



The American Livestock

Breeds Conservancy

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Conserving rare breeds since 1977

High on the Hog: The Guinea Hog Project

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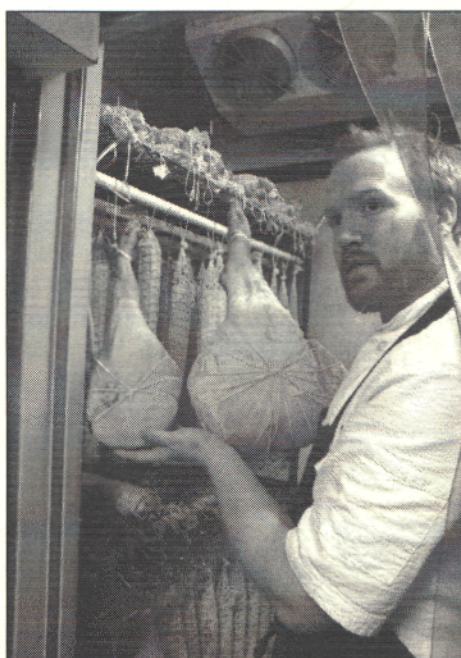
The Chef

This winter, ALBC staffers had the pleasure of meeting Executive Chef Craig Deihl of Cypress Restaurant in Charleston, South Carolina. Deihl holds many titles and awards including a 2010 James Beard Foundation nomination for Best Chef in the Southeast, but around the ALBC office he is affectionately known as “the guinea pig for the Guinea Hog.” Deihl is one of the first high-profile chefs in the country to work with the Guinea Hog breed and explore how it handles, tastes, cooks, and serves.

On a chilly mid-February afternoon, he invited us into his restaurant for a taste, both figuratively and literally, of his efforts to save one of America’s most endangered swine breeds. Just a few years ago, there were fewer than 75 of these animals in the entire United States. Today, many breeders are giving these historic animals a second chance and Deihl is at the helm of getting this breed back onto the American dinner table.

Deihl’s excitement for this new endeavor is infectious. After welcoming us with his gracious Southern charm, he immediately flipped open his cell phone and scrolled through image after image of the hogs, the products, and the marvelous dishes he has served featuring the breed.

When asked what was different about working with this particular breed, he exclaimed, “The fat! The fat is amazing. The texture, the color, and the amount are all phenomenal.” Many chefs are afraid of fat, but not Deihl – he embraces it. In fact, his operation is set up to embrace the whole hog. Deihl receives the whole car-



Chef Craig Deihl compares the size of the hams from the Guinea Hog (left) and the Tamworth (right). The size of the Guinea ham is a testimony to the smaller size of the breed. Photo by ALBC staff.

cass directly from the processor and uses every ounce of product. On this particular day, we enjoyed Guinea Hog liver paté, pork belly, hams, shoulders, and more, all from the Guinea Hog. Each part had a unique flavor and style. Deihl also renders the Guinea Hog fat to make lard and uses some parts for charcuterie projects. He has even created an artisan meat CSA that will, in the future, offer Guinea Hog products.

Deihl understands that working with rare breeds requires a different approach to culinary art. Because there are so few animals on the ground, purchasing only prime cuts is not an option. These breeds must be used in their entirety. Deihl has embraced

this concept and purchases whole hogs from a regional producer, Gra Moore. Deihl also realizes that the Guinea Hog is a rare breed, meaning there is limited amount of product available. Deihl has dealt with this challenge by using the meat as a feature on his menu as opposed to a staple dish. While Deihl serves an important role in getting this breed back into the market, it is the unique working relationship that he has forged with the producer that makes the project possible.

The Producer

On a mid-summer afternoon, we visited with producer Gra Moore, owner and operator of Colonial Heritage Farms in Pamplico, South Carolina. Moore’s family has a long history with pigs in the region. His father once managed a similar breed, the Essex hog, on small river islands in North Carolina. When Moore’s father first saw Gra’s Guinea Hogs, he thought he was looking at his old Essex herd. This observation prompted ALBC to launch an ongoing investigation into possible links between the two breeds.

