



FROM THE *PINEYWOODS*

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Conserving the Pineywoods

The Newsletter of the Pineywoods Cattle Registry and Breeders Association

← SPRING 2007 FEATURING
ENDANGERED BREEDS
OF THE SOUTH

Spring Calendar

April 20-22, 2007. The PCRBA annual spring meeting will be held the 3rd weekend in April at the farm of Fred Diamond in Saucier, Mississippi. After lunch at 12 noon, the Board of Directors will meet at 1:00pm prior to the regular business meeting at 2:00pm on Saturday, April 21. Tours of farms will follow Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning. Directions to the Diamond Farm and lodging information are printed on page 4.



Waiting for the show to start. The first 10 of 80 participants feature PCRBA founding breeders Virgil Berry and Mitch Amason in the foreground.

ALBC WORKSHOP HELD IN HATTIESBURG, MS

PCRBA was a major participant in the ALBC anniversary program and dinner held in Hattiesburg, MS on March 2 & 3, 2007. Speakers from all over the U.S. addressed the workshop theme "Using and Marketing Traditional Southeastern Livestock" featuring Pineywoods cattle, Gulf Coast sheep, Spanish goats, and Cotton Patch geese. The purpose of this workshop was to help us find better ways of marketing and selling our livestock to improve our farms' profitability, encourage others to begin breeding the animals we raise, and promote sustainability in agriculture. Hosted by the Oral History Department on the campus of USM of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, participants enjoyed sharing information, lunch, and, on Friday night, March 2, a dinner featuring Pineywoods beef, Gulf Coast lamb, and pork at Seasons restaurant in Hattiesburg. Some of the finest chefs from Hattiesburg and New Orleans prepared an unforgettable feast from animals contributed by Justin Pitts.

On the next few pages is some of the information that made the trip down, over, and up worth the travel. We learned about...

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Prime Movers in the March ALBC event in Hattiesburg: Marjorie Bender, ALBC Research and Technical Program Manager, Poppy Tooker, Culinary Activist, Chairperson of Slow Food USA Ark of Taste Committee & founder of the New Orleans Convivium, and Justin Pitts, cattle breeder, PCRBA Treasurer & Board Member.

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President's Column.....by Jess Brown

Thanks are again due, this time to the organizers, speakers, and participants of the ALBC event in March and for the great job ALBC did in promoting our heritage breeds in style and taste. We Pineywoods folks all need to join ALBC and can do so by mailing in the enclosed form with check. See you at the PCRBA Annual Meeting in April.



Marji Bender and John Guice share a moment of historic humor.

⇐ ...the Celts and the Pineywoods in *Herding Cultures in the Region* by John Guice, Emeritus Professor of the University of Southern Mississippi. Dr. Guice pointed to a vast culture, predominantly of Celtic origin, of cattle ranching that has permeated the southern coastal states for hundreds of years. Factors such as isolation and preoccupation of historians with the Civil War obscured this culture and its contributions to the history of cattle ranching in academic literature. In truth, the Old South West, ranging from Cumberland Gap to South Pass and from Georgia and the Carolinas to the Gulf states, deserves much credit for its role as a critical link to the story of the West. One hundred years ahead of the filmland “West,” this region practiced traditions such as cattle drives, herding on horseback, and Spanish ranching techniques and warrants serious attention from future scholars of our history.

⇒ ...agriforestry in *Pineywoods in the Piney Woods: Shaping the Landscape* by Bill Fritz, cattle breeder and Associate Provost & Professor of Geology at Georgia State University, who uses PW cattle to help manage and maximize the development of both beef and timber in what he calls “conservation” that promotes harmony between, not isolation from, man and nature, Bill’s cattle forage out the underbrush of the timberland, enabling the trees to flourish with more nutrients, light, room to grow. This practice also enhances wildlife habitats as well as timber and beef production..



⇐ ... strains of Pineywoods... registered, of course in *Strain*

Conservation and Breeding Strategies by Phil Sponenberg, Professor of Virginia-Tech and ALBC Technical advisor. Phil presented a diagram of the Pineywoods cattle strains and strategies for recovering strains on the verge of extinction. One aspect of his breeding strategy involves using a bull for only one or two seasons to prevent inbreeding and hasten the recovery of a genetic strain. Newcomers to breeding were advised to choose one strain that “resonates” in terms of characteristics. Details of Phil’s breeding strategy and a copy of his strain diagram can be found under “Articles by Dr. Sponenberg” on the PCRBA website www.pineywoodscattle.org the top of the home page.

↓ ...Guinea and Choctow Hogs (“Pigs are not for the faint of heart!”) in *The Status of Guinea and Choctow Hogs* featuring participants such as ALBC Board member Arie McFarlen from SD. Guinea hogs, the only true miniature on the continent. are 85-250 pounds, solid black, occasionally white footed or tipped and have more hair than bristle in the coat, semi-dish snouts, prick ears, and straight tails. Oddly the curly tails seem to come with domestication. They originated in the South; DNA may clarify exactly where. Arie’s fascination with hogs and pig is catching as she describes their dog-like temperament, interest in what is going on, and fondness for companionship.



While not herdable they get along well in herds of goats and sheep, but don’t rate well with cattle!

⇒ ...and heritage seed gatherers in *Conserving Culture in Agriculture Conservation* by Robert Rhoades and Virginia Nazarea, Southern Seed Legacy, Professors of Anthropology, University of Georgia-Athens. Many of us can identify with the “contrary” seed gatherers that Virginia and Bob have studied around the world—people who, like heritage breeders, buck the tide towards conformity and commercialism to preserve dying traditions and resources in livestock as well as crop preservation. Their recent purchase of Pineywoods cattle added a dimension to their heritage farm, *Agrarian Connections*, near Athens, GA that preserves the rural past. You can learn more about their exciting project at the website: www.lanta.uga.edu/rhoades/agconn



⇒ **...sheep** in *The Status of Gulf Coast Sheep* by David James & Tim Hassell, Gulf Coast Sheep Breeders Association. Both David and Tim told similar stories of coming back to traditional farming, connecting past to future.



