

Division of Marketing  
Agricultural Development and Diversification (ADD) Program

1998 Grant Final Report

Grant Number 13040

**Grant Title** . A Homestead Goat Milk Cheese Network: Expanding Northern Wisconsin's Potential in the Specialty Cheese Market

**Amount Awarded** \$21,082.00

**Name** Sara Bredesen

**Organization** Buckwheat Acres Goat Dairy  
Three Lakes

**E-Mail** bkwht@newnorth.net

**WEB**

Department Contact: DATCP - Marketing - ADD Grants  
PO Box 8911 Madison, WI 53708-8911  
Tel: (608)224-5136  
<http://datcp.state.wi.us>

Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection  
Division of Marketing  
Agricultural Development & Diversification Program (ADD)

***1999 Grant Project Final Report***

Contract Number: 13040

***A Homestead Goat Milk Cheese  
Network:***

***Expanding Northern Wisconsin's  
Potential  
In the Specialty Cheese Market***

August 1, 1998 to August 1, 1999  
Amount of Funding Awarded: \$21,082

Sara T. Bredesen  
7253 Hwy 45N  
Three Lakes, WI 54562  
715-546-3735  
email: [bkwht@newnorth.net](mailto:bkwht@newnorth.net)

## Year 1 Project Summary

The original intent of the grant project was to be small-scale and regional in nature and broadly designed to:

- 1) Form an alliance with other northern Wisconsin goat milk producers in seeking an outlet for their product.
- 2) Create and market prototype homestead goat cheeses.
- 3) Design, test and share a method of marketing regionally produced goat milk cheeses.

Five specific steps were outlined to meet those broad objectives:

- 1) Identify potential goat milk producers who are not currently serviced by existing cheese plants, and survey their current and future plans for dairying.
- 2) Research the regional demand for specialty goat milk cheeses and formulate a report of potential products, buyers, and market parameters.
- 3) Formulate two or three basic products that will be consistent with the market research results.
- 4) Acquaint the public and media with our regionally produced cheeses, and create an awareness of the value of goat milk products.

The intended economic benefit was to provide a market for commercially-produced goat milk in northern Wisconsin and for regionally-produced goat milk cheeses. It is assumed that economic benefits would be derived by retailers through added sales of a unique product, and to fruit and herb producers through the addition of flavors to the cheese.

The grant was originally intended to help set up a prototype homestead cheese operation that could act as the beginning of a network of homestead plants. The people I surveyed were lukewarm on making their own cheese but wildly excited about having a viable goat products industry "up north." Because of that response, I have kept the original objectives of the grant the same, but have broadened my personal long-range goals so that northern Wisconsin goat milk producers will eventually have access to a whole package of income opportunities. That package includes:

- Homestead cheese production, if preferred
- Contract, private label cheese production, if preferred
- A cooperative effort to collect and sell excess milk
- A working relationship with existing southern plants and milk producers
- An information and support network
- Product development and marketing support
- Support for necessary by-product disposal (ie. Meat kids, whey, cull milkers)

As my personal goals have broadened, it has been necessary to adjust the time needed to meet the grant's original objectives. Year 1 did not change, but year 2 was increased by six months. I still believe strongly that all of the objectives are viable and necessary to the growth of a northern Wisconsin goat specialty cheese market. The problem to this point is that there is no northern Wisconsin goat products industry, so there is no support for a specialty cheese market as I envision it.

