for the Delawares, based on just the price of feed, was nearly 2-fold greater, farmers should price their final product accordingly.

There was a statistically significant difference between the two breeds of chicken with regard to

their carcass weight and dressing percentage. The average weight for the broiler carcasses was 3.26 lb. whereas the average weight for the Delaware carcasses was 3.00 lb. The dressing percentage for the broilers was 68.08%. The Delaware dressing percentage was lower at 64.61%.



## Impact Statement

Research on Heritage chickens, such as the Delaware breed, have yielded information about the ability of the breed to gain weight efficiently and use feed efficiently using modern feeds.

This research has indicated that in comparison to raising broiler chickens in small flocks, farmers will need to charge twice as much when pricing their heritage breed product.

Growth rates and carcass yields for the Delaware breed are significantly lower. Farmers will need to feed Delaware chickens twice as much feed to reach market weight.

### What research is needed?

Additional research is needed to determine which breed performs best in the living conditions, both indoor and outdoor, in the Mid-Atlantic Region. Since many of the small flock producers in the

region also raise their birds on pasture or in organic systems, more information is needed about the performance of these breeds on different types of pasture.

### Want to know more?

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Strategic Priority: Animal health/Products/Production

Additional links: <http://www.umes.edu/ard/Default.aspx?id=46285>

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# Rediscovering Traditional Meats from Historic Chicken Breeds

By Gina Bisco

The chicken meat most of us take for granted today is quite different from what our grandparents experienced. Today commercial chicken meat production is very different from methods and ideas common before the mid-20th century. Those of us who want to conserve old chicken breeds need to understand the traditional chicken meat classes and their excellent cooking qualities.

There are 4 traditional chicken meat classes: broiler, fryer, roaster and fowl. The traditional broiler age range was from 7 to 12 weeks, and carcass weight from 1 to 2 1/2 lbs. (Squab broilers would be youngest and smallest of these, typically Leghorn cockerels about 3/4 to 1 pound dressed.) The next age and weight group was called the fryer. Traditional fryer age range was from 14 to 20 weeks, and carcass weight from 2 1/2 to 4 lbs. Traditional roaster age range was from 5 to 12 months, and carcass weight from 4 to 8 pounds. Most roasters were butchered between 6 and 9 months. Hens and roosters 12 months and older were called “fowl” or “stewing fowl” signifying that slow moist cooking methods were required.

These traditional meat classifications, used until the 1940s, were based on the growth patterns and carcass qualities of the pure breeds that were commonly used throughout the U.S. to produce eggs and meat. Traditional chicken meats were classified by butchering age because of the special product qualities associated with each age range. Even though modern product labels and modern cookbooks still use the terms broiler, fryer and roaster, these traditional meat classes no longer apply to the modern “meat line” chickens because of their extremely fast growth rate. The modern “meat line” chickens grow so fast that all sizes, even the largest size, are butchered before they are old enough to be classified as traditional fryers.

Historic breeds' natural growth rate may appear to be a disadvantage when compared with modern meat lines. But natural growth rate offers a very real and significant advantage that can only be obtained with age – ***flavor!***

Though historic breeds can all be butchered young, in the past people preferred the richer flavor of the meat from chickens older than 12 weeks. Once it is realized that flavor cannot be hurried with faster growth, but requires time and age to develop, then the advantage of keeping historic poultry breeds becomes clear. The modern meat lines grow too fast to develop the rich flavor that people used to expect from chicken meat.

The modern meat lines are bred for uniformity, and to reach certain sizes under controlled conditions. They grow so fast that they have to be butchered quickly when they reach target weights. After about 9 weeks of age, modern meat lines suffer increased losses from bone and heart failure. They are not designed to live long enough to achieve the rich flavor that traditional chicken breeds achieve.

