

Shropshires Perform Double Duty On Menhennett Farm

Farm's Cheese Will Be Sold At Maryland Sheep, Wool Festival

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Lancaster Farming Staff

COCHRANVILLE (Chester co.) — Each morning Annette Menhennett lines up about 12 Shropshire ewes and coaxes them, six at a time, through a small door and into a parlor where they nuzzle in and eat their ration of grain.

Although Shropshire sheep may not be noted for their milk-

should go into the milking string, Menhennett said.

The breed is "noted for longevity, so a good Shropshire ewe can go on producing lambs up to age 12," she said. As for milking, "1180 has milked 3-4 years, and I hope to continue milking her another four years," she said.

Additionally, while ewes of other breeds lactate 60-90 days, a Shropshire ewe's lactation may

last five months.

Although Menhennett views the dairy/cheesemaking aspect of the farm as a sideline, she does keep an eye on the dairy traits of her animals.

"I'm breeding for a fast-growing, well-muscled market lamb," said Menhennett. However "if 1180 (one of the best milk producers) has a ewe lamb, we'll try to keep the lamb and she if she is like her mother," she said.

Lambing season is the end of January through April.

Beginning Of A Dairy

Menhennett and her husband, Warn, had purchased their farm in 1965, bought five sheep in 1967, and constructed the out-buildings and barns on the operation.

In 1989 she toured, along with a small group of sheep aficionados, several sheep operations in various countries. The trip included a stop at sheep dairies in Norway and Iceland.

The seed was planted when Menhennett sat through a short course on sheep dairying in Scotland, which helped point her toward dairying. "That's what intrigued me," she said.

When she came back from the tour, then, she was ready to begin dairying in 1990, where she



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milks the sheep and made cheese "in a very small way — I first made cheese in the kitchen."

The couple built the parlor in 1992.

"It's very rich milk," said

Cook. With the higher butterfat and milk solid percentages in the milk, "we get about twice as much cheese per gallon," than

(Turn to Page A21)



Annette Menhennett operates a 110-head Shropshire market lamb and cheese farm. She has attended the Maryland Sheep and Wool Festival since the 1970s and sells all the farm's cheese at the event.

producing ability, Menhennett has milked several of her 110-head flock to produce the farm's cheese since 1990.

Most of the farm's income stems from the sale of the lambs at market; however, making cheese has proven to be an enjoyable sideline for Menhennett and farm manager Lee Cook.

Besides managing the farm, Cook also produces the farm's cheese.

The 90-acre farm is home to more than 100 purebred registered Shropshires. The breed, according to Cook, is "an old, standard general-purpose market sheep that make good lambs and good mothers," he said.

The ewes produce 2½ gallons of milk in the twice-a-day milkings, and all of the milk goes to cheese production.

In the beginning of lactation, Menhennett's best ewes will give 40 ounces of milk in the morning and 25-30 ounces of milk in the evening. Later in lactation those ewes may give between 40-50 ounces for the day.

"We don't start milking until the lambs are weaned, so we wait 30 days," Cook said.

Menhennett begins milking the goats about March 1 and usually ends the fourth of July, a real "Independence Day," for her, she said.

"When we resume milking in February, if they (the ewes) have had a lamb that's 30 days old, we'll take her and check her udder" to decide if she

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