

Noble Springs Dairy Living the Goat Life



Photo Anthony Scarlati

By Rebecca Baur

Noble Springs Dairy sits far off the road between Franklin and Leiper's Fork with a long, gravel driveway that gently winds back to a 1890s farmhouse.

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There are a few outbuildings, a large barn and a cemetery on the property with markers dated as early as 1790s. The peaceful 233-acre farm is forever protected in the Land Trust for Tennessee leaving its history intact and agriculture alive. Dotting the

surrounding pastures are 125 dairy goats – the livelihood for young cheese-makers Dustin and Justyne Noble.

The barn is covered in lounging goats, with playful kids scampering about, the sounds of goat bleats

and “bbhhhaas.” Inside a modest wood-framed building sits commercial-grade milk and cheese processing equipment where some of the best goat cheese in the area is made by local hands.

Dustin and Justyne Noble are at an age where they have plenty of time to discover life, but have already dedicated themselves to what has been a life-time passion – for dairy goats. Justyne, 25, grew up in Tonganoxie, Kansas and, like most children in her small, rural neighborhood, was absorbed in FFA and 4-H. Her mother bought her two goats for a 4-H project when she was seven years old that became a key hobby. “I always liked the different types of goats, there’s a lot you can do with them, like fiber goats and dairy,” says Justyne. Dairy appeared to be her calling. She loved to show horses, but found goats were smaller and more fun to handle, so she would frequent local and national shows with her Alpines.

Dustin, 30, is a native of Brentwood, whose brother had an allergy to regular cow’s milk as an infant. Noble’s parents discovered goats milk a great alternative and were given two goats to have at home for fresh milk. It made a lasting impression on Dustin and, with the added encouragement of his father, began raising goats at age 10 and through the rest of school and college was showing goats all over the country. He earned an Animal Science degree from University of Tennessee and prided himself a master breeder of Toggenburg and Saanen Dairy Goats, paying careful attention to select herd sires from

does placing at the top of their class in ADGA National Shows.

Dustin and Justyne met in 2003 while showing their prize-winning animals at the American Dairy Goat Association's National Show in Iowa. They struck a friendship, kept in touch, and Justyne would move closer by enrolling in Middle Tennessee State University, bringing five goats with her. Upon finishing college, knowing their lives were a parallel universe of love for dairy goats, they would find a place to call home. With the help of family friends they set up business on a Franklin farm. By 2009, they were operating as a Grade-A licensed cheese-processing facility, as well as the only farm in the state of Tennessee licensed to sell goats milk for human consumption. Top it off with Dustin and Justyne's wedding right on the farm.

Raising goats and making cheese is a labor of love for the Nobles. They average 15-hour workdays, milking at 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. everyday. "I think we've taken a total of three days vacation in the three years we've been doing this," says Justyne. "We really enjoy it; it was a hobby for both of us before turning into a business. It's like a kid who plays guitar growing up and then becomes the professional singer, we're fortunate to be doing something we enjoy," Dustin adds.

The goats are free to roam 20 acres of pasture, living on a healthy diet of grass and alfalfa hay, and nibbling on grain while standing in the milking parlor. Sixty to seventy goats are available to milk at a time. "They get two months vacation, to rest and have kids, it can be demanding for a production animal," says Justyne.

The goats of various color and size exhibit quality breeding with the added personality, curiosity and socialized nature, a result of being hand raised and bottle-fed. "We selectively breed our animals to help them be more efficient in milk production," adds Dustin. Given their history and expertise, cheese lovers can be assured top quality milk goes into every Noble Springs Dairy product.

The farm produces around 15,000 pounds of cheese a year, gathering 40-50 gallons of milk a day. Dustin explains, "If you com-



Photo Anthony Scarlati

pare nutrition facts, goat's milk is 35 percent lower in fat to cream cheese, 60 percent lower in cholesterol and 30 percent lower in Calories. It's easier to digest because of the (shorter) molecules and goat's milk is naturally homogenized." As with all dairy products, their milk is FDA tested and contains no antibiotics or hormones.

Already making a name for themselves, the dairy operation has been featured on the PBS Series America's Heartland, Live Green Tennessee and Rural TV. They're a favorite at farmer's markets, requested by local chefs and their products can be found in local stores including Whole Foods.

Visit their website, www.Noble-Springs.com to find out where you can buy their delicious variations of Chevre spreads like Garlic and Herb, Cherry Berry, Pimento, Sun-dried Tomato and Basil and the Chocolate Truffle, Chevre logs like The Busy Bee, Honey Apricot, herbs de Provence and Garlic Dill, as well as Feta and Gouda.

"We take a lot of pride in the quality of our products, we like to

be involved in the whole process, the health of the animals, the process of making cheese; we're happy how it has progressed," says Dustin.

It's as if the Noble's are walking in the footsteps of those who worked the farm a hundred years ago, with their own hands, one happy and healthy goat at a time.

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