

So You Want to Start a Goat Dairy?

*By Dot Hempler, Owner/Operator; Triple "H" Ranch, Goat Dairy & Farm Store
(presented at Caprine Outing 2002)*

Starting a goat dairy is something that many goat hobbyists consider. It seems like the logical thing to do when you have productive animals and no outlet for all that wonderful milk they produce. For some of us, it is the right route to take. Keep in mind, it is not a glorious nor easy route.

First, ask yourself, do I have the emotional, physical, and financial ability to consider doing this? I suggest you tour as many goat dairies as possible and consider employment at a dairy. Talk to people who are successful at what you want to do. This will give you a better idea of the demands that your goat dairy will make of you. Look at how farmers have built their milkhouses and cheese plants. Write down your plans and both short and long-term goals. Do a 2-3 year financial prospectus on paper. Try to guesstimate what your income and expenses will be. Putting things on paper makes it clearer to see if this dream can become a reality. Another financial consideration is that of marketing. Do you have the means to market your product? Geographic location is important. Having a product is a small part, having the means to market it is crucial. It takes an enormous amount of planning, research, money, and physical labor to start a successful and profitable dairy business. Keep in mind, it will not be an overnight success. Some of us have spent years becoming successful.

If you decide to take the plunge, I would suggest you follow some or all of these steps. Contact your state Dept. of Agriculture and Markets and request a copy of the regulations for dairy plants. A field inspector may come to your farm and give you some suggestions and advice also. The inspectors are there to guide you and can be a great resource. They can also be quite intimidating and sometimes difficult. For that reason (from my experience) it is very wise to empower yourself with knowledge and be strong enough to stand up for what you know. Everything you construct, do, and market, will have requirements to meet. When you get the regulations manual, read it front to back again and again. Some of it is difficult to interpret. Your ability to interpret the manual and be able to stand up for that interpretation will be a powerful tool.

Take a good look at your herd, your assets and your financial state. Do you want to use your life savings or take a business loan to start your dairy? Traditional financial institutions are sometimes reluctant to finance dairy operations. Check into small business loan groups (often run by small towns who want new innovative businesses) or Farm Credit Financial Institutions.

Buying a herd or expanding your own is fairly easy. Finding small, affordable equipment can be very frustrating and sometimes almost impossible. Many cheese-makers, myself included, were unable to locate the necessary equipment. By shopping around for components and enlisting the help of a steel fabricator, small cheese vats and other equipment can come to life. Despite getting inexpensive components, my 40-gallon cheese vat ultimately cost \$5,000.00. But, a new one would have cost 2-3 times that. Finding a milking system and headstalls can be difficult too. Check with your inspector. Sometimes they will allow you to use portable milking systems (such as those sold through Heogger's Supply).

Talk to contractors, plumbers, electricians, and friends to get service quotes and ideas. Finding reliable and affordable craftsmen can be difficult. Contractors don't often have a clue about dairies and regulations. Your job will be to interpret and ensure that they work according

to the specifications. Most of these “experts” will cost you \$30-\$40 an hour, and it will undoubtedly take many hours!

Do you have potable water or will you need to have a well dug? Water too has to meet requirements, as does your well. You will also need an approved septic system. The average well and septic system can cost about \$10,000.00.

Do you have a “customer friendly” and “liability free” barnyard? Do you have enough parking space for customers? Most cheese-makers do market products on and off farm, so you can expect that you will have farm-visitors and customers. Check with an insurance company regarding adequate liability coverage and product liability. This protects you if someone gets hurt or claims that your product made them sick. Search around because many companies do not offer product liability. If you plan to market off the farm, (and most likely you will out of necessity) look into potential customers (i.e. restaurants, farm stands, gourmet shops, small retail stores, and CSAs). Check with local regulatory agencies regarding any necessary vendors permits. Check with your local zoning board. Some towns won’t allow dairies or farm stands in certain zoned areas. Do some research into obtaining your own cheese plant supplies (containers, lids, boxes, labels, etc.) all of these items will need approval by the Dept. of Ag and Markets.

This may all seem quite overwhelming, but it is possible with the right amount of ingenuity and determination!

My own experience was that most things took much longer to complete than expected, contractors have no regard for deadlines, and everything costs more than anticipated.