Historic poultry breeds are, in contrast, very flexible as to butchering age. *Any* historic pure breed can be butchered between 7 to 12 weeks for use as broilers, 12 to 20 weeks for use as fryers, 5 to 12 months for roasters, and over 12 months for stewing fowl. Although historic pure breeds were categorized as “egg breeds”, “meat breeds”, and “general purpose” or “dual purpose” breeds, these categories were not nearly so specialized as the modern mind tends to assume. Prior to development of the ultra-specialized single-purpose meat lines and egg lines, all pure breeds were managed more as multi-purpose flocks rather than exclusively for production of a single specific commercial product.

Prior to 1920 the egg breeds were so classified because of feed efficiency, smaller size, and lack of broodiness – not only in regard to number of eggs produced. The meat breeds were classified as such not because they were used only for meat, but because they were the best suited to producing the highest quality, largest and top-priced roasters. In fact, until 1920 and measured by eggs per hen per year, meat breeds such as Brahmas and Cornish were competitive with many egg breeds. Their primary disadvantages as egg layers were their greater food consumption and inclination toward broodiness. The general purpose breeds were therefore not the only category expected to produce both meat and eggs. Rather, general purpose breeds were considered most practical for general farms. General farm chickens were expected to be as productive as the egg breeds and meat breeds, but require less attention.

All historic breeds were once used to produce table eggs and meat. They were expected to lay well enough to be used for egg production, and every flock produced fowl when the layers were culled. All historic breeds produced about half cockerels and lacking the capability to accurately sex at hatch, excess cockerels were raised with pullets until they were old enough that the differences were obvious. The farmer could then decide which traditional meat classes would most profitably fit the excess males.

Probably most broilers and fryers on retail markets in the early 20th century were from egg breeds, such as the very popular Brown or White Leghorns. The egg breed cockerels did not have the carcass traits required to achieve the best roaster prices, so most were usually butchered at the younger broiler or fryer age. The heavy breed cockerels (cockerels from the meat, general, or dual purpose breeds) could be used for fryers or broilers if market conditions indicated it was too risky to keep them longer. But these breeds had the right body traits to be graded as excellent roasters when well grown. And roasters were always preferred.

The product qualities of a traditional high quality roaster do not at all resemble the modern meat line chickens in the supermarket labeled “roaster”. The carcass of a traditional roaster is overall longer and narrower, has a naturally shaped breast, and has proportionately far longer legs and larger thighs than the industrial meat line carcass of the same weight. The carcass of meat line “roasters” has a very broad breast and relatively tiny legs and thighs. The traditional roaster carcass yields a fairly even amount of dark meat and light meat, whereas the meat line roaster yields nearly all light meat and little dark meat. And, due to the much younger butchering age, the meat line roaster has a soft texture and bland flavor, while the traditional roaster has the rich flavor and firm texture expected of the more mature chicken.

The traditional meat types each require appropriate cooking methods. Far from being a disadvantage, this greatly expands culinary potential. But, after more than 50 years of supermarket chicken, most Americans don't know the first thing about cooking older chickens, and have no contemporary sources to turn to for that information. Modern cookbooks are designed for the modern meat line product.

Generally speaking, the quality and flavor of chicken meat from historic breeds is going to be superb as long as it is understood that different ages require, or are best suited, to different cooking methods. The key is to know the butchering age of the bird as well as when the bird was butchered.

Top meat quality requires proper processing. At butchering time, chickens must be killed quickly and humanely, stressed as little as possible. Stress reduces meat quality. Also, it may be that hand plucking could result in better meat quality for older butchering age ranges, as the mechanical pluckers are said to toughen meat somewhat.

After processing, for best meat texture, chickens should be chilled and aged before cooking. Most sources recommend chilling and aging chickens for 24 hours, and up to 3 days before freezing. I think aging at least 24 hours improves the texture, and that older chickens are better with longer aging, up to perhaps 5 days in the refrigerator for fowl. The properly aged bird should retain a very fresh clean smell with no hint of taint. I've read that chickens that are to be frozen need not be aged first if they will remain at least a month in the freezer. However, that advice may have been based on industrial meat lines, butchered very young. For historic breed chickens butchered at 12 weeks or older, freezer aging may not be enough. If a chicken was not aged in the fridge for at least 24 hours before freezing, then after thawing I usually will allow it another day or more to age in the fridge, before cooking.

