

Ameraucana Alliance
By Jensen Pierson

If someone told me that after my college years I would still be raising and showing chickens I would have thought they were crazy. I was on my path to adult life, I should not still be playing with my childhood hobbies, right? It still amazes me how eight years of 4H poultry projects have such an impact on my life. Rewinding the clock to the fall of 2013, my flock of Large Fowl Ameraucanas had shrunk to a mere fifteen birds. Granted I still had another dozen assorted laying hens, but I was convinced that with the conclusion of my 4H years that my years of raising birds was coming to an end. Compounded with an outbreak of chronic respiratory disease earlier that summer, I was ready to throw in the towel and pursue a career with horses through Wilmington College. Little did I know that now in 2017 I would be hatching and raising more than I ever have before.

Fast-forwarding to 2015, I had hatched a few dozen birds since 2013, but had no real plans to show those years. My Ameraucana mentors, Mike Gilbert and John Blehm, encouraged me to breed for resistance in my flock as an alternative to vaccination. When it appeared that the end was coming to all shows when the avian influenza outbreak hit our country in 2015, I again found myself questioning if raising chickens was in my future. That year my county fair's poultry committee, of which I was an active member despite my obligations to my college curriculum, found everyone discouraged and wondering what would become of the poultry program in the future. It was this year, even with all of the negativity associated with the show bans, that I realized my years of showing poultry were not over. Joining the poultry committee and becoming a 4H advisor showed me that I had a lot to offer the youth in my county. I felt an obligation to them to teach them what I had to learn from trial and error in my 4H years.

2016 met me with a few surprises, and a few more birds. My first surprise was that plans to graduate with an equine business major at Wilmington College would not be possible. My second surprise was that I had discovered a new form of agriculture that had the potential to complement raising exhibition birds. I could even make money from raising meat chickens on pasture and eggs from hens out in the field. With this renewed look at farming I understood that my Ameraucanas could be an asset and not an expensive hobby. Last year I hatched 80 Ameraucanas and attended 2 shows. I even acquired a second breed to love, Dorkings. After finishing in the middle to the bottom of the placing at the Ameraucana Alliance national meet, I decided that 2017 would be the year I returned my Ameraucana flock to its former glory.

My first goal for this year is to have birds mature enough for the shows. I am determined not to make the same mistake of showing birds that are too small. Right now I have over a hundred chicks on Kal-Jen Farm; more than half of them are blue, black, and buff Ameraucanas, while the rest consist of my silver and red Dorkings. My dedication to not putting up with sneezing and swollen faced birds for 3 years has paid off; I have yet to have any cases of chronic respiratory disease in my flock this year, and my birds have never looked better.

I encourage anyone that is interested in Ameraucanas to look into joining the Ameraucana Alliance; I am convinced that if it were not for the support by the officers at the Ameraucana Alliance, I would not be the person I am today. Raising Ameraucanas has taught me passion, persistence, and determination. As one of the newest directors from the Alliance, I am excited to see what the new year holds for another generation of birds.