



ALOKAS and Rankkasade – younger-generation Kyyttö.

“THESE NATIONAL TREASURES must be looked after,” muses Harri Ala-Kapee, farm master at Ahlman. Rimma the Kyyttö is pleased for his opinion.



FINNCATTLE,

genes & gourmet eating

TEXT and PHOTOS Annikaisa Knuutila

Rimma, a cow of the Eastern Finncattle breed, or Kyyttö, chomps happily on lush meadow grass at the Ahlman teaching farm. She's due to calve at any moment, delivering new blood to the herd. Rimma and the Ahlman farm are links in a chain which has rescued the endangered Kyyttö from the brink of extinction.



THE AHLMAN teaching farm near Tampere's city centre also houses chickens, goats and small animals – as well as a Milk Bar.

VIIRU the bull has a role in continuing the Kyyttö breed.

Harri Ala-Kapee, the farm master at Ahlman, is another such link.

“It's not right to lose a national treasure like this,” he mused to himself perhaps a decade ago, embarking on a determined effort to foster Finnish cattle breeds. The Ahlman farm is continually expanding its stock of regional breeds, grazing only Finncattle since 2008.

The teaching farm increased its head of Kyyttö significantly when the cowshed at the Sukeva prison was closed and all its regional breed stock found new homes. In 2008, Ahlman received 16 Eastern and 21 Western Finncattle from Sukeva. The teaching farm now has the important task of preserving the gene stock – maintaining gene bank cattle – of both Eastern and Western Finncattle.

Only ones of their kind

Of the three original Finncattle breeds, the Eastern Finncattle is the most endangered. Harri Ala-Kapee points out that it is equally important, however, to protect the future of the rare Western and Northern Finncattles. There are now 500 adult Eastern Finncattle, a recovery from the Kyyttö's low point of just 50.

“They used to be a good milk cow but haven't been bred at all in 40 years. Today their milk production is modest compared to foreign cattle bred for milking. Each Kyyttö produces 3,000 kilos of milk each year, while the national average is 8,000 kilos with the best breeds producing up to 10,000.”

Even so, the farm master stresses the potential of Finncattle.

“Today there's a lot of talk about overproduction. So should cows produce such a maximal amount? When cows are bred to produce milk, their health suffers. On

average they live four and a half years. A regional breed can live more than a decade, which means that its milk volume over a lifetime is considerable. What's more, it has time to produce offspring for meat. It should also be taken into account that a regional breed is smaller in size, eats less,

calcium medication. When a Finncattle gets the medicine, it pushes itself up even though its legs are a bit shaky. Bred cows don't even try to get up when they notice their legs don't seem to carry them. They give up – then they have to be put down.”

Genuine quality

But how can these national treasures, regional cattle breeds of every country, be cherished? Chef **Heikki Ahopelto** and Harri Ala-Kapee put their heads together.

“Studies have found that Kyyttö milk contains a lot of kappa-casein B, which improves the yield of cheese. This gave us the idea of making fine cheeses for restaurants and small shops,” Harri Ala-Kapee explains.

The duo also took cheese and milk to Italy in 2008. At the Terra Madre event in Turin, visitors sampled smoked meat from Kyyttö bulls and Appenzeller-style Kyyttö cheese.

“They were very popular. The flavours were new and we had a lot of people asking where they could buy more. We returned more confident, but wider exports would require more resources.”

The farm master estimates that the Eastern Finncattle's future looks good: more and more cattle breeders are interested in the Kyyttö breed, while cheesemakers and restaurants are attracted by the gourmet prospects. Food buffs at the Masuuni restaurant in Tampere have taken to the Eastern Finncattle with equal enthusiasm, delighting over Kyyttö veal á la Masuuni with boletus-barley risotto and fennel seed demiglace, carpaccio of Kyyttö veal with capers mayonnaise and pine seed, Kyyttö beestings crème brûlée with raspberry sherbet...•

A farm in a city

» The Ahlman farming school, named after Bailiff Gabriel Ahlman (1737–1799), opened its doors in Messukylä, Tampere, in 1904.

» Today the Ahlman vocational college trains youths as well as adults in agriculture, gardening, hotel management and catering, entrepreneurship, and as wilderness and nature guides.



The teaching farm has a Milk Bar where members of the public can buy unprocessed milk. Sales last season totalled 16,000 litres.

and that a smaller proportion of the energy is consumed by the cow itself.”

Harri Ala-Kapee also praises Finncattle for their character.

“They're very wilful, curious and even gentle – but they can also buck. You have to understand them a little,” the farm master notes with amusement, adding that they are also exceptionally enduring and healthy.

“They don't give up easily. Paralysis is a common complication when older cows are calving, but they usually recover with