An important generality about the difference between cooking modern meat line chickens and cooking historic breed chickens is that for the latter there is a bigger distinction in time needed to cook the light and dark meat. Modern meat line chickens, being all butchered within a very young age range, all have leg meat nearly as tender as the breast meat, which will cook about as fast. The historic breed chicken has had more exercise over a longer time before it is butchered, which greatly increases flavor but also increases cooking time for those muscles. This becomes noticeable in the fryer age range: the breast meat of a fryer will reach optimal doneness noticeably before the legs. The difference increases as the butchering age increases, and seems pronounced in birds over one year. The cook has to plan how to prevent the breast meat from getting overcooked, and dry, by the time the leg meat is done. Good cooks will find many ways to achieve this end, and the results are well worthwhile.

The traditional classifications indicate the ages best suited to different cooking methods. Broilers are the youngest and tenderest chickens and can be cooked by quick dry heat methods. At the broiler age range, up to 12 weeks old, historic breed cockerels are quite slim and usually under 2 pounds carcass weight. Due to the tenderness of youth as well as their slim proportions, they are suited to broiling, whole or split in half, by direct heat such as in the oven broiler or outdoor grill.

The traditional fryer age is up to about 20 weeks old with the bird usually not weighing more than 4 pounds. At this age cockerels have had a lot more exercise and have developed wonderful flavor, but should still be tender enough to cook by dry heat methods - though to cook evenly they usually have to be jointed. Egg breed cockerels are reputed to be excellent fryers, and at that age range may be as meaty relative to their smaller bone size as the cockerels of heavier breeds. Fried chicken is really worth the mess and calories, at least occasionally, with home raised fryers.

The roasting age range specified for historic pure breeds is from 5 months to about one year, but most traditional roasters will be butchered between 6 and 9 months. This age range is expected to have much richer flavor. General purpose breed roasters can be baked uncovered in the oven at moderate temperatures. But open pan baking requires frequent basting. I find it easiest to get consistently great results throughout the wide roaster age range by using an old graniteware "chicken roaster" that has a tight fitting lid. This type of dark enameled roasting pan was designed to retain moisture and brown the bird without taking the cover off. (Good browning may not happen in a roasting pan with cover made of shiny metal.) If the cockerel is over 10 months old, I'll usually put in a cup of water. Baked at about 325 degrees Fahrenheit (F) for about 30 minutes to the pound, without removing the cover, they do not need basting and the skin browns nicely. The breast should still be moist and not overcooked when the legs and thighs are tender; if that doesn't happen, try a lower temperature and more minutes to the pound. It also helps to cook the bird with the breast down.

General purpose breed cockerels are usually from 4 to 6 lbs carcass weight at roaster age. Historic meat breed cockerels should surpass the weight of general purpose breed cockerels at some point in the roaster age range, and their flavor should be equally wonderful. While I believe egg breed cockerels should make fine small roasters, they may require moist heat cooking at an earlier age range since they reach maturity significantly younger than the heavier breeds.

Hens and roosters butchered at older than one year, classified as "fowl", make very fine eating also. This class was perhaps the most commonly eaten and least seasonal type until the mid-20th century. But today mature fowl is rarely available, unless you keep your own flock or know a farmer who does. It is essential to use moisture and low temperatures in cooking hens and roosters over 1 year old.

It will take hours longer to cook fowl, but the meat is richly flavored and was esteemed for sandwiches, chicken salad, pot pie and all recipes calling for cooked chicken meat. Fowl will become just as tender as younger chickens as long as it is kept moist and the meat temperature is kept low, preferably below 180 F. If the meat temperature goes above 180 F, the protein fibers toughen so that even if it is cooked long enough to fall apart, the individual fibers remain tough. When stewing, the water should not be allowed to boil, but should be kept at a simmer temperature, 180 F or less. Fowl can also be steam-baked with 1 or 2 cups water added to the pan; the pan should be tightly covered so the moisture won't escape, with the oven temperature at 300-325 F.

