Barn’s Hayloft Mounted On Top Of Country Home

Greg Paurus mounted the hayloft from an old barn on top of the house where he and his 12 siblings were born to make a unique 2,500 sq. ft. “cabin” for family reunions and to rent out to crafters and quilters. “The Home Place Retreat” includes a large open workroom, beds for 10 people, and all the amenities to make guests feel at home.

The old Sarkela barn was well known in Sebeka, Minn., as a holding barn for cattle on their way to market in St. Paul. Located on the edge of the town, it needed to be removed when a new American Legion building was built.

The bottom level of the barn was in poor condition, but Paurus figured he could save the 20 by 22-ft. loft area. He braced the loft, cleaned and painting them white was the best choice for finishing them.

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Business Is Booming For Heirloom Beans

Steve Sando knows a lot about beans, especially rare heirloom beans. He eats them for breakfast, writes about them, and grows them to sell at his store and on the internet.

“I now have 25 varieties that are grown here in California and 10 that are grown for us in Mexico by small farmers there,” says Sando. “I try to grow two years worth of beans at a time, but sales have been so good that we run out of favorites from year to year.”

Sando says that all it takes is a taste to get hooked. That’s what happened when he tried his first heirloom bean, the Rio Zape. He’s been spreading the word ever since and says the message is well received.

“One person get a taste, they get excited and begin to treat different beans like different wines,” says Sando. “When I grew my first Rio Zapes, I didn’t know what to expect. They were similar to the pinto beans I liked, but there was so much more going on. The flavor and aroma.”

He grower in Poland. Sando has written books devoted to his love for heirloom beans: “The Rancho Gordo Heirloom Bean Grower’s Guide.”

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Hungarian Sheep Have Amazing Horns

The spiraling horns of Racka sheep are like no other domesticated sheep, growing up to 2 ft. long. The once rare breed is recovering in its native Hungary, but is just getting started in the U.S. Tom and Nancy Richardson believe they have the biggest herd in the U.S., although they have no full-blood Rackas in the first place. We started with a ram lamb that was half Racka and bred it to other horned breeds in 2008. By 2010, we had 8 ewes that we artificially inseminated with pure-blood Racka semen. Their lambs were then 62 percent Racka.

The problem for the Richardson is their source of Racka bloodlines is limited to straws of semen and selective A.I. A single straw costs $75 from Super Sire Ltd. Breeders like the Richardsons slowly increase the percentage of desired bloodlines. “When we started, we used horn stock of several breeds to expand the genetic base,” says Richardson. “We are trying to select for the Racka genotype.”

Rackas were originally bred for wool, meat and abundant milk. Ewes average around 88 lbs. and rams around 132 lbs. The standard for racka horns in the Hungarian Racka Registry is a 20-in. minimum. The standard for ewes is 12 to 15 in. In the pure-blood animals, the corkscrew horns go almost straight up from each side of the head. On the Richardsons’ animals they protrude to the side.

“We keep our rams in individual pens to prevent fighting, which could chip their horns,” says Richardson. “I’ve learned why the mothers have horns, too. They can protect themselves, and they will turn on you if you go for the babies.”

Racka wool is described as long and coarse, cream colored to brown or black and an ideal crisp and softness for hand spinners. The Hungarian breed registry requires rams produce at least 6 1/2 lbs. of wool.

Richardson has found that even those lambs that don’t have the desired Racka features have value as breeding stock. He notes that they are very good mothers and even the ewe lambs produce more milk.

“Racka lambs are very strong,” he says. “We had our vet out to pull a lamb, which he set aside, saying it wouldn’t make it. Then he pulled its twin and said it wouldn’t make it either. It turned out that they both did, but the ewe didn’t.”

The Richardsons aren’t selling breeding stock at this point. When they do sell off low percentage Rackas, they are sold through an exotic auction service in Macom, Mo.

“We will send out samples of the wool if buyers are interested,” says Richardson. “We also will breed a Racka with one of our other sheep breeds to a customer’s order. However, we never invite visitors to our farm.”

Richardson is looking for partnering breeders on the East and West Coasts as a way of protecting the Rackas he has developed.