I’ve included a listing of goat dairies, some important resources, and phone numbers for those who are brave enough to enter the world of “GOAT DAIRY”!!

I hope this is helpful and I look forward to seeing more goat dairies in operation.

Dot Hempler
28 Fish and Game Road
Hudson, NY 12534
(518) 828-0651

List of Dealers with New and Used Equipment:

Oliver M. Dean, Inc.
125 Brooks Street
Worcester, MA 01606
800-648-3326
508-856-9100
<http://www.omdean.com/>

201-423-0505

Mico Welding & Fabricating, Inc.
New Berlin, NY
607-847-6815

Hereema Corp.
200 Sixth Avenue
P.O. Box 568
Hawthorne, NJ 07507

Mollenberg-Betz, Inc.
300 Scott Street
Buffalo, New York 14204-2293
716-852-7138
<http://www.mollenbergbetz.com/>

New York Process Equipment
73 South Genesee Street
R.D. #1, Box 1
Fillmore, NY 14735
716-567-4491

Twinco
145 Ellicott Road, Box 8
West Falls, NY 14170
716-655-1171

United Dairy Machinery Corp.
301 Meyer Road, P.O. Box 257
Buffalo, NY 14224
716-674-0500

United Stainless Welding Co.
9592 Chestnut Street
Brewerton, NY 13029
315-668-6883

Rowlands Sales Company, Inc.
Butler Industrial Park
P.O. Box 552
Hazleton, PA 18201
570-455-5813

Girton Sales Company, Inc.
P.O. Box 901
Millville, PA 17846
800-332-8902
Fax: 570-458-5553

Gibson Supply
Ken Gibson
Hartford, NY 12838
518-632-5882

Don's Dairy Supply, Inc.
Donald Coager
349 Roses Brook
South Kortright NY 13842
607-538-9464
Fax: 607-538-1514

Westmoor Ltd.
Conde Equipment
P.O. Box 99
906 West Hamilton Avenue
Sherrill, New York 13461
800-367-0972
Fax: 315-363-0193
<http://www.westmoorltd.com/>

Morin Claude Farm Equipment
Holland, VT 05830
802-895-4159

Stanford Refrigeration
Peter Willig
Stanfordville, NY 12581
845-868-2272

B&G Restaurant Equipment
48 Eagle Street
Pittsfield, MA 01201
413-442-0390
Fax: 413-442-1559
<http://www.bgrestdsupply.com/>

Mueller Milk Cooling Systems Specialists
Regional Manager: Robin Shirley
Hampton, NY
518-282-0040
www.muel.com

Premier Dairy Service
Argyle, NY
518-638-8382
Middlebury, VT
802-388-0043

CIDEC Corp.
Auburn, NY
315-252-9270

Don Beck, Inc.
Castile, NY
585-493-3440
Canton, NY
315-786-2238

Corfu, NY
585-599-4696
Watertown, NY
315-786-0573

Smith Brothers Electric
Lisbon, NY
315-393-2988

Cortland Valley Dairy Service
Cortland, NY
607-753-6744

Wormuth Dairy & Refrigeration
Morrisville, NY
315-684-9152

Packaging for Products:

Milk Container Supplier
Franklin Plastics
800-847-4907

Milk Container Lids
Crompton Sales
978-687-1207

Cheese Containers
Plastic Packaging Corp.
800-342-2011

Graier's Discount Labels
800-693-1572

Financial and Legal Services:

New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets

1 Winners Circle
Albany, NY 12235
800-554-4501
518-457-1772 Milk Control
518-457-8870 Label Approvals
<http://www.agmkt.state.ny.us/>

Farm Law
Arend R. Tensen
800-371-3506
603-448-7100

Farm Credit Agency

Provides many services including Loans, Business Planning, and Tax Services.

