

WHISKEY HILL GOAT DAIRY

Adding to the Local Dairy Mix

DEBORAH SCHUMACHER, Staff Writer

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There's a new micro-dairy in our neighborhood. Whiskey Hill Goat Dairy produces raw goat milk and raw goat cheeses as well as scented soaps from goat's milk. The operation is run pretty much single-handed by Diana Dyer, a part-time registered nurse that somehow finds the time to tend her herd of goats, milk twice a day, and bottle each milking for sale at The Food Co-op and the Farmers Market.

Why did she name her dairy Whiskey Hill Goat Dairy? "There's no hill here," she explained with a laugh, "but the goat herd was long ago registered with the American Dairy Goat Association as the Whiskey Hill Goat Herd and so, when I came here from California, I brought the name with me." She also calls her farm the "Spaghetti Farm" because of the long and narrow dimensions of the property.

Diana Dyer's dairy sits on six acres on Cape George Road in Port Townsend. The backdrop for the barn, goat yard and electro-fenced pastures is a 20-foot wildlife buffer that she intends to leave undeveloped. Looking to the future, Diana has decided to leave this wooded area as a sanctuary for the wild members of her neighborhood should development occur adjacent to her farm. This is the foundation of what she believes is a sustainably managed small farm.

Everything Goes Full Circle

Whiskey Hill Goat Dairy practices sustainability in other ways. Milk that isn't bottled for sale is used to make cheese. Whey that's strained from this milk is fed to the chickens and becomes eggs. Straw and manure from the goat barn is cleaned out and hauled away for compost. The barn swallows eat the flies.

An experienced breeder, Diana is always working to improve her herd. If a doe produces milk with a high butterfat content, she explained, she'll breed that doe to increase the butterfat content in her herd (the butterfat content in milk from her dairy is currently between 4% and 5%). I asked her what happens to the kids she doesn't plan to keep in her herd. Female kids or future milking goats, she explained, will sell to other goat keepers. I was pleased to learn many of the male kids will sell as pets. Some, she said, get sold for meat. "We can't keep them all," she admitted.

The Whiskey Hill Herd

Diana's herd is composed of 28 goats, including three bucks, with a mix of Nubians and Alpines of various colors and markings. Nubians are the most popular of the goat breeds and are pretty charming with their floppy ears. Alpines, just as charming as far as I'm concerned, have smaller ears that stand up straight. Her oldest milker, Nanny Janny, is 12, an Alpine herd queen that's always first on the milking stand. These days, Nanny Janny has started to slow down a bit and so Diana has decided to retire her from the milking stand.

Diana also introduced me to her three "boys," her registered bucks Cactus Point Executive Decision and Kastdemurs [...], both Nubians, and her bearded Alpine, Nixon's Showy Valentino. I asked about the reputation of goat bucks to be smelly and aggressive and she invited me, with a big laugh, to "come back in the fall!" This time of the year they're docile and friendly and there was no stench. But come fall, she promises, they'll dress themselves up in their own urine and roll around in the dirt to ready themselves for the mating season.

The Milking Operation

I was astonished when Diana told me that she ran the operation mostly on her own. Her daughter and her grandson share the property with her and are there to help with the big projects, but the day-to-day operation of the dairy—feeding the goats and the chickens, prepping and milking the does, bottling the milk, and marketing her product—is her job. And she still works two days a week as a nurse!

Every day, twice a day, Diana milks 12 does that produce about 10 gallons of milk. Bracketing the milking is the prep and the clean up. The prep time, she explained, is the most time-consuming. The milking itself takes her about 35-40 minutes. She doesn't milk by hand but uses a small milking machine that extracts milk from two goats while they snack from a bowl of grain on the milking stand. All this twice a day. I was amazed and inspired.

Goats can be milked throughout the winter even though they slow down (the milk is richer, with a higher butterfat content). Diana plans to keep milking throughout the winter since she's opened her dairy to maintain production, but she'll stagger breeding so that does are milked for eight months with a four month rest. Rotating her milking does will allow some of her herd to be resting even while she's getting a steady supply of milk year round.

The goats are fed a daily diet of alfalfa hay with grain for the does when they're milking. They also spend part of the day on pasture getting the benefits (for themselves and the milk drinkers) of fresh grass. Like everyone raising animals these days, Diana is concerned about feed costs. A ton of hay, she says, has gone from \$150 to \$325. As commodity prices go up, so do the costs of grain for feeding livestock. It's a challenge for a small farmer to balance a healthy diet for her animals that results in a healthy product with an increasingly pinched feed budget.

This latest contribution to our local food mix comes after Diana's long history of raising and showing goats. A nurse for 30 years, many in the intensive care unit, Diana found her goats to be a good hobby to balance the intensity of her work. "I called my goat herd 'my committee,'" she told me. She could always count on their sympathy and also their discretion, she explained, when she needed to vent about things like hospital politics. After a hefty investment in the infrastructure necessary to satisfy state health codes and to produce high-quality raw goat milk and raw goat milk cheeses, Diana is ready to bring her product to market. Whiskey Hill Dairy will one day, Diana hopes, be one of many micro-dairies supporting and supported by our community.

Whiskey Hill Goat Dairy is part of a dairy renaissance in our region. Dungeness Valley Creamery in Sequim introduced certified raw (cow's) milk in 2006 and the Bishop Dairy remains on the Peninsula as a producer for Organic Valley. Mount Townsend Creamery in Port Townsend produces local cheese from local milk.