



The yearling herd is enjoying lush pastures this time of the year.



David is also a regular helper at milking time.

# For Leids, Goat Dairy A Unique Family Project

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STEVENS (Lancaster Co.) — "We keep things small here," said Titus Leid, who along with his wife Mabel own Wildflower Goat Farm.

Playhouses that Leid makes to sell, one example of the family's bent toward the miniature, are positioned at several places on the farm. Leid also opens the door to show daughter Rose's "pig" project — several small pens of long-coated, colorful guinea pigs.

Also on this dairy, the animals weigh and eat considerably less than their milk-producing counterparts.

At the Leid farm the producers are quick-footed, energetic goats — 180 of them altogether — that supply the milk that goes out every 72 hours.

to seven acres of woods. The herd consists of an assortment of Saanen, Alpine, Toggenburg, and Nubian cross breeds.

Although Saanens, often compared to the Holstein, produce the most milk, the Leids found that milking a variety of breeds helps to increase the protein and butterfat levels. Saanens do, however, comprise most of the Leid's herd. "It doesn't matter if most of them are white," said Leid. "We know them, and their personalities.

"This kind of job is good for the children because the goats are their friends, so they don't mind seeing them every day."

Currently the Leids are milking approximately 120 goats twice a day, at 5 a.m. and 4 p.m.

### A Goat Meeting

In 1984 Leid was at a goat meeting conducted at a neighbor-

drinking and cooking with goat milk for 20 years.

In 1992 a Wisconsin-based cheese operation, Bongrain Cheese, called and asked if he was still interested in milking goats.

"We thought it would be something unique to do — a good family operation," he said.

Consequently they purchased a dairy goat herd from a West Virginia farm in 1994 and in March 1995 began shipping milk.

By lining goats up, taking measurements, and making adjustments, Leid designed his own parlor, which handles 19 goats at one time. Each rotation of 19 animals takes 12 minutes — a total of almost two hours for each milking.

"It's a nice job to come out and milk on winter mornings — it's pleasant in here," he said. The dairy truly is a family occupation, as the Leid children have their own assignments and help with each milking.

At milking time, the goats line up willingly at the door that will let them into the parlor. The same goats tend to end up in the same shift. Although most of the goats come voluntarily, the Leids end up chasing the last six goats in, "but they do it on purpose just to get attention," he said.

Cooling the milk quickly is one of Leid's trade secrets for keeping the milk from getting a "goaty" flavor.

In addition the dairy, which includes six milkers, a pipeline, and tank system from a former cow dairy, helps moderate the milk's taste. Milking by hand in an uncovered container, he said, may flavor the milk, as goat milk quickly picks up scents and flavors from its surroundings.

Feeding and care also makes a difference in the taste, said Mabel. The Leids bring in the goats several hours before milking time to feed them hay, which seems to modify strong flavors such as garlic.

The Leids use a vacuum system to clean the dirt off the floor after milking.

They ship the milk to a branch division of Bongrain Cheese in nearby New Holland.

They also ship cheese to a farm that processes and markets goat milk to health food stores and directly markets goat milk cheese, yogurt, and ice cream.

The Leids shipped over 25,000 pounds for the month of May. Although the quantity produced by the goats is less than cows, goat milk — a specialty item — can command a price two to three times as much as cow milk.

Approximately half of the herd freshens in October and November to keep a consistent supply of milk throughout the winter months.

"Goats naturally kid in the spring, so you have to work against nature," he said. "We use lights on the goats for 20 hours for two months."

All of the milkers, for example, are under lights from January 1 through March 1. "They think they're having long days," he said. Then when the lights go off in March, in conjunction with springtime's cool temperatures and cloudy days, the goats are "tricked" into cycling.

All the daylight they have is natural light in March. "We try to keep chores short so there are no extra lights, so they cycle in 4-6 weeks," he said.

When they kid in the fall, the season is fairly concentrated. Most of the nannies kid in a span of one to two weeks. Last year, in fact, out of 100 goats, 80 kidded in two weeks. "So that makes for busy times."

Although the Leids used to check the expectant mothers throughout the night, they have found that most of the nannies kid in the afternoon, so they have enjoyed the extra sleep and simply check the herd throughout the day.

In the fall, the nannies are allowed to kid on the pastures.

After school the Leid children

herd," he said. "We cull pretty hard." Only kids from the herd's best milkers stay on the farm.

### Herd Health

Reading journals, news articles, and books helped to teach the Leids not only the dairying aspects of goats but also veterinary work, since Leid does most of his own goat health care.

"Worming is the key to goat-keeping," he said. "It keeps them healthy and eliminates lots of other problems." The Leids worm the herd four times a year.

In addition, twice a year they trim hooves and give the herd a dairy clip — trimming the belly and udder area, besides the beard to give the nannies a more feminine appearance, according to Leid.

Contrary to popular opinion, goats are not the tin-can eaters so often portrayed in art or song lyrics. Instead, "goats are picky eaters," he said. Leid buys consistently high-quality hay so the animals will not pick out the choicest vegetation and leave the rest.

They also feed pelleted feed during milking. This is a change from the loose mixed feed they used to give the goats. "They picked out whatever they wanted and left all the minerals, so it is put it all together in a pellet," he said.

According to Leid's research, 10 goats eat the same amount a cow consumes, and seven goats produce what one cow does, so



Amy stops to enjoy a bite of a milkshake made from goat milk, a special treat.



The Leids raise approximately 40 of their own replacements each year.

Besides Titus and Mabel, the dairy's workload is shared by Rose, 17; David, 15; Amy, 10; Emily, 8; and Stephen, 4. Son James, 20, has an off-farm job and helps evenings and weekends.

The farm includes 15 acres, most of it in pasture. Besides open fields, the goats have access

ing farm, "mostly because we were close," he said. There he filled out a questionnaire and indicated his interest in milking goats.

For several years, however, there was no response, so the family continued milking their handful of goats for their own use. The family has, in fact, been



Emily helps her father, Titus, during the milking.

look forward to going out to the pastures to collect the nannies and kids, since the kids will be separated from their mothers after approximately 12 hours. This allows the kids time to get essential colostrum and yet allows the Leids the flexibility to teach them to drink from a trough while they are still young.

The nannies, on average, give birth to two kids each. Although one, three, and sometimes four kids may arrive, "two is enough," he said.

The Leids raise 40 kids each year for replacements. "The dairy doesn't necessarily take 40 a year but we're building our

the feed conversion rate is a little more efficient, he said.

### Health Benefits

This recipe, from Mabel, is vouched for by the family as delicious.

### EASY GOAT CHEESE

- 1 gallon milk
- ¼ cup vinegar
- 2 tablespoons melted butter
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- salt to taste (approximately ½ teaspoon)

Heat milk to almost boiling (206 degrees). Add vinegar. It should form curds immediately. Drain in a cloth-lined colander for a few minutes. Add butter, baking soda, and salt to curds. Refrigerate and it is ready to eat.