## Work Conducted

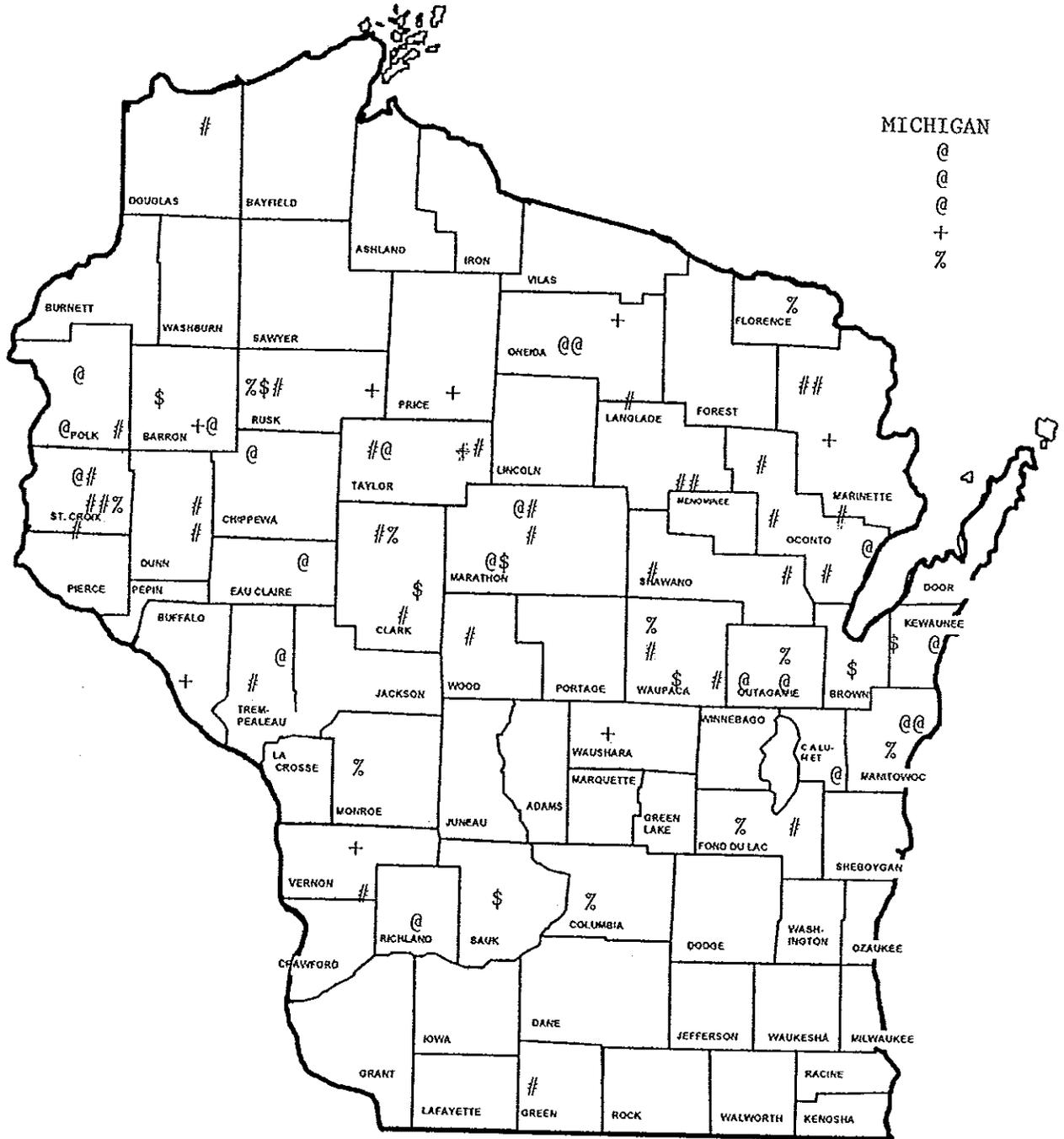
### ***1) Identify potential goat milk producers who are not currently serviced by existing cheese plants, and survey their current and future plans for dairying.***

Prior to the initiation of this grant, there were no statistics available to identify numbers or locations of potential goat milk supplies in northern Wisconsin. In fact, researchers from the Department of Ag and from Emergency Government contacted me for data based on my survey findings.

Using media, word-of-mouth, and goat club news lists, 169 surveys were distributed. Ninety-five were returned, and those that did not indicate an interest in potential commercial production were put in an inactive file. The target area for surveying was originally set north of a line and including Trempeleau and Kewaunee counties. However, media coverage brought in respondents from Monroe, Waushara, Manitowoc, Vernon, Sauk, Columbia, Fond du Lac and Lafayette counties, as well as five others in Michigan near Marinette and Florence counties.

