

Young Producer Builds Up A Big Dairy Goat Farm

"Dairy goats are finicky eaters. Kids need extra care to help them survive. And you can milk 340 goats an hour with a double 30 parallel parlor handling 60 goats at a time."

Those are a few of the lessons Tony Garcia Jr., has learned in 4 years since moving from his parents' 800-cattle dairy farm to start up Paradise Goat Dairy in Modesto, Calif. His reason for switching from cattle to goats was simple – market stability. With demand for goat milk for yogurt, cheese and kefir, local creameries pay a year-round average of \$3.70/gal.

At 22, Garcia has expanded from 75 goats to 1,800 goats, averaging 1,300 milked at a time.

In 2013, he rented his grandmother's farm and remodeled the dairy barn to accommodate goats. The special milking equipment was expensive, so Garcia says he built up slowly. Fortunately, the goats he started with were about half the current price, and he has been able to build his herd by breeding with bucks and AI (artificial

insemination).

"I'm the first big goat dairy using a lot of AI, for better breeding and genetics and less disease, which can be transmitted by bucks," he says.

His herd includes a variety of dairy breeds, but his favorite is the Alpine breed.

"The average goat lasts about seven years and produces 3/4-gal. of milk a day," Garcia says. "I am now shipping to two creameries and have a little room to expand."

There are many similarities milking cows and goats, such as chores and putting up alfalfa hay. The goats are housed in dry pens with shades.

But goats have some unique challenges.

"The raising of babies is so much harder with goats. They are super sensitive and really finicky," Garcia says. They need to be monitored carefully, so he adds a few employees during kidding season, and he works closely with a veterinarian to use the right vaccination program.

He adds that goats are more wasteful and



At 22 years old, Tony Garcia, Jr., rented his grandmother's farm near Modesto, Calif., and remodeled the dairy barn to accommodate goats. He now has 1,800 animals, milking about 1,300 at any given time.

only pick out their favorite feeds in a TMR (total mixed ration).

As he continues to learn and set goals for higher milk production, Garcia says he is satisfied with his decision to switch from cows to goats.

"It was a wise choice to go this way," he says.

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Katie Bonow won a goat as a 12-year-old 4-H member, and 16 years later she now milks 24 does and has a thriving cheese-making business.

4-H Win Led To Cheese-Making Career

When Katie Bonow won a goat as a 12-year old 4-H member, she never imagined it would eventually lead to having a herd of dairy goats and a cheese-making business. Sixteen years later, she now milks 24 does, all descended from that one goat.

"I call her the goat that launched a thousand wheels of cheese," says Bonow, owner of Capra Nera Creamery. "She was a Nubian, but I've been crossbreeding ever since. The herd now includes Alpine, Saanen and American Lamancha bloodlines."

Bonow may have fallen in love with her first goat, but it was excess milk that introduced her to cheese. In the first 4 years her herd grew to 9 head.

"We couldn't drink all the milk," she recalls.

She credits her mother and a couple of neighbors with teaching her the craft. Her interest and experience making cheese grew while in college. Time spent at a Vermont artisanal cheese making course, combined with work on several Italian farms sparked the passion. She returned to Italy after college and worked at a goat dairy farm.

As she began to consider options, 2 people helped the transition to goat farmer and cheese-maker in particular. One was her mother, who maintained the growing

goat herd during college years. The second was her fiancé and now husband. A dairyman himself, he knew the way to her heart was to help her farm.

"We bought a neighboring small farm 2 years ago," says Bonow. "I do all the work with goats, as he is busy with the family dairy. He provides quality control (tasting) and helps with machinery as needed."

With the help of family and friends, she gutted and rebuilt the double-4 herringbone parlor once used for dairy cows and moved her goats in. She quickly went from milking 6 goats by hand to a pipeline and a single-6 herringbone set-up for goats. Eventually it will be upgraded to a double-6 as the herd grows. The other half of the parlor has been turned into a milk house. The former milk house became the cheese-making and aging room.

With 24 does to milk, Bonow has purchased some goat specific equipment and adapted dairy cow equipment when possible. One such unit is the bulk tank, which has family connections.

"It is the bulk tank that my parents bought when they were first married for the dairy that they still operate," says Bonow.

The cheese vat was a tougher find. She bought a used 30-gal. vat 4 years ago and

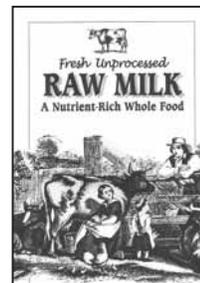
Her Mission: Explaining The Benefits Of Raw Milk

An ad for Raw Milk Brochures caught our attention recently. We chased down the seller, Sandra Redemske, a graphic designer who produces, prints and sells the brochures to dairy producers. She's done the research and has condensed the information into a four-panel brochure to educate the public about raw milk and its health benefits. For consumers, health care professionals, health food stores and dairy farmers who sell raw milk, it is packed with information.

"It's my way of helping people to understand the benefits of raw milk," Redemske says. The self-employed Maine resident discovered the benefits of raw milk after experiencing serious health problems from mercury poisoning by her dental fillings, which she says damages her digestive system.

She started purchasing raw milk to drink and make her own butter and soft cheeses. When people asked what she was doing, she decided to put together the raw milk brochure, and she's been selling them for nearly 20 years, updating the information over the years.

The brochure covers the benefits of raw milk and how it heals and restores health, the health hazards of processed milk and diseases associated with it, raising healthy



Sandra Redemske is a graphic designer who produces and sells raw milk brochures to dairy producers. Her goal is to educate the public about raw milk's health benefits.

cows on pasture, and also how raw milk is used by traditional cultures.

"People don't realize that milk is heat and pressure-treated, separated, and then put back together for different products. That damages the milk," Redemske says. She also wants people to know that raw milk has all the enzymes and nutrients, so it is easy to digest and very nutritious.

She keeps her brochures affordable. Prices start at \$8 for 25 brochures to \$192 for 800 brochures.

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expects to outgrow it this summer.

"Vats are very expensive new and are hard to find used," says Bonow. "We bought this from a gentleman in New York."

She makes raw milk cheese exclusively, which has to be aged for more than 60 days. Since starting, she has found markets for her cheese at several area stores as well as selling direct. This past winter she offered a package of 1 1/2 lbs. of multiple types of cheese for \$30, plus postage for those at a distance.

Bonow says it is marketing and distribution, not regulations, that have been her biggest challenge. "I had no knowledge of sales prior to doing this," she says. "I'm more of an introvert, and it took a lot of personal growth to get better."

She now does in-store demonstrations,

interviews and social media, including Facebook and Instagram. She also works with a microbrewery and will soon be washing her cheese wheels with one of their brews.

Bonow plans to continue growing her herd and her sales and distribution. She plans to top out the herd at 50 head and concentrate on building demand to match the supply.

Bonow advises anyone interested in following her path to start small. "It is easy to burn out," she says. "Make sure you enjoy it, or you'll get sick of it pretty fast."

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