Moore first heard of Guinea Hogs after becoming a member of ALBC. He was looking for a small breed that would forage well on his property and enjoy the occasional treat of one of the 20-plus varieties of heirloom corn that are grown on the farm. As he decided which hog breed would be most appropriate for his small rural farm, the Guinea Hog quickly came to the top of the list.

Over the past several years, a sizeable herd has been developed at Colonial Heritage Farms, and in 2009 the time had come to begin thinking about ways to market the meat of these pigs. Because of their small

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Rare Breed Tales

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cattle, and the company kept a herd on the property numbering around 500 head. As roads came into the area in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the cattle disappeared and so did the days of the open range.

T. M. continued to ride Tackies throughout his life. Some of his favorites sported names such as Lucy and Tackalina. They were agile in the thick and thorny brush and swampy terrain of the area. Both horse and rider would often get scratched up on a good day's ride; however, the horse almost always had its head free of scratches. The horses avoided injuries to their faces by using their heads to find openings in the thick brush. When an opening was found, they would then push their bodies through in order to get to the other side of the prickly obstacle. Of course the rider was not so lucky and was rarely spared getting a few good scratches along the way. If no openings were found, the horses would opt to jump over as they were athletic like rabbits and could leap five feet or more in a single bound to get over an obstacle – a feat Tackies still demonstrate today.

As the afternoon wore on, T. M. and Ed continued recounting the time they

spent in the region hunting. Both were still amazed they ever survived their crazy adventures in the field. T. M. no longer has any cattle or Marsh Tackies but Ed still raises the horses on his farm not far from the site where T. M.'s great-great-grandfather is buried on Yonges Island. Ed's daughter Jennifer, an eighth generation Ravenel, has taken up the torch and will



T.M.'s family valued their Chinese geese as an "intruder alert system." They are a popular breed for weeding chores due to their active foraging habits. Photo by ALBC staff.

continue the family tradition of keeping Marsh Tacky horses, ensuring that they don't disappear as the old Woods cattle have.

The day slowly became late and it was time for Ed and me to go. We said our goodbyes to T. M. and his daughter. As I made my way to the car, I continued to absorb the images that T. M.'s stories created in my mind. As we drove away, we passed the old Bradley Pasture and not far from that was a Revolutionary War cemetery where veterans including William A. Washington (President Washington's cousin) lay at rest. Lowcountry history is hidden around every corner in Ravenel. I consider myself very lucky to hear about times passed and be able to document the glimpse of a time few remember. ♦

For more information about Pineywoods cattle, contact the Pineywoods Cattle Registry and Breeders Association, Julie Brown – Secretary/Treasurer, 183 Seburn Ladner Place, Poplarsville, MS 39470, (601) 795-4672, info@pcrba.org, www.pineywoodscattle.org

For more information about Marsh Tacky horses, contact the Carolina Marsh Tacky Association, 6685 Quarter Hoss Lane, Hollywood, SC 29449, (843) 906-2274, mashtacky@gmail.com, www.marsh tacky.org

Guinea Hog

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size and the propensity for this lard-type breed to put on body fat quickly, it was a challenge to determine what kind of niche market the Guinea Hogs would serve. Since little was known about the optimal processing time or the meat and carcass qualities of the breed, discussions between ALBC and Slow Food Charleston resulted in the recruitment of Chef Craig Deihl to investigate the meat potential of the breed.

Wasting no time, Deihl got to work on his first processed Guinea Hog in the fall of 2009. The first hog was processed at around ten months of age and had a finished weight of approximately 80 pounds. Deihl quickly discovered that the pork from a young Guinea Hog is exquisite. After reveling in the quality of the fat and the taste of the meat, Deihl decided to feature the Guinea Hog at the legendary Charleston Food and Wine Festival. To meet this



Producer Gra Moore holding a six-week-old Guinea hog piglet. Photo by ALBC staff.

demand, Deihl purchased more whole hogs from Moore. The second and third hogs were processed at a younger age, approxi-

mately nine months, and they had a dressed weight of approximately 60 pounds. The producer and chef are experimenting with the age at processing to determine the optimal processing time that meets the needs and desires of chef and that is still profitable for the producer.