The surveys sought to determine the potential production of goat milk based on current herd size, future plans (or interest), and needed changes to the facility to make it suitable for commercial production (**See Appendix A**). Potential fluid milk production was extrapolated from those numbers based on an estimated average of 1800 pounds of milk per animal over a 305-day lactation. **Chart 1** shows the distribution of potential production by county and intended size of herd. **Chart 2** indicates the maximum and minimum potential production and herd size by county.

**Chart 1: Distribution of Potential Goat Milk Production, by Location and Estimated Herd Size**



**Key**

@ 1-49 Head of Goats  
 # 50-99 Head  
 + 100-149 Head

% 150-249 Head  
 \$ Over 250 Head

**Chart 2: Potential Goat Milk Production by County**

<b>County</b>	<b>Min. Total Head</b>	<b>Max. Total Head</b>	<b>Min. # Milk*</b>	<b>Max. # Milk*</b>	<b># Responding</b>	<b>Largest Herd</b>	<b>Smallest Herd</b>
Barron	350	1815	330,000	3,267,000	4	200	10
Brown	500	500	900,000	900,000	1	500	500
Buffalo	100	100	180,000	180,000	1	100	100
Calumet	Did not respond with specifics				1		
Clark	960	1310	1,728,000	2,358,000	5	500	50
Columbia	200	200	360,000	360,000	1	200	200
Crawford	60	90	108,000	162,000	1	90	60
Douglas	50	50	90,000	90,000	1	50	50
Dunn	110	160	198,000	288,000	2	160	110
Eau Claire	20	20	36,000	36,000	1	20	20
Florence	100	200	180,000	360,000	1	200	100
Fond du Lac	225	225	405,000	405,000	2	150	75
Kewaunee	250	250	450,000	450,000	1**	250	250
LaFayette	75	75	135,000	135,000	1	75	75
Langlade	110	150	198,000	270,000	3	90	50
Manitowoc	390	390	702,000	702,000	3	200	30
Marathon	455	475	819,000	855,000	5	250	20
Marinette	235	310	423,000	558,000	4	150	10
Monroe	200	200	360,000	360,000	1	200	200
Oconto	115	160	207,000	288,000	3	60	25
Oneida	120	120	216,000	216,000	3	100	10
Outagamie	225	275	405,000	495,000	2	150	75
Pierce	25	100	450,000	180,000	1	100	25
Polk	100	125	180,000	225,000	2	100	25
Price	100	200	180,000	360,000	1	200	100
Richland	25	30	45,000	54,000	1	30	25
Rusk	650	700	1,170,000	1,260,000	4	300	50
St. Croix	400	410	720,000	738,000	5	200	50
Sauk	250	250	450,000	450,000	1	250	250
Shawano	130	200	234,000	360,000	3	100	30
Taylor	105	105	189,000	189,000	5***	60	20
Trempealeau	100	120	180,000	216,000	3	100	20
Vernon	100	100	180,000	180,000	1	100	100
Waupaca	575	705	1,035,000	1,269,000	5	300	30
Waushara	120	120	216,000	216,000	1	120	120
Wood	100	100	180,000	180,000	1	100	100
<i>Michigan</i>	256	381	460,800	685,800	5	200	20
<b>Total</b>	7886	10721	14,299,800	19,297,800	85	5955	2985

\*Based on estimated average of 1800# per 105-day lactation \*\*A second respondent wanted her own herd for homestead cheese, not to ship milk \*\*\*Includes a herd shipping commercial milk.

Does this survey indicate a viable goat milk industry in northern Wisconsin? According to Bill Wendorff, program director at the UW-Madison Center for Dairy Research, Wisconsin is currently converting 11 to 12 million pounds of fluid goat milk into cheese at three southern plants, a homestead operation at Ridgeway, and a cheese plant at Somerset that uses mostly Minnesota milk. With those numbers in mind, 14+ million pounds of additional milk potential looks very promising. However, the rosy picture has to be tempered by the following elements of good business:

- 1) Goat cheese producers are more willing than cow folks to go out 100 to 200 miles and more to pick up product, but farms have to be conveniently laid out on the route, and milk production has to be of sufficient quantity to justify the hauler's time and gas.
- 2) Cheese plants usually want year-round milk supplies, so herd numbers need to be sufficient to allow for 1/3 of the herd to be dry at any one time of the year.
- 3) Some of the survey respondents have never worked with goats before and would be facing a steep learning curve.
- 4) *Catch 22*. Milk producers want to know that there is a sure market for their milk before they commit to expansion, and cheese plants want to be assured they will have a steady milk supply before they will commit to goat cheese production.

