

AGHA Pigtales

Summer 2008

Newsletter of the American Guinea Hog Association

Volume I Issue I



Frisky in Wisconsin snow

Four Score and Seven Pigs Ago...

The AGHA is finishing its second (full) year of operation. It's a good time to reflect on why we are here, what we have done, and where we are going. I think it is especially important because as I watch the list serves and the arguments take place in the guinea world; our discussions are often more broad and far reaching than our organization. In this way we are like teenagers who want to do more than maybe they are ready for. This is not a slam, but a comment on perhaps how unaware our membership is on the history of the organization and the rarity of our breed.

When I got into guineas almost a decade ago, there were less than a handful of active breeders, and some of them were losing interest. There wasn't a market for their pigs. No one knew what guineas were, and those who did had a hard time finding them. There were also a handful of folks who had older animals who were passed their productive life, but whose owners were interested in restarting their project. There were a total of maybe 40 animals or so spread around. By three years ago when we decided (with urging from the

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Getting Started: Housing

Some of you may be entering the world of guinea hogs with little or no livestock experience. *Getting Started* is here to give you examples of what has worked for other guinea hog owners. It will feature a different topic each issue. This time we look at housing.

Several people sent in pictures and descriptions of the shelters they use for their hogs. As you will see, housing for your guinea hogs doesn't need to be elaborate.

Matty Evans lives in New Hampshire where temperatures can range from -10° in the winter to 100°F in the summer. He has successfully housed his guinea hogs, Sully and Lola, in shelters made from pallet wood and metal roofing panels. In summer the shelters are open on one side. For winter Matty adds a fourth wall with an opening big enough for the hogs to get through.



Sully and Lola's "summer shelter"

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Calendar

September 19-21

The American Livestock Breeds Conservancy is holding its annual conference at Tillers International, Scotts Michigan. For more information go to: <http://www.albc-usa.org/conference2008/conf2008.html>

The AGHA has been invited to participate in the workshops. We have been asked to create a poster for display. Please send your guinea hog photos to Jim at:

president@guineahogs.org

AGHA will be holding a membership meeting at the ALBC conference.

Welcome to the AGHA Newsletter

Welcome to the first issue of the AGHA newsletter. I hope you find it informative. Comments, suggestions and articles are welcome. Send them to Nancy at gdknncy@yahoo.com. Thanks. Unless otherwise noted, articles are written by Nancy Gaedke.

To be off the critical list we need to have more than 200 piglets born each year.



Brambleberry Farm piglets

4 Score cont. from p 1.

ALBC) that we needed a registry to track the genetics of such a small population and promote the breed, there were 9 or ten folks involved. Now the AGHA has 40 members. There are almost two hundred hogs in the registry, and more that are unregistered. When folks have questions or are interested in more information, there is a place to get it. The AGHA started the yahoo list serve for everyone, and the member's list serve to go over organizational stuff. There is a website and most importantly, a registry.

I am partly motivated in writing this because I have heard grumblings from folks who seem to think the organization is not running exactly as they would like.

That may be true. Breeders are notorious splitters. 'The way I do it is the best, and rest of you are ignorant.' It's the old adage of getting 5 horse people together and asking them how to handle a certain problem and you'll get 5 different emphatic answers. Many breeds go the multiple registry route. There are several Soay registries, and I think 3 Dexter registries. For the guinea hog, we are talking about a small population and a relatively new organization. In order to work together to bring this breed back from the brink of extinction we need to give a little, have a little patience, and a good nature about doing a good work. We've got to remember that there are only around 200 of these animals on the ground. If you care enough about livestock to have researched breeds and seek something like a guinea out, then you know what a challenge it is and will be to increase and maintain a genetically healthy population. The organization and registry are critical to this. The ALBC critical list for hogs measures how many replacement animals are born every year. To be off the critical list we need to have more than 200 piglets born every year. Right now we are still at only that many animals- and that's assuming the registrar is aware of any of our mortalities to remove those animals from the list- which is probably not happening much. It is also statistically true that many rare breeds breeders stay in it for only about 10 years. That means we need to be getting new folks to take over as the others get out.

In addition it has been found that guineas are a truly unique population. The initial

ALBC genetics test we participated in a few years back did not find a similar pig family that it was related to. As an example, mulefoot hogs are very rare. They are also Spanish in origin and other Spanish hog types throw occasional mule footed animals. To do a breed back program you could find a similar hog type and use it without diluting too much. We on the other hand, have a challenge. We have what is currently believed to be a unique population. So we want to try and do a good job first of bringing back the breed without mixing. There are leads that show guineas may have special attributes that may help in curing diabetes as well. Unique genetics may offer a host of attributes which are yet undiscovered. As industrial agriculture becomes more reliant on fewer breeds, and inbreeding becomes problematic, a unique outlier is also an insurance policy for our food supply. I know I am preaching to the choir, but I want to reinforce in you the importance of the choice you have made to conserve this breed.

