

Heritage Livestock Play an Important Role in the Growing Market for Humanely Raised Products

By Roger Harley with Liz MacKenzie. Photos by Sara Kuntz



Roger Harley with Bruce, his Tamworth boar.

Roger Harley farms near Peterborough, Ont., and has been dedicated to the humane treatment of animals since he began raising sheep and cattle in the southwest of England 30 years ago.

Roger has an extensive background developing hormone-free and antibiotic-free farming principles that also combine animal welfare standards. After dedicating years towards establishing these principles in the United Kingdom, Roger has applied these philosophies on his own and other farms in and around Peterborough County. In 2007, he was appointed Director of Farming Protocol for Rowe Farms, a retail store that provides meat

and poultry products raised without the use of antibiotics, growth-promoting hormones, or animal-based feeds and promises their customers that animal welfare has been a key factor in the raising of the products they sell.

Heritage breeds, Roger points out, are normally easy keepers and can thrive without confinement or intervention. This reduces stress on both the animals and the farmer and allows the livestock to lead a more normal life.

Roger farms Wiltshire Horn sheep, Tamworth pigs and Belted Galloway cattle near Peterborough and will soon have about 1300 acres under management. He has chosen his breeds for

their hardiness: the Wiltshire Horn sheep, originating from the bleak hills and plains of Wiltshire, England, can tolerate extreme temperatures with its unique layered hair and can adapt to most climates. The ewes are great mothers and the lambs gain weight rapidly when fed just on grass. Both the Belted Galloway cattle and the Tamworths pigs also grow thick winter coats that help them to survive in the harsh climate.

All his produce is from registered stock, with all the hogs now being DNA traceable. Moves are now underway to do the same for the cattle and sheep. He is currently working with Trent University and DNA Ident Inc. to

develop new techniques for identifying commercial herds of livestock from farm to folk through DNA traceability. A pilot project is now underway on his farm.

Roger just can't say enough good things about the Tamworth pig. They fit the Rowe Farm requirements on so many fronts. The Tam's hardiness allows very early and late (March to November) farrowing, making it possible to have a reliable product stream year round. When customers come to Rowe Farms for their meat, they are not sent away empty handed.

The Tamworth's great mothering instincts give their piglets the protection they need in open farrowing conditions, and they are excellent grazers.

Roger currently has 25–30 acres in Tam production.

All systems on the farm are mobile and simple. Reduced inputs increases profitability and all inputs are watched vigilantly, even electricity. Frugality is the watchword.

Innovation is also ongoing. New insulated farrowing sheds / arcs and winter watering systems are currently under development.

Roger's herd is expanding. He projects that he will be killing 3000/year by 2013–2014. The marketing wizards at Rowe Farms understand that it's not just quality that sells the product, but the story of "quality with a conscience". The products are

branded as "locally grown", "antibiotic-free", "hormone-free" and "conscientiously farmed". That, and excellent quality meat seems to be the right stuff to sustain this wildly successful enterprise.

The marketing of integrity seems to be working for Rowe Farms. They did not suffer during the economic turnaround of the past year, rather, in October they added two new retail stores in Toronto to bring their total to six. To keep up this momentum, they are always looking for new farmers who can meet their standards.

On page 9 is a part of their hog protocol. Protocols are also available for beef, sheep, broiler chickens and laying chickens. Do not hesitate to contact Roger Harley, Director of Farming Protocol at roger.harley@rowefarms.ca, if you think that this is the marketing route that you wish to take.



Tamworth boar, Bruce and his better half.



Tamworth sow in nest.



Outside Roger Harley's barn.



Tamworth sow.