



Endangered Mulefoot Hogs and Goat Yoga - Farming With a Purpose in Bond County

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POCAHONTAS, ILL. - Brought to the national spotlight by flash-in-the-pan country star Gretchen Wilson of “Redneck Woman” fame, the tiny town of Pocahontas, Illinois, which straddles the border of Madison and Bond Counties, again drew nationwide attention with a recent National Public Radio (NPR) story about the endangered American Mulefoot Hog.

The story of the mulefoot hog begins in Ancient Greece – as far as recorded history is concerned – with the great Greek philosopher Aristotle, who described them in circa 300 B.C.E. They were brought to the North American continent in the 1500s when the

Spanish decided to conquer South and Central America. Some of them were set free and farmed for food. They were a popular breed until the early 20th Century, when the hog's slow growth rate and need for foraging made it cumbersome for farmers to continue breeding, but it is still known as being delicious.

It is that taste breeders of the now-endangered hog hope brings it back from the brink. The mulefoot hog is down to around 600 registered specimens across the United States. Much like show dogs, these animals are checked for certain physical features and genetics to ensure they are – in fact – mulefoot hogs. Characteristics indicative of the special hog include black skin and hair as well as the lack of cloven hooves. Mulefoot hogs have one single hoof on each foot – giving it the distinction of “mulefoot” as their hooves appear more similar to that of a mule than their fellow pigs.

They also do have a slower growth rate than most hogs and aren't nearly as muscular. Their meat is also red instead of the usual “other white meat” designation other pork products tout. They have a good fat content, as well, which several people describe as being “delicious.”

“Another thing that might be confusing for people is how we can EAT an endangered species,” Alicia Davis, who breeds these hogs in Pocahontas said in an email to Riverbender.com. “And the answer is: If there is not an interest in this animal for the dinner table, it WILL go extinct. This hog fell out of favor with breeders and farmers when commercial farms and concentrated feeding operations – big hog buildings where hogs never see the light of day – became all the rage. An estimated 97 percent of hogs never even see the light of day! Slow-growing hogs thrive on pasture.”



Davis runs Green-Finned Hippy Farm, which is the only registered breeder for these hogs in the State of Illinois. Davis said she once traveled in 10-hour round trip to get a non-related male for breeding purposes. They are sponsored in part through small grants through St. Louis-based Slow Grow, which is an organization dedicated to bringing the mulefoot hog from the brink of extinction.

“Because of their numbers, it's hard to find a registered boar for breeding that isn't related to the rest of the stock,” Davis said.

Since the story of the mulefoot hog ran on NPR last year, Davis said her farm has been able to spread awareness of the unsung endangered species not protected by federal laws.

“These hogs aren't protected like the bald eagle was,” she said. “It's up for small farmers to keep this lineage going.”

Spurred to raise the hogs by well-known St. Louis chef, Joshua Galliano, Davis said her operation started in 2014. Green-Finned Hippy Farm was originally named for talapia fish it was raising. Now, it has definitely been overtaken by the mulefoots. Davis said she is marketing the pigs for people who want to breed them, and also is selling the meat, which is considered by many to be some of the best pork in the market.

“We only butcher the neutered males, since we only need two for breeding purposes,” Davis said in an email. “All our females are given the chance to become breeders for the farm. The taste is so superior to the pork that can be found in the stores. This is due to the amazing genetics and, of course, the pasture-raised, care-free lifestyle that they live on our farm!”

This pork cannot be found in stores in the area. Davis said they do drops a few times a year at locations throughout the St. Louis Metro Area, including Troy, Illinois, O'Fallon, Illinois, Maplewood, Missouri and Alton, where Davis said most of her family lives.

Outside of the mulefoot hogs, Green-Finned Hippy Farms also delivers eggs and other meat with the label, “meat and eggs you can feel good about eating.” Davis's farm is labeled as a “beyond organic” community-supported agriculture (CSA).

Besides marketing food as delicious and farm-fresh, Green-Finned Hippy Farms also raises goats – goats used in a great many of things.



“We pretty much brought goat yoga to the Midwest in 2015,” Davis said. “It was a think going on in the East Coast, the West Coast and up in Oregon, so I thought, why not bring it here?”

Goat Yoga, for the uninitiated, is yoga done in the presence of goats. The goats interact with the participants, and even climb on them as they do poses. The purpose of adding goats is to aid with the already-calming effects of yoga. Goat yoga occurs at the farm through the spring and most of the summer, with a break for the heat in August. It occurs again in the fall with September and October events as well.

Before goats can be utilized in the yoga, however, they must be socialized. To help with that, Davis said an event called Sips and Snuggles occurs in which people are invited to

partake in tea and coffee in the presence of baby goats in order to help them get used to people for the yoga.

Davis said these goats can also be rented for weddings, and the farm itself is available for private tours and birthday parties.

More information on the farm can be found on their Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/GfhFarms>, or by contacting Davis at (618) 669-2897. The farm is located at 256 Hickory Road in Pocahontas. Warm weather will bring walk-in tours every Saturday from 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. People are asked to call ahead for any sort of personal tour until then.