So please, support the AGHA. Run for the board. Volunteer to help out. Send in your registrations and keep current on your membership. Try to research family lines, preserve the ones we have, and start your own lines. Be patient while waiting for animals to come available. Be patient that not everyone agrees on pricing, on sales strategies and personal motivations. No one is getting rich off of these animals. Everyone, we hope, is in this because they are trying to do the right thing while having

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useful animals in the process. We want a homestead hog and our ancestors did the breeding work for us. What a blessing. Like the country or the planet as a whole, we can argue and disagree, but we are in this together. This organization is by us and for us, so let's help each other. If we can conserve this bit of living history, and continue and promote its benefits to the present and the future, we will have done something right for our children. This is a practical example of conservation that we all are actively involved in. And for that, I thank you.

Don Oberdorfer,
AGHA member

Getting Started Cont.

Hay is used for bedding and gets changed every couple of months.

Donal Parks of Maryland uses an old compost bin for his hogs. "Inside the hog's main pen is an old compost bin, covered, from years ago. The former owner of this place over-engineered everything he built so this stands up to the hog's scratching and pushing. The bin has two compartments and all three hogs huddle in one or the other compartment at night. Each compartment is probably three feet square."

Donal uses straw or mulch hay for bedding. "I'll throw in a bale every now and then when the bedding gets thin. I don't know what they do with the bedding but it disappears over time."

In central Texas Maggie Devans has "a rectangular little barn for our sow and boar. It is built of

plywood and a 'patio' of concrete. We put fresh hay inside the sleeping quarter. We have also put a short board across the entrance to keep babies in the first two days. Daisy and Dutch have no problem with the rectangle building or the 4 inch board across the front. They automatically go in at night without coaxing. We poured the concrete a few feet wider than their little barn so they can get up out of the mud when they choose. We put the back of the little barn to the north and the opening is to the south where our prevailing winds come from in the summer. We left a couple of small openings in the base of the barn, so if needed, we can hose it out. So far the pigs have kept it amazingly clean."



Daisy and Dutch reside here

Wisconsin's -20° didn't phase Nancy Gaedke's four guinea hogs this past winter. Housed in a small 'horse barn' they burrowed into the 2 feet deep straw to keep warm. "A hog panel was used to keep the hogs at one end of the barn, away from the chickens and geese but really to keep them out of the birds' food."

For the summer each pair is in a pen made of four hog panels with a hut from Farm Tek. They usually sleep out in the open and use the hut for shade or if it's raining."



Roxanne and Delphax by their FarmTek shelter

"I have had great success, housing wise, with a hoop house made by attaching two cattle panels to a wood frame" says Susan Wormersley of New York. "I used 2x6s for the long sides and 2x4s for the front and back pieces. They were notched and bolted together. The corners are braced, and the cattle panels (two overlapping) are attached with heavy-duty clips. The roofing material is roll roofing, but I don't think it's absolutely necessary - I was just worried about making it heavy enough to withstand high winds. Not that we get high winds, but you never know! The roofing is not attached - it was just cut into two long pieces and draped over. I put two long bungees from front to back, one on each side to keep it flat. Then I put the canvas tarp on top of that and bungeed and tied it well. I screwed on an upright bracing piece in the back (attached to the curve of the panel with another heavy-duty clip) and built a frame in the front. In the winter, I cut and attach side and top pieces with screws to provide more weather-proofing."

Upcoming articles will discuss feeding, watering, fencing/containment, farrowing. Please email your pictures and stories related to these topics to Nancy at gdknncy@yahoo.com.

Recommended Reading

A Conservation Breeding Handbook

By Carolyn Christman and D. Phillip Sponenberg.

According to the ALBC website this book “Explains the importance of livestock and poultry breeds and describes how individual breeders can be stewards of these genetic resources. Soft cover, 136 pages, 8 ½ x 7, illustrated. \$15.95.”

Of particular interest to guinea hog breeders as we work to increase the population and create different lines are two parts of the book, chapter 4, and chapters 9 and 10.

Chapter 4 defines terms such as inbreeding, linebreeding, linecrossing, and crossbreeding. It offers reassurance that Inbreeding can be used with good results. “Inbreeding has negative connotations for most breeders, but it can be a powerful tool to increase the consistency and uniformity of a population. Inbreeding has been used, either purposefully or accidentally, in the establishment of most breeds.”

The authors go on to explain some things to do to prevent the problems that can result from inbreeding.

Chapters 9 and 10 go into more specific detail about different breeding strategies. Two of these strategies are “A Conservation Program for Two Parallel Herds” and “The

Rescue of Livestock Populations with Very Small Numbers.”

This book is available through the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy website. <http://www.albc-usa.org/store/store-conservation.php>.

Do you know of a book that would be of interest to fellow guinea hog enthusiasts? Send in your suggestions for this article or, better yet, write a review.

Quote

When asked what challenges he has had with guinea hogs, Matty Evans replied, “I have had no issues at all. These hogs are easier than kids.”