



For Immediate Release

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A CHICKEN CHOOSIN' COMPARES NINE HERITAGE BREEDS

(Upperville, VA) — On July 13, 2009, food professionals, chefs, food writers, farmers and food aficionados gathered at Ayrshire Farm, in Upperville, Virginia, to participate in *A Chicken Choosin'*. The event was a blind tasting of chicken from nine Heritage breeds and an industrial strain of chicken, all reared under the same conditions. A formal panel of celebrity judges along with sixty guests ranked each breed on flavor, texture and appearance.

This event falls on the heels of the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy's (ALBC) announcement of its Heritage Chicken definition. The gathering gave food professionals, media and the general public an opportunity to learn more about the Heritage Chicken definition, culinary advantages of Heritage breeds and the important genetic contributions these breeds make to our food and agricultural systems. "These breeds not only taste good, they are genetically important," said Don Schrider, event facilitator and Large Livestock Manager for Ayrshire Farm.

The crowd was surprised to learn that ALBC is currently working to conserve the genetics of 37 breeds of chickens considered genetically endangered. Participants were even more stunned to learn that the global poultry industry is 90% dominated by one breed – the Cornish/Plymouth Rock (Corn Rock) hybrid – consequently decreasing the genetic diversity found in our food system.

The Heritage breeds tasted were the Buckeye, Delaware, Dominique, Dorking, Faverolle, Buff Orpington, Barred Plymouth Rock, Rhode Island Red and Speckled Sussex. For comparative purposes, an industrially bred Corn Rock cross was included. All of the Heritage breeds tasted are on ALBC's *Conservation Priority List* and are considered important for genetic conservation. Three of the breeds included in the tasting are *critically endangered*, having a population of fewer than 500 breeding birds in the United States.

The expert judges were the first to sample the meats. The celebrity judge panel included Tony Esnault, former Executive Chef for Alain Ducasse in New York City. Chef

Esnault is thought to be one of the most skilled chefs in America for his chicken preparations. Joining Chef Esnault, was Akiko Katayama, a freelance food writer and regular judge on the Food Network's *Iron Chef America*, James Beard Award winning Chef R.J. Cooper of Vidalia restaurant in Washington, DC, Bob Perry a trained chef and Chefs Collaborative board member, and Rob Townsend, Executive Chef at Ayrshire Farm.

Tasters judged the each chicken sample on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest. Samples were judged on flavor, texture and appearance.

Once the crowd and expert panel completed tasting and scoring the breeds, they were asked to vote for a first, second and third place winner and the votes were tallied.

The winner of the crowd vote was the Dorking. Second place was a tie between the Rhode Island Red and the industrially bred Corn Rock cross. Third place was a tie between the Dominique and the Buckeye.

After the crowd decided their favorite, the expert judge panel announced its winners, which were determined by consensus. The judges selected the Dorking and Corn Rock cross for first place. Second place was awarded to the Plymouth Rock and third to the Faverolle.

Judge Akiko Katayama added, "I had never tasted different breeds of chicken side by side before and I was surprised how diverse and profound the chickens' flavors can be."

All the chickens were raised at Ayrshire Farm under the same conditions. They were all raised on pasture and fed organic feed. They were all processed at 16 weeks, with the exception of the Corn Rock cross which grows twice as fast and needed to be processed at 7-8 weeks.

Each chicken had been soaked in a brine mixture for 24 hours prior to being roasted in a convection oven for 30-45 minutes. Each chicken was cut into bite-sized pieces and the pieces were presented in covered dishes at numbered stations; the breeds were not identified by name. Participants used numbered toothpicks to obtain samples and were given a numbered scorecard for recording their results. Tasters were given the opportunity to try both white and dark meat from each breed.

Head Chef at Griffin Tavern in Flint Hill, Virginia, Victor McLawhorn commented, "Heritage chickens definitely have a richer flavor than the average chicken." He was pondering how he could incorporate the flavors into some of his signature dishes such as chicken and dumplings. "It melts in your mouth," he added, referring to the Heritage chicken meat.

A Chicken Choosin' was produced through a partnership of the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy, Chefs Collaborative, Humane Farm Animal Care, Slow Food USA, and Ayrshire Farm.

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About the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy:

The American Livestock Breeds Conservancy is a nonprofit membership organization working to protect over 150 breeds of livestock and poultry from extinction. Included are asses, cattle, goats, horses, sheep, pigs, rabbits, chickens, ducks, geese and turkeys. Founded in 1977, ALBC is the pioneer organization in the U.S. working to conserve historic breeds and genetic diversity in livestock. ALBC's mission is to ensure the future of agriculture through genetic conservation and the promotion of endangered breeds of livestock and poultry.

For the official definition of Heritage Chicken, visit www.heritagechicken.org.

Celebrity Judge Picks:

Each expert judge chose their individual favorite breed based on flavor, texture, and appearance.