The Breed

The Guinea Hog is a small, black breed of swine that is unique to the United States. Also known as the Piney-

woods Guinea, Guinea Forest Hog, Acorn Eater, and Yard Pig, the breed was once the most common pig breed found on homesteads in the Southeast. Today there are less than 200 in the country.

Guinea Hogs were once widespread and descriptions of them varied. Generally, the hogs were small, weighing 100-300 pounds, and black or bluish-black in color. They had upright ears, a hairy coat, and a curly tail. Beyond this, conformation varied, as hogs could have short or long noses and be "big boned," "medium boned," or "fine boned." It is likely that many strains of Guinea Hogs existed. Since most of these are extinct, it is now impossible to weave together all the threads of the Guinea Hog story into a single neat tapestry.

Guinea Hogs were expected to forage for their own food, eat rodents and other small animals, grass, roots, and nuts, and clean out garden beds. The hogs were also kept in the yard where they would eat snakes and thus create a safe area around the house. Guineas were hardy and efficient, gaining well on the roughest of forage and producing the hams, bacon, and lard essential for subsistence farming.

The Guinea Hog became rare in recent decades as the habitat of the homestead hog disappeared, and it survived only in the most isolated parts of the Southeast. During the 1980s, new herds of Guinea Hogs were established, partly in response to the pet pig market.



Chef Craig Deihl sharing images of a Guinea hog with a local Tamworth producer. In the background is a Guinea hog carcass just arriving from the processor. Photo by ALBC staff.

These hogs are great for small producers and are appropriate for use in diversified, sustainable agriculture. They are an excellent choice for those who need the services of hogs (such as grazing, rooting, tilling compost and garden soil, and pest control) and desire a small breed. Under such husbandry Guinea Hogs thrive, as they always have.

It is clear that the Guinea Hog is genetically distinct from improved breeds of hogs and merits conservation, but more research on the breed is needed. Like other traditional lard-type breeds, the Guinea Hog faces great obstacles to its conservation. These hogs do not produce a conventional market carcass because they are smaller and have more fat than is typically preferred today. The goal of Chef Deihl and producer Gra Moore is to find a niche market for the Guinea Hog; the breed may not be suited to grocery store shelves, but in the right hands there is great potential for them.

The Meat

Several members of Slow Food Charleston evaluated the taste of the Guinea Hog product. They each were served a pan-roasted loin, and they provided the following evaluations of key product characteristics.

Appearance: fat cap on loin crisps nicely to a golden brown; dark pink to a lighter pink

Aroma: fresh; sweet; earthy; fragrant

Texture: tender and firm; succulent; tender yet not mushy; tender and moist; fat explodes in mouth

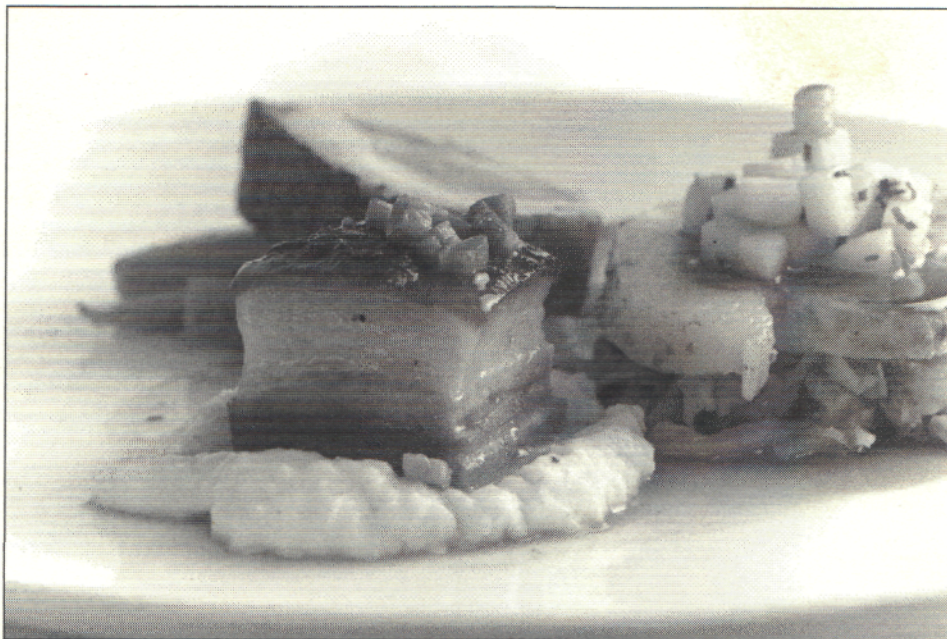
Flavor: nutty and beautiful; buttery and juicy very flavorful; delicious;

