

Casey Prochniak uses milk from her family's herd of 15 to 20 goats to make candies and caramels.



Goat's Milk Makes Sweet Treats

Casey Prochniak has turned her passion for showing and breeding goats into a sweet side business by using their milk to make fudge, caramel, turtles, and other candy. Sales for the sweets have surpassed her soaps and lotions, especially during the holiday season.

She first learned how to make caramel from a friend, then started experimenting with other candies.

"Goat milk is naturally homogenized, so it is hard to get cream for some recipes," Prochniak says, so she adds commercial cream in some candy. Overall, goat's milk gives her creations a rich and smooth texture.

Between a part-time job as a veterinary technician and being a mother of two young children, she mostly makes candy in the evenings and on weekends in her

Gibbon, Minn., home. She sells through a local consignment store and her website. The cooler seasons work best for shipping candy.

The Prochniaks milk 15 to 20 goats, bred from American Toggenburg, Alpine and Lamancha dairy goats that they show at ADGA National Shows.

"I like the preciseness of making candy. It's relaxing for me," Prochniak says. She also likes the challenge of coming up with new recipes such as caramel apples, with the plan to grow her own apples.

Check out her website for more information on candy flavors and pricing.

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Welsummer Chickens Are A Dual-Purpose Breed

"I'm the president and founder of the Official Welsummer Club of North America," says Wyatt Burnside of Monticello, Ind. "I breed and show Welsummers and have done so for the last 15 years."

The American Poultry Association awards points to individuals who show poultry across America. Burnside has been doing this for so long that he has the second-highest number of points in the U.S.

Burnside says he stumbled on to the Welsummer breed when an acquaintance gave him several. "It snowballed from there," he says.

The 24-year-old says raising Welsummers is easy in some ways and more challenging in others.

"They're very hardy and extremely fertile," he says. "That means it's easy to raise a large flock of birds."

Welsummers are known for their beautiful terra-cotta-colored eggs. They lay a variety of shades of terra-cotta with different levels of speckling.

"They can be challenging to raise if you're trying to breed them to the highest standard for showing," Burnside says. "The females have a very delicate, beautiful, and complicated pattern. Getting the right type and structure can be difficult."

As a breed, he says Welsummers are typically very gentle and don't show a lot of aggression, even among the male birds.

Welsummers, first created by a farmer in the Netherlands, are a dual-purpose breed, which means they're good for laying eggs and providing meat. Because of their dual purpose, they don't lay eggs every day.

"You don't want them to lay eggs daily," he says. "Those birds that do tend to burn



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out very quickly. While a Welsummer won't lay eggs every day, they will lay eggs consistently for you every two or three days for 5 to 6 years."

Other high-performance birds generally last only 2 or 3 years.

"As far as everyday care, they're well known for their foraging ability," Burnside says. "They're great at finding part of their diets if you give them access to pasture."

Burnside supplements their forage with pellets and recommends using a complete feed pellet. He doesn't recommend mixing grains because it's a complicated process to do correctly.

"I have butchered some of the birds, and they were delicious," he says. "The Welsummer is a great dual-purpose breed."

"Anyone looking to start a flock of any size should consider getting a few Welsummers," Burnside says.

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Amundsens expanded their operation quickly to over 2,000 hens.

They Started An Egg Business From Scratch

Jason and Lucie Amundsen built a state-wide egg distribution business after starting with just five hens. Locally Laid eggs are available throughout much of Minnesota. Amundsen gives the credit to a funny brand name, great partner producers, and a lot of hustle.



Amundsens emphasized locally produced eggs and an alternative to corporate agriculture. That and the pastured hens gained attention from customers and media alike.

"We went from five hens to 2,000 overnight," says Jason. "We got a quick education. Everything that we thought would happen didn't happen, like our plan for keeping waterers from freezing."

Amundsen recalls a sudden temperature drop that turned muddy machinery into frozen machinery. "We laid on frozen ground for hours with hammers and screwdrivers, chiseling frozen clay away from our Kubota to get it moving," he says.

Even their chickens were lost at first. Turned out into a field, the first shipment of 900 birds from a commercial egg-laying operation ignored nearby hoop shelters when dusk fell.

Ten years later, the chickens are still laying eggs, and the Amundsens are still in business. Jason credits the customer response to the eggs for keeping them going.

Jason had created initial demand through simple hustle. "I brought eggs to restaurants and grocery stores, asking them to just try them," he says. "They raved about the bright yellow yolks and how the white stood up in the pan."

The response was great. The next challenge was upscaling to meet the demand. A contact with a nearby Amish community solved a major share of the upscaling need. Members of the community agreed to follow the Amundsens practices of non-GMO feed and pastured production for the bulk of the year.

They also invested in an egg processing and USDA-inspected grading facility. Locally Laid quickly transitioned from sole egg producer to minor egg producer, while expanding marketing and financial management.

"Without the processing station, it wouldn't have worked," says Jason. "Finding a producer isn't that hard. Finding someone to bring eggs to a store is hard, but not too hard. Getting an egg processing facility is the hardest step of all."

"We were lucky to develop a relationship with people who understood what was needed," he says. "They know how to farm, but they don't understand Twitter."

The Amundsens do, thanks in no small part to Lucie's writing and promotion skills. The couple chose Locally Laid as their brand name and established a social media presence. They emphasized locally produced eggs and an alternative to corporate agriculture. That and the pastured hens gained attention from customers and media alike.

"Our Amish producers get the security of knowing they'll be paid for the eggs they produce to our standards, which makes life easier for them," says Amundsen. "The money stays in the area, paying the workers at the processing plant and for feed at the local feed mill. It builds the community instead of a large corporation."

Instead of getting bigger as egg producers themselves, the Amundsens have diversified. They have 20 acres of pick-your-own honeyberries in production and are expanding into pick-your-own strawberries. They also host guests in their AirB-N-Bawk (Vol. 46, No. 5) guest houses. All of it is tied back to the hens.

"The beauty of the chickens is it gives the kids something to do while the parents pick berries," says Jason. "It did mean we had to quit electrifying the fence. The kids catch hens outside the fence and put them back."

Meanwhile, Jason deals with marketing, invoices, purchase orders, payments, and the biggest challenge of the egg business, matching supply and demand.

"This fall we need more eggs," he says. "We could double production and still not meet the demand. Last winter we had too many."

Would he advise others to get into the business? "It depends on your skill set," he says. "You need to consider who you are, what you're good at, and how big a risk you will take. Are you willing to trade security for opportunity?"

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