

The Rare Hare Barn

It may seem counterintuitive to claim that raising heritage rabbits for meat is a way to keep breeds alive; yet this is the same logic that turns vegetarians into stewards of sustainable meat. Continuing in traditional rabbitry practices, Eric and Callene Rapp run the Rare Hare Barn in Leon, Kansas.

Eric came in to rabbit raising naturally enough, as a third generation farmer and worked at the Sedgewick County zoo. As a senior zookeeper also at the Sedgewick County zoo, Callene holds a degree in Animal Science, works with rare breeds and serves on the board of the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy.



As Eric's parents were having health problems and the Rapps became increasingly dissatisfied with the nutritional and flavor values of industrial grade meat, they turned back to raising rabbits. Eric and Callene had their interest in heritage breeds piqued by experiences at Sedgewick. At first they only raised meat for family and friends. The choice to pursue rabbit raising came by way of a local meat processor, Krehbiels who expressed interest in carrying the Rapps' rabbits.



(Photo: American Fryer Rabbits)

Callene and Eric scoured the rabbit community to find reputable breeders to bring their business to a more commercial level. They still hunt down all the antique rabbit-raising books you can find on eBay and join all groups relating to raising rare hares.

Yet in the middle of cow country, or rather beef country, finding a market for rabbits is not easy. While three Kansas restaurants carry Rare Hare Barn meats, the Rapps also on orders from a wide range of chefs in locales as varied as Texas, NYC, and California.

The hardy breeds at Rare Hare can tolerate the blistering Kansas summers with help from an installed swamp cooler and their own large ears. The Rapps specialize in the seldom-bred Crème d'Argent, Blanc de Hotot, American Chinchilla, Silver Fox, and American. While raising rabbits in large cages and home blending feed take more work, the Rapps are happy to care for their rabbits. Callene knows the importance of looking after each animal and says, "The small amount of extra work is worth it". The Rapps sustain beautiful breeds in danger of disappearing and provide a healthy, ecological meal to their buyers and community.