

They Collect Pollen For Orchards, Chefs

“You can’t over-pollinate,” says Gary Woolley, manager for Pollen Collection and Sales in Lemon Cove, Calif. Studies show that providing additional pollen to fruit and nut trees increases yields at least 10 to 15 percent.

His company has been in the business of collecting and selling pollen for more than 30 years. Founder David Rebb Firman learned about pollen from his grandmother, Mina T. Firman, who began collecting pollen in 1933. While many of her methods, including hand harvesting, are the same today, new technologies such as electrostatic spraying promise to boost pollen’s benefits even more, Woolley says.

Typically, trees have more than enough pollen. A mature almond tree, for example, has as many as 350,000 flowers.

“If growers set just 25 percent of the flowers, they will have a huge crop,” Woolley says.

But soil and weather conditions can

affect how much of the pollen is effective. By gathering pollen and distributing it in a timely manner, there is more pollen for bees to move and a better chance for increasing yields.

Between mid-February and early May, workers gather pollen from healthy orchards. Orchard owners are paid per acre. Almond trees are shaken, and some of the flowers (in the popcorn stage where the petals are closed around the pollen anthers) fall and are collected. The flowers must be handpicked on other trees including pistachio, cherries, peaches, kiwis, and so on.

Barrels of flowers are taken to a processing plant where they go through a machine that removes the petals. The pollen is dried, then screened, cleaned and frozen in gallon freezer bags. Within days it is shipped to customers, mostly in the San Joaquin Valley of California. Pollen is dispersed by blowing it through a machine into the crown of a tree and/or by placing pollen in beehive inserts so

that bees crawl through the pollen when they leave the hive. Providing additional pollen makes it possible for fewer bees to move more pollen.

Pollen prices vary according to species, but the biggest seller is almond, which sells for \$1.75/gram.

“We recommend 80 to 100 grams/acre in 3 applications,” Woolley says. But often producers add 60 to 80 grams/acre in 2 applications (30 to 40 grams/acre each time).

Woolley notes that the whole process from collecting pollen to dispersing it occurs in a concentrated period of time from 3 to 10 days.

He predicts even better yields in the future based on research over the past six years with wet electrostatic application, a solution that suspends pollen and places it right on the flower’s pistil.

“It’s really phenomenal. We get 30 to 80 percent yield increases,” he says.

Besides increasing fruit and nut yields, the company has developed a market for fennel



“By providing additional pollen to fruit and nut trees, there’s a better chance for increasing yields,” says Gary Woolley.

pollen, used as a spice in cooking.

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Iberian Hogs Find Home In Georgia

Will Harris is the proud partner in purebred Iberian hogs introduced from Spain. He has added them to his Georgia pastured livestock operation (Vol. 37, No. 1). It already includes cattle, sheep, goats, poultry, rabbits and heritage domestic hogs. Harris’ 100+ employees raise, butcher and market the farm’s meat via the internet and to restaurants and supermarkets across the southeastern U.S. When Spanish hog producers Jamie and Kurt Oriol came knocking at his door, Harris was ready.

“Until recently, it was illegal to export Iberian hogs from Spain, but when the law changed, the Oriols got a permit to export 24 gilts and 6 boars,” explains Harris. “We were one of 10 farms they considered.”

Harris has a 50 percent ownership in the animals, having covered half the costs of bringing them to the U.S. to raise them. The herd arrived in December 2014, and it has been growing ever since. The first 27

animals were slaughtered in February with a second group of 42 slaughtered in September.

“We’ve been saving gilts, but hope to start slaughtering on a regular basis,” says Harris.

He is already offering Iberian pork on his website store with spare ribs selling for about \$6/lb. However, hams and shoulders won’t be available until the summer of 2019. Cured at La Quercia (Vol. 38, No. 1) for 2 to 3 years, they will sell at a high premium. Bone-in hams ordered today for the 2019 delivery are priced at \$1,500 each. A full bone-in-shoulder is priced at \$750.

While Iberian hogs are normally fattened on acorns, Harris’ hogs get peanuts and acorns. They also get their share of cracked eggs from the farm’s pastured hens. The diet is supplemented with non-GMO feeds. They also forage the farm’s wooded pastures where they spend the bulk of their lives.

“Hogs were never meant to be raised on concrete, in cages, or under fluorescent lights.



Will Harris has added purebred Iberian hogs to his Georgia pastured livestock operation. He sells the meat on his website.

Ours are never kept in confinement.”

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Centuries-Old Rare Chicken Breeds

Good foraging is one of the features Glenn Drowns likes about his two rare breeds of chickens, American Dumpies and Dorkings. Drowns, a heritage chicken breeder from Iowa (see Vol. 33, No. 5) raises about 140 chicken breeds but says the Dumpies and Dorkings are especially unique.

“American Dumpies are not a recognized breed, but a result from off-types of Cuckoo Scotts we obtained,” explains Drowns. “We were culling the yellow-legged birds in an attempt to stay true to the white-legged Scotts. However, when we kept some, we noticed they were much more vigorous and thrifty than the Scotts and also lay well.”

A genetic preservationist, Drowns produces all his own eggs for hatches and tends his own flocks. While that usually means keeping flocks pure to type, he also experiments with selective crossbreeding or variants like the American Dumpies. He has been selecting for them for 8 years.

Like their Scotts’ ancestors, they are a dwarf breed known for their short legs. This gives them a waddling gait. Adult bodies are less than 2 in. off the ground. The short legs and waddle are thought to have made

them easy to catch. The characteristics also suggest a breed less likely to range far from home. Lack of movement would also produce more tender meat.

The downside to the short legs is a lethal gene that can show up when 2 short-legged birds are bred to each other. Birds born without the lethal gene can have long legs and can be bred back to short legged birds with less chance of the lethal gene occurring.

American Dumpies are available in groups of up to 15 at \$5 per chick. Drowns also raised the Cuckoo Scotts Dumpies, but is sold out for 2018.

“We are most concerned that more flocks of this breed get established,” he says. “They are a unique, stocky bird. While we will continue to maintain the breed, the lack of genetic diversity has bottlenecked, and we produce very few chicks.”

The Scotts Dumpies are an old breed, standardized from Landraces in the 1800’s. Although written descriptions of short-legged birds go back for centuries, Dorkings have been around even longer.

“Dorkings were described by Julius Caesar,” says Drowns. “They are slow growing,



Heritage chicken breeder Glenn Drowns raises about 140 chicken breeds but says his American Dumpies (left) and Dorkings are unique.



but constant and thrifty foragers. They make wonderful dual purpose birds for eggs and meat.”

The birds reach 6 to 8 lbs. and are famous for flavor. Eggs are a tinted white and run from medium to large in size. They are also plentiful in the winter when other breeds often produce fewer eggs.

“I have seen them lay quite well in 25 degree below zero weather,” says Drowns.

Dorkings have white skin and leg color. Feathers are multi-hued from black to gray, red or white. Lines within the breed are designated by their color. Drowns sells chicks for \$6.50 each and maximum orders of 5 to 15.

Drowns and his wife Linda run the center as a hobby/business. In addition to poultry breeding, they also produce and offer a broad range of seed and root crops, including a list of more than 225 sweet potato varieties. He has a full-time job off the farm, and they respond to emails and phone calls on a limited basis.

“Please don’t expect an immediate answer,” warns Drowns. “We also don’t take orders by email.”

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