Overall, the tasters were very impressed

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Guinea Hogs are noted for their docile dispositions and ease of handling. These characteristics and others make them an ideal choice for the homestead or small farm. Photo by ALBC staff.



Guinea Hog products featured as main dishes. Front: pork belly with celery root-grits and smoked bacon jus. Right: grilled loin with cumin-orange carrots. Back: rye braised shoulder with savoy cabbage and bourbon glazed honey crisp apple. Photo by Rick McKee.

Guinea Hog

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with the meat. Each taster completed a scorecard for the dish, giving scores for appearance, aroma, texture, flavor, after-taste, and overall impression. The tasters scored the meat on a scale of 1 to 6 with 1 equal to unfavorable and 6 equal to exceptionally favorable. The Guinea Hog meat consistently scored 5 and 6 in all areas. One taster even commented, "I think this product has a real future with higher-end restaurants and consumers who seek out premium products with history and flavor."

At a recent dinner held at Deihl's

restaurant, the founder of Slow Food, Carlo Petrini, even commented that the Guinea Hog pork was better than the pork that he had at Buckingham Palace a few weeks prior.

Thanks to the guinea pigs, Gra Moore and Craig Deihl, these Guinea Hogs just might have an emerging market. ❖

To learn more about the Guinea Hog, contact the American Guinea Hog Association, Secretary, PO Box 719, New Boston, NH 03070, (603) 487-2137, AGHA@sullbarfarm.com, www.americanguineahog-association.org.

Chef Craig Deihl's Evaluations of the Guinea Hog

	Raw Product	Cooked Product
Variables	(Preparation/Handling Notes)	
Shape and Proportions	Normal looking with very large jowls, when the meat is cut there is lots of fat, almost 50% fat	Small muscles, lots of fat covering the carcass, for some it may be almost too much fat, but fat can be used in other ways
Smell	Fresh, clean smell	Nutty with a great pork flavor, very fresh
Fat Color and Content	Fat cover 2 inches thick and fat is stark white	White! White! White! Firm and delicious
Meat Color & Texture	Shoulder and ham was deep rich, red color	When cooked meat becomes very firm but very tender and the fat is very tender
Overall Flavor & Impressions	Very tender, slightly nutty flavor, unbelievable product	

From the Director

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of all of the herds, to promote and direct good breeding and husbandry practices, and to work with breeders and producers to identify or establish a market niche for their goats.

The planned rescue of the Spanish goat herd in South Carolina is an excellent example of ALBC in action and clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of the *Discover, Secure, Sustain* plan of action in achieving conservation results. Despite the project's merits, however, ALBC would not have been able to even consider taking action if it were not for the generosity of an anonymous donor. His gift enabled ALBC to plan and set the groundwork in place for the breed rescue and recovery effort. As a rare breed steward himself, our donor recognized that there is more to successful breed conservation than planning and short-term successes, so he made his gift in the form of a challenge grant. The challenge to ALBC as an organization is to raise a matching amount of \$5,000 for the rescue, temporary placement, and long-term stewardship and recovery of the South Carolina Spanish goats. In response to this challenge, ALBC has made meeting this challenge one of the goals of its summer fundraiser, the **Rare Breed Stewardship Society** appeal. If you are already member of the Society, please join me in making a gift, if you are not, this is an excellent opportunity to make a contribution that will have a lasting impact. ❖



The Spanish goat is a landrace and varies in appearance. Goats range in weight from 50 to 200 pounds and come in a variety of colors found in goats. Pictured: A doe and her kid on the island. Photo by ALBC staff.