New Jersey:

Bridgerton
800-219-9179
856-451-0933

Flemington
800-787-3276
908-782-5315

New York:

Batavia
800-929-1350
585-762-4444

Burrville
800-626-3276
315-782-6050

Canton
800-295-8431
315-386-8452

Chazy
800-545-8374
518-846-7330

Claverack
800-362-4404
518-851-3313

Cobleskill
800-327-6588
518-296-8188

Cortland
800-392-3276
607-756-9977

Geneva
800-929-7102
315-781-7100

Greenwich
800-234-0269
518-692-0269

Hornell
800-929-2025
607-324-2020

Mayville
800-929-2144
716-753-2144

Middletown
888-792-3276
845-343-1802

Riverhead
800-890-3028
631-727-2188

Sangerfield
800-762-3276
315-841-3398

Warsaw
800-929-8128
585-786-8128

New York Farmstead & Small-Scale Cheese Makers:

Berle Farm
Beatrice Berle
P.O. Box 1, Beechwood Road
Hoosick, NY 12089
(518) 686-3249
berle@cserve.net
Fresh organic farmstead goat's milk & cheese

Bluefields Farm
David Jones
294 Old Kingston Road
New Paltz, NY 12561
(845) 256-1214
bluefieldsfarm@netscape.com
Farmstead goat's milk cheese
*Is just getting started

Lively Run Goat Dairy
Suzanne Messmer
8978 County Road 142
Interlaken, NY 14847
(607) 532-4647
livelyrun@fltg.net
Farmstead goat's milk cheese

Captain Kid Dairy
Anthony and Melissa Perullo
3985 Sound Avenue
Mattituck, NY 11952
(631) 298-5548
Fresh goat's milk cheese

Coach Farm
Philip Peeples
105 Mill Hill Road
Pine Plains, NY 12567
(518) 398-5325
Fax: (518) 398-5329
coachfarm@taconic.net
Goat's milk cheeses, milk, and yogurt

Nettle Meadow
Laurie Goodhart
484 South Johnsbury Road
Warrensburg, NY 12885
(518) 623-3372
rain@capital.net
Organic farmstead goat's milk cheese

Ranson Brook Farm
Susan Sellew
New Marlboro Road
Monterey, MA 01245
(413) 528-2138
Fresh goat cheese

Sherman Hill Farmstead
Linda Smith
9626 City Highway 21, Franklin-Walton Road
Franklin, NY 13775
(607) 829-8852
Farmstead goat's milk cheese

Side Hill Acres
Rita Kellogg
79 Spencer Road
Candor, NY 13743
(607) 659-4121
rkellogg@aol.com
Farmstead goat's milk and cheese

Triple H Ranch
Dot Hempler
28 Fish and Game Road
Hudson, NY 12534
(518) 828-0651
Fresh farmstead goat's milk cheese

Vandeburg Farms
Mike Decker & Ron Vandeburg
P.O. Box 313, 4123 NY Route 26
Whitney Point, NY 13862
(607) 692-3665
(607) 760-8393 cell
eradecker@msn.com
Kosher farmstead goat's milk cheese

Wieninger's Goat Products
John and Sarah Wieninger
Route 23A Star Route, Box 106
Hunter, NY 12442
(518) 263-4772
Aged raw goat's milk cheese
*Out of business, may have equipment

I used this survey at local gourmet shops and small retail stores to get an idea of the marketability of my proposed products.

GOAT CHEESE SURVEY

This survey is for use by a local goat farmer planning to market FRESH GOAT MILK AND CHEESE. Your answers will help us to provide a product that will suit your needs. Please check one answer for each question.

Where are you most likely to buy fresh goat cheese?

- Grocery store
- Farm stand/ small specialty store
- Farmer's market
- Directly from farm

When purchasing goat cheese, do you prefer cheese in:

- A plastic wrap or plastic tube
- A resalable plastic container
- It doesn't matter

How often do you purchase fresh goat cheese?

- 1-4 times per month
- Every other month
- Only on special occasions

Please tell us what flavors of goat cheese you buy (check all that apply)

- Plain
- Dill
- Cracked pepper
- Other

How much are you willing to pay for 8oz. of locally made, all natural fresh goat cheese?

- \$3.00
- \$4.00
- \$5.00

If you could purchase fresh goat cheese directly from the farm at a reduced cost, would you be likely to do so?

- Yes
- No

What other items would you be likely to buy at a local farm based store when you purchase cheese?

- Fresh free range eggs
- Fresh goat milk
- Fresh farm raised vegetable and herbs
- Goat meat and lamb meat
- Fertilizer (nannie nuggets)

Thank you for your help, your answers will help us to serve you better.