

## Heritage livestock center near Sanger seeks supporters

By Robert  
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Supporters of an effort to build an animal conservation institute in eastern Fresno County will gather Monday night to try and build momentum for the far-reaching project.

Leading the charge is the Kentucky based Birchwood Conservancy, a group that has been preserving heritage breeds of livestock animals for 21 years. On its Lexington ranch is a private collection of rare cattle, horses, goats, swine, poultry, sheep, working dogs and plants.

Lucinda Christian, president of the conservancy, would like to establish the World Heritage Animal Genetic Respository Veterinary Institute in eastern Fresno County. The institute would be home to 250-plus animals and will be a full service veterinary and genomics center.

The institute would employ 15 people during its first phase of development and about 200 to 300 acres will be needed. Start-up costs for the first phase are estimated at \$11.78 million.

Christian said private donors are needed. She hopes to complete the initial phase within four years.

To help encourage community and financial support, an informational meeting will be held at 6 p.m. on Monday in the Forum Hall at Reedley College. Christian will be joined by geneticist Jerry Taylor, cloning expert and veterinarian Dirk Vanderwall and agriculture economist Mike Reed.

Christian said the central San Joaquin Valley is ideal for the institute because of its rich agricultural heritage and open spaces.

Experts say that preserving heritage breeds of animals is important for developing disease resistance. At one time, multiple breeds of livestock animals were used by farmers, but many fell out of favor with large-scale producers, pushing some of those animals to near extinction.

Christian says Fresno County could play a critical role in helping to preserve and study some of the rarest farm animals and working breed dogs in the world. The institute also has the potential to attract the interest of animal experts.

"It is anticipated that WHAGR will draw a significant host of world class academic, research and diplomatic visitors that will undoubtedly share in experiencing the same wonderful aspects of the area that its residents so value and appreciate," Christian said. "We hope that the community members embrace the diverse cultures and welcome the opportunity to be ambassadors of goodwill for the community."

Supporters of the institute are excited about the possibility for preserving livestock breeds and agricultural land.

Kent Kinney, past president of the El Rio Reyes Conservation Trust in Reedley, said his organization is working with the institute to identify pieces of property in the Kings River bottom area in Sanger. Kinney said the plan is to protect the property through land conservation efforts.

"This project holds the potential for the Kings River area to be recognized for its value beyond building subdivisions and gravel mining," Kinney said. "This area can be known as a learning institution, for its biological diversity and providing land conservation."

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