



This picture goes with the article written by Alison Martin in the Livestock Conservancy newsletter. Although the article is written about the importance of registration, the sow shown in this picture would not be eligible for registration due to lack of wattles, which are a requirement.

Why Registration Matters

By Alison Martin

A recent question from a Livestock Conservancy member raised an important point that may resonate with many of you. “The Guinea Hogs that we have are all unregistered; registration, correct me if I'm missing some important aspect, seems more important if one is wanting to sell breeding stock instead of pork products,” writes a member in North Carolina.

Some of you will empathize with him – he’s raising pigs for his own freezer, selling to family and friends, and hoping to build a side market for charcuterie, as so many are now doing with Guinea Hogs. Why pay the extra money for registered stock? After all, the folks who raised these pigs 150 years ago on homesteads across the South sure didn’t register their pigs. Such a process didn’t even exist. And another thing, some breed registries take so long to get the paperwork back, is it really worth the hassle?

Others among you will feel quite differently – you may have spent years working to conserve your own breeds and build their numbers, using breed registration and promotion as tools to encourage interest and value in the breed. Maybe you’re the breed registrar and have dedicated hours, months, and years to making sure everyone gets their registration papers and helping folks use the pedigrees to make breeding decisions.

But why does registration really matter?

* Conserving rare breeds. All of us who raise rare breeds and work to conserve them do so because of the unique characteristics of that breed. Each has just the right adaptation, personality, performance, or appearance that makes it a breed. Conserving these characteristics means mating only within the breed; too many breeds have been lost when the purebreds used to create value in crossing weren’t maintained. The Livestock Conservancy calls this “crossbreeding out of existence.” One of the easiest ways to make sure that you and others are keeping the breed true to its own character is to use only registered purebred breeding stock, and to keep up with registrations. Breed registries are also the Conservancy’s main source of information to prioritize breed conservation – if animals aren’t registered, then it becomes very challenging to track improvements or declines in breed conservation status.

* Breed promotion. Maintaining and selecting for breed characteristics, ensures that the same things that attracted one breeder will attract new breeders. This is important even to those who are raising their animals for market products. Breeders who work together through the breed association raise the level of awareness for both products and breeding stock. One needs to look no further than the highly successful marketing program for Angus beef. By

registering animals, we support breed associations and their breed promotion efforts, which benefit all who raise the breed.

* Raising the value of your animals, or, who knows what the future will bring. Let's look at theoretical breeder Ms. Suarez, who raises pigs – let's call them the Super Heritage Breed. She is successful building a market for her animals, is able to increase the size of her herd, and naturally she keeps her best gilts for breeding. As Ms. Suarez learns what her customers want, she selects the gilts who can pass those characteristics to their offspring and who also developed into great mothers. Not only does her herd get bigger, they get better. In fact, in five years Ms. Suarez has a reputation for having really good quality breeding stock, and other breeders approach her wanting to buy a boar. But she never anticipated selling breeding stock, so none of her pigs are registered. Wanting to make extra money by selling registered breeding stock, she asks the Super Heritage registry for the procedure, only to be told that they have a closed herdbook and that her wonderful breeding stock cannot be registered. By not planning ahead, Ms. Suarez can't take advantage of the market for purebred breeding stock, even as a sideline to her meat business. She has also inadvertently removed her stock from the gene pool, and the improvements she has made to her stock are lost to the breed rather than providing a lasting contribution.

If your current breeding stock is registered, thank you for contributing to the future of the breed! If not, consider getting your registrations up to date or adding some registered breeding animals to your herd over time. Doing so will help ensure that your herd's legacy will influence the breed for generations to come.

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Photo Caption: The Livestock Conservancy depends on breed registries as its main source of information to prioritize breed conservation. Pictured are a Red Wattle sow and piglets owned by Josh Wendland in Barnes, Kansas.

The Livestock Conservancy is a nonprofit membership organization working to protect nearly 200 breeds of livestock and poultry from extinction. Included are sheep, donkeys, cattle, goats, horses, pigs, rabbits, chickens, ducks, geese and turkeys. Founded in 1977, The Livestock Conservancy is America's leading organization working to conserve historic breeds and genetic diversity in livestock. To learn more about the Conservancy's work and to become a member, visit www.livestockconservancy.org.

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