⇒ **...geese** in *Conserving Cotton Patch Geese* by Tom Walker, goose and turkey breeder from Bastrop, TX. Tom's story also tells of a return to roots, beginning with a futile search for "snake-killing" geese and ending with rediscovery of the beautiful Cotton Patch Geese, featured in the picture, that he remembered from his boyhood. Tom's breeding program focuses on traits such as eye, foot, and feather color used to trace the ancestry of various birds. He uses a number of interesting techniques to enhance his research. For example, to determine purity, each goose sets on her own eggs so he can identify and trace characteristics.



↑ From David James: "As I grew up I often thought to myself that when I left the farm I would never return to farming. This was primarily because I did not like the work associated with raising crops like hoeing Johnson grass from the fields and gardens. I discovered Gulf Coast sheep in the 1980s and the Pineywoods cattle in the 1990's. Rita and Katrina were disastrous but very well could have been devastating to the Pineywoods cattle and Gulf Coast sheep breeds and might have wiped out entire bloodlines."



↑ Tim Hassell's journey from past to future began in a Southern community of the 1930's isolated geographically, culturally, economically and educationally. He grew up with no phones or radios and 130 years of the same livestock. Why replace something that was already working? When it came time to return, his search for the old reliable plants and animals brought him back to the Gulf Coast Sheep.



⇐ **...answers** in *A facilitated discussion of conservation successes and challenges* by Phil Sponenberg and Marjorie Bender. The discussion touched on several topics including Mulefoot hogs, donkeys, breeding vs high egg production, flying geese, and the importance of breeding best animal vs best bull with a final note that *survival goes up in natural settings*.

⇒ **...and anything else we want to know about** by the team of experts in *A facilitated discussion of rare breed products with those in the business* by Marjorie Bender, ALBC (see page 1); Barbara Bowman, Boss Dog Marketing, ALBC Board member, & Slow Food USA Ark of Taste Committee Member; Sandy Lerner, owner, Ayrshire Farm, & ALBC Board Member; Poppy Tooker, Culinary Activist, Chairperson of Slow Food USA Ark of Taste Committee & founder of the New Orleans Convivium; Chris Cagle, owner, New Yokel Market, Hattiesburg; and James Bremer, Specialty Produce Purveyor, New Orleans

Marjorie Bender opened the discussion with a quick overview of ALBC goals for the future that includes promoting future and health oriented preservation of genetically diversified, humane, organic, grass and range-fed livestock management to counteract profit driven production trends towards reliable repeatable units. What emerged from this open discussion falls into two topics: breeding programs and marketing programs.

For breeding, Phil Sponenberg emphasized that goals determine breeding. First identify what you want out of your stock—preservation, taste, looks, size—then design your program to produce these results. For marketing, Barbara Bowman proposed niche marketing to targeted



customers. Chris Cagle brought up the problem of finding organic and local foods. He advised three keys to marketing: (1) focus on health, (2) persuade community that buying local rebuilds local economy, and (3) promote flavor, or, as Poppy Tooker said, "I care most about taste!"

Jim Bremer also remarked on the difficulty of obtaining this specialty beef and his realization of how difficult it is for ranchers to find certified meat processors which he called the "elephant in the room." In response, Sandy Lerner offered help that included a graduated pricing system for beef based on certifications in rare/heritage, organic, humane, and predator friendly categories.



...and, of course, festivities featuring rare, heritage beef, pork, and lamb from the farm of Justin Pitts to the plates of our ALBC participants via some of the best chefs in New Orleans and courtesy of Poppy Tooker of ALBC Slow Foods Arc of Taste.



Guest chef answering questions after dinner.



Special Thanks to front line person Jennette Beranger, ALBC Research & Tech Program Mgr

PCRBA Annual Meeting (continued from page 1)

Directions to Diamond Ranch (from Mobile, AL): Fred Diamond, 19152 Diamond Rd, Saucier, MS 39574.

From I-65 near Mobile, AL, pick up I-10 W via Exit 0 toward Mississippi crossing into Mississippi. Merge onto US 49N/Hwy 49 via Exit 34B towards Hattiesburg/Hospital/Gulfport-Biloxi Int'l Airport/Navy Seabee Center. Turn left onto Pine Street and go .2 miles. Turn Right onto Old Highway 49 and go less than .1 mile. Turn left onto Diamond Rd/Fred Diamond Rd and go 1.7 miles. End at the Diamond Ranch.

Motels: Magnolia Plantation Hotel (3 out of 5 stars) 16391 Robinson Rd, Gulfport, MS; (228) 832-8400

Holiday Inn Express-Gulfport (3 out of 5 stars) »9435 Hwy 49, Gulfport, MS (228) 864-7222

Hampton Inn Gulfport – (3 out of 5 stars) 9445 Highway 49, Gulfport, MS (228) 575-6773

Announcements:

#1. Info about ox teams needed. In the next issue, we would like to focus on ox teams—pictures, history, training techniques, and stories. Please send whatever you have on this topic. Thanks, Bonnie Fritz, 795 Cape Road, Carnesville, GA 30521, 404-314-3020, bonnie@pineywoodsbeef.com.

#2. New Breeders Welcome. PCRBA welcomes new breeders and offers our expertise and resources to help you choose, purchase, and acquire the right start-up herd for your farm, taste, and pocketbook. Please contact Justin Pitts for more information at 601-584-1035