- **Chef R.J. Cooper** of Vidalia restaurant in Washington, DC chose the Rhode Island Red.
- **Chef Tony Esnault** a French chef, previously of Alain Ducasse at the Essex House in NY, chose the Faverolle.
- **Akiko Katayama:** Asian food writer and regular guest judge on Iron Chef America chose the Corn Rock cross.
- **Bob Perry** of Chefs Collaborative chose the Dorking.
- **Chef Rob Townsend:** Executive Chef for Ayrshire Farm chose the Sussex.

About the Heritage Breeds Tasted

Note: Breed status is according to ALBC's Conservation Priority List. For a full explanation of how breeds are placed on the Conservation Priority List and how breed status is determined, please contact ALBC.

- **Buckeye**

Status: Critical

Buckeyes were developed by Mrs. Nettie Metcalf of Warren, Ohio, and appropriately named after the "Buckeye State." Buckeyes are unique in the American Class of chickens in that it is the only breed created entirely by a woman. The Buckeye is a dual-purpose breed of chicken with a deep, lustrous red color of plumage. They have yellow legs and skin, and, thanks to their pea comb, are very cold-weather hardy. They are people friendly. They are a very active fowl and are noted for being especially vigilant in the pursuit of mice.

- **Delaware**

Status: Critical

Delawares, originally called "Indian Rivers," are an American breed developed by George Ellis of Delaware in 1940 and were used for the production of broilers. Delawares make an excellent dual-purpose bird. It has well-developed egg and meat qualities, and a calm and friendly disposition. The breed is noted for rapid growth and fast feathering of the chicks.

- **Dominique**

Status: Watch

The Dominique chicken is recognized as America's first chicken breed. The Dominique was plentifully bred on American farms as early as the 1820's, where these birds were a popular dual-purpose fowl. The Dominique chicken is medium-sized, sporting a black and white feather pattern known as "cuckoo". This plumage coloration is also referred to as hawk-colored and serves the Dominique in making the bird less conspicuous to predators. Although categorized as a dual-purpose breed, these birds are first

and foremost egg producers with hens historically averaging 230-275 small- to medium-sized brown eggs.

- **Dorking**

Status: Threatened

The Dorking breed is named for the southern English town of Dorking. The English bred the bird as a table bird, renowned for its fine-textured, very white meat. The breed is known for having 5 toes, its calm and docile temperament and its ability to adapt to a variety of climates. They are good foragers and are an ideal choice for a backyard setting. They lay large, creamy white eggs.

- **Faverolle**

Status: Critical

The Faverolle was named for a village in France. It's a dual-purpose breed and is known for its strong production of brown eggs even in winter. The Faverolle makes an excellent backyard bird and is reported to be particularly good with kids.

- **Buff Orpington**

Status: Recovering

The Orpington was first developed in England. The most well known variety of this breed is the Buff Orpington which first appeared in 1894. It wasn't until after the 1895 poultry exhibition at Madison Square Garden, New York, that the buff variety of the breed enjoyed popularity as a farm fowl in the United States. The first trait that is noticed with the Orpington is its "massive" low-lying appearance. These chickens have a good rate of growth and produce a fine table fowl. The hens are reliable layers of tasty brown eggs and lay well even into the winter months producing close to 200 eggs per year on average.

- **Barred Plymouth Rock – Non-Industrial**

Status: Recovering

The Plymouth Rock was developed in America in the middle of the 19th century. The Barred Plymouth Rock is one of 8 color varieties of the Plymouth Rock, which became popular very rapidly, and in fact, until World War II, no breed was ever kept and bred as extensively as the Barred Rock. Its popularity came from its qualities as an outstanding farm chicken: hardiness, docility, broodiness, excellent production of brown eggs, and meat. This chicken has a bright red single comb, face, wattles, and earlobes. The plumage should have feathers that are crossed by sharply defined, regular, parallel bars of alternate light and dark color. A highly selected strain of the White Plymouth Rock is the genetic basis for the industrial Corn Rock cross.

- **Rhode Island Red – Non-Industrial**

Status: Recovering

Originally developed in Massachusetts and Rhode Island in the 1880s, the Rhode Island Red is not only America's best known breed, but is perhaps the world's best known fowl. The originators of the Rhode Island Red wanted to create a bird that could lay many eggs yet dress out nicely as a table bird. As a result, the breed is one of the most successful dual-purpose birds, and remains an excellent farm chicken. The Rhode Island Red is known for its hardiness and its ability to handle marginal conditions while still producing eggs. The industrial Rhode Island Red is often crossed with a White Leghorn so that it produces lots of brown eggs. These are commonly referred to as Production Reds.

- **Speckled Sussex**

Status: Threatened

The most common utility breed in England for nearly a century, the Sussex provided meat and eggs for the London market. The early history of the breed is unknown, but it was an established breed in England by 1845. The Sussex is highly adaptable breed, able to thrive in confinement or on free range. The breed is known to be calm but curious. The Sussex lays a moderate number of medium sized eggs.