

The American Livestock Breeds Conservancy Heritage Definitions: FAQ's

Why define “heritage” for livestock and poultry species?

ALBC's goal in defining Heritage is to secure the term in the food and agricultural marketplaces so that it becomes a term that consumers can rely upon. Most heritage breeds are also endangered breeds, so by defining Heritage it allows for the reintroduction of these breeds to the marketplace as the cultural and culinary treasures that they are. Defining Heritage helps create a market niche while helping to conserve traditional breeds, their genetics, and their agricultural systems. Developing a marketplace for endangered breeds is a critical piece of conserving them for the future and central to ALBC's mission.

Why is ALBC the organization best-suited to create these definitions?

ALBC is nonpartisan in the creation of these definitions. Our mission is the genetic conservation and promotion of endangered breeds of livestock and poultry. We are not looking to make a sale, or gain a profit, but to conserve these breeds for our future and the future of our food system. ALBC has a vast network of contacts and resources that have contributed to and influenced these definitions. Each of the definitions is created through discussion with partners and stakeholders.

Is the “heritage” label recognized by USDA?

The “Heritage” labels have not been officially recognized by the USDA certification process; however, producers have successfully added the “Heritage” term to their labels and won the approval of USDA by using the ALBC guidelines. This has set a precedent for future use.

ALBC's goal is to educate the consumers. We want them to know the definition of Heritage and to boldly ask questions to assure that the product carrying the “Heritage” label meets the definition of the term.

Who monitors or polices the use of the term “heritage” on products?

Consumers and peers. ALBC does NOT police the term or certify breeders and producers at this point in time. The goals of issuing these definitions is to encourage consumers to learn about the products and ask for the products by name. By educating the consumer, we can empower them to search out these products.

What is “Heritage?”

Heritage is an umbrella term that embraces pure breeds of livestock and poultry with deep histories in the United States. Farmers and ranchers further identify their products by naming the breed. Just as there is great variety in apples and tomatoes, there is also great variety in Heritage livestock and poultry. A Jersey Giant chicken tastes different than a Delaware, and cheese made from the milk of Kerry cows has unique qualities and flavors. All products labeled “Heritage” should also identify the breed. ALBC is developing specific definition for what Heritage means for each species.