Whether stewed or steam-baked, the breast meat of fowl will be best (especially good for sandwiches) if it is removed as soon as it is done, which may be a couple of hours before the dark meat is done. I allow at least 3 hours to cook a 3 1/2 to 4 lb hen.

Some prefer the electric slow cooker for stewing chickens. The only slow cooker I've tried allowed the meat temperature to get too high, 200 F or higher. Perhaps others have better slow cookers.

A great advantage of the historic chicken breeds over modern meat lines is discovered when making broth. It is hard to make good broth out of supermarket chicken. They are so young that there is just not much flavor in them to make a good strong broth (and in the process the meat becomes tasteless mush). Our ancestors knew and greatly appreciated the rich flavor of strong chicken broth. Historic chicken breeds can all be expected to produce superb broth.

There are basically two methods for making chicken broth. One is to stew the chicken. With this method,

flavor goes out of the meat and into the water, so to protect meat flavor, use only 3/4 to 1 cup water per pound. Fowl is the best choice for this method of making broth because fowl has the most flavor. A 4 lb. stewing hen can be gently simmered in enough water to produce between 1 and 1 1/2 quarts of rich broth, while retaining good flavor and texture in the meat. Do not allow the meat to boil.

Another method of making broth is to use the bones and skin from baked chicken (like Thanksgiving turkey soup). Simply add water and simmer on the stovetop for a couple of hours. This method makes decent broth from chickens that are much younger than 1 year (though older are still better). According to one cookbook, for a rich broth the proportion should be about 2 cups water for every cup of bone and meat scrap. I expect to get about 4 to 6 cups of rich brown broth from the bones and skin of a roaster or old hen that was first oven cooked. Bones and skin from baked chickens can be saved in the freezer until there is enough to do a large batch of broth at one time.

Usually cookbooks that give directions for cooking fowl specify “stewing hens” and don't say anything about roosters. Some modern books on raising chickens even say that old roosters are not good to eat. But, remember the old song, “She'll be comin' 'round the mountain”? It was the *old red rooster* that was going to be made into chicken and dumplings. From my own experience I'd guess that meal was worthy of song. The general purpose breed roosters I've butchered have been very good to eat, even when several years old. Properly stewed, the old rooster's meat has superb rich flavor and the texture is firm but tender, not dry, tough, or stringy. The rich broth from stewing an old rooster is truly wonderful. Use more than 1 cup water per pound when stewing a rooster; roosters yield significantly more strong rich broth than hens.

For more information and recipes well suited to all the traditional meats that can be produced from the historic breeds of chickens, look to old cookbooks from before the 1950s. Here are some favorites:

*Fowl and Game Cookery*, by James Beard, 1944.

*Better Homes and Gardens Cook Book*, 1941.

*The Modern Family Cookbook*, by Meta Given, 1942

*Let's Cook It Right*, by Adelle Davis, 1947, 1962, 1970.

Some cautions regarding old cookbooks are in order. Those from the mid-1800s and earlier can be very hard to follow. The older the cookbook, the sketchier the instructions seem to be, and the more likely they are to use unfamiliar terms. Cookbooks from the late 1800s and later are the easiest to decipher and tend to give more complete instructions.

Don't believe it when a cookbook tells you hairs on the chickens are a bad sign or that they mean the bird is old. The hairs are just filoplumes, a hair-like feather, whose presence and length is variable and not directly related to age. People commonly used to singe them off. They can also be plucked with tweezers, or left on if they don't bother you.

Another old cookbook caution is outdated ideas about food safety and bacteria. Some say you can stuff a chicken the day before you cook it, which is now considered a dangerous practice. Some old cookbooks also say chicken can be stored at temperatures well above what is now considered safe.

Aside from these sorts of cautions, what old cookbooks say about cooking chickens is generally true for historic breeds. After all, those were exactly the chickens that were familiar to cooks then. No one would have known what to do with a 6 or 7 pound, 9-week old supermarket chicken. The size would have made an impression, as would the bland flavor.

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