

SUSTAINABLE AND SCALE-APPROPRIATE

Wild Harvest Creamery in Chimacum

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Wild Harvest Creamery, owned and operated by Suzanne and Mike Tyler, is a model of small-scale and sustainable farming that adopts the lessons of traditional farming while visioning forward into the future. It's also scale-appropriate. Suzanne emphasizes a desire to raise only as much as can feed a local market. "If I have to go looking for customers," she remarked, "I've grown beyond my market." Her pigs are a good example of these self-imposed limitations: the pigs, fed whey that's a by-product of the farm's cheese production, number seven (all are currently spoken for). Even though there's a market for local pork, Suzanne won't raise more. The size of her "pig operation" fits the size of the farm and the work her family is able to do.

Suzanne guided the Outreach team (Brwyn, newsletter editor, Mindy, our layout artist and illustrator, and myself) through the farm, starting with the goats, a flock of 29 milking does that poked their inquisitive noses into pads of paper and folds of clothes as we stepped over electro-net fencing into their grazing pasture (the fence wasn't electrified at the time).

All of Suzanne's goats, a mixed flock of Alpine, La Mancha and Oberhausli, are on a program of rotational grazing that keeps the pasture clipped but not stripped. Other than some grain while they're being milked, they're mostly eating a grass diet supplemented with alfalfa hay from Roger Short's farm, which is just across the way. Each goat has a name and they all wear bright collars. While we talked, Suzanne held down a pine bough to allow the girls to snack on the bright green spring growth, "a good digestive," she explained.

We went from the does in the pasture to the goat kids in the "muck pack" barn. "Muck pack," Suzanne explained, refers to the bedding management system they've adopted. The barn is cleaned out once a year in July when the straw bedding that's been collecting all year is pulled out and used for compost. Since the bedding area is on dirt, the straw composts in the lower layers. Manure beneath clean layers of straw keep the goats warm in the winter. Even though the manured straw was more than a foot thick, there was no foul smell. All the organisms, from human to microbial, are cooperating in this barn.

Outside the muck pack barn we visited briefly with the sheep. The wool from her sheep is spun and knitted into socks that Suzanne wears year-round. We also visited the farm's "poultry operation" where Suzanne and Mike raise geese, turkeys, ducks and chickens sharing a run and two houses. Inside one poultry house Suzanne was brooding baby ducks and baby turkeys in small wading pools kept warm with heating lamps.

Suzanne, with a background in genetics and cancer research, explained that she's been "agriculturally oriented" for awhile. Mike, a veterinarian, owned a clinic in Sequim before they moved to the farm in 2005. Their 16-year-old son Aaron has been hired this summer for the 5 a.m. milking. Two interns, Tristan Sandross and Rob McCue, also help out on the farm—while we were there they were working hard removing Scotch Broom.

This small team somehow manages to maintain all the animals, keep up a kitchen and flower garden, manage the FSC forest that's a part of the property, milk 29 does every day, *and* make and market several kinds of goat cheese. Suzanne confided, "My husband does the work of five!"

In the cheese-making room we learned about the cooling vat ingeniously adapted from a large freezer where water is chilled to almost freezing and then circulated in the cooling vat to keep fresh milk cool. When run in reverse it heats the vat to pasteurize the milk. In the milking parlor, Suzanne gave us a quick run-down on the milking process, including an explanation of the merits of using clear rather than opaque hoses so milking can stop as soon as all milk is drawn to protect the health of her does' udders.

Oh, and did I forget to mention the miniature horses? As we drove up the gravel road to the farm it was a little like entering a fairy forest, complete with mini horses grazing in fenced pasture in full bloom. Coming and going we recognized the look of order and beauty about the place. Wild Harvest Creamery makes manifest what devotion and commitment to good work can bring to the world.