On the positive side, three other elements have to be tossed into the mix:

- 1) There appear to be clusters of potential milk that could be worked into one or more viable routes, depending on the final destination.
- 2) Current commercial producers for the three southern plants are looking for alternative markets for their summer milk, so milk not identified in this grant is available.
- 3) Farm Services is conducting a "Homestead Dairy Day" in November, 1999, that will bring forward more potential milk producers.

The survey identified 18 respondents interested in either making homestead cheese or contracting for a private label. (Initial contacts were made with several small cheese plants to ask whether they would be interested in making contract cheese.) Two survey respondents were interested in soap or lotion production, and two were in the process of getting cheese makers licenses. Of those latter two, one was setting up his facility for raw milk feta production (Richland County) for production before the end of 1999. My own facility is included in the survey results (Oneida County). As a part of the grant, I have received my cheese makers license and will have facilities licensed by the end of 1999.

***2) Research the regional demand for specialty goat milk cheeses and formulate a report of potential products, buyers, and market parameters.***

This portion of the research was collected by visiting cheese and gift specialty shops, corresponding with farmers' market organizers, listening to radio and TV ads for potential customers, researching telephone books, and talking to people who are familiar with up-scale restaurants in my region. The specific results are going to be of benefit only to me or to someone else trying to make and market cheese in the area roughly including Oneida, Vilas, Langlade, and Lincoln Counties. The general method for collecting market information is included in a document entitled "Developing the Homestead Goat Cheese Business in Wisconsin" which will be available as part of Year 2 grant work. (See outline at **Appendix B**).

A survey of goat milk cheeses sold in my region found a miniscule selection and only one Wisconsin cheese (**Chart 3**). One deli manager was willing to tell me the standard markup, which was 35-40% with the higher level at mid-summer when tourist activity is highest.

**Chart 3. A Survey of Goat Milk Cheeses Sold in the Four County Area (Oneida, Vilas, Langlade, Lincoln) and Competing Cow Milk Feta**

Name of Cheese	Type	Varieties	Origin	Packaging	Price Range
Madame Chevre	Soft spread	Garlic, black pepper, five herb	Ontario, Canada	Cryovac bubble 5 oz	\$2.99-3.19
Gjetost	Hard, whey	Standard	Norway	Plastic wrap, 8 oz cardboard box	\$3.99-5.29
Wis. Country Chevre	Soft spread	Plain	Bass Lake Wisconsin	Soft Cryovac tube 6oz	\$3.99
Saladena Goat Crumbles	Dry crumble	Herb, plain	Bresse Bleu, Watertown	Heat seal rigid bubble 4 oz.	\$3.19
Chavrie	Soft spread	Plain, basil and roast garlic	BC via PA (French)	Reseal plastic pyramid 5.3 oz.	\$3.98-4.39
Prelude Chevre Chaud	Baked en crouete	Plain in pastry crust	Cantre Foods, CA	Cryovac bag in cardboard 6 oz.	\$7.49
Chevre de Bellay	Soft spread	Plain, herb	French	Cryovac tube 4 oz	\$3.09-3.39

**Competing Cow Milk Feta**

Apetina	Chunks in oil	Oil and herb	Domestic	Faceted jar 10.5 oz	\$3.99
Store Brand	Crumbles	Plain	Unknown	Deli cup 4 oz.	\$1.95
Store Brand	Cube	Plain	Unknown	Cryovac 8 oz.	\$3.09
Athenos	Crumbles	Basil and dried tomato, garlic and herb	Churny	Heat seal rigid bubble pack 4 oz	\$2.39-2.49
Athenos	Chunk	Plain, basil and tomato, garlic and herb	Churny	Cryovac 4 oz	\$3.99-3.79
Odyssey	Chunks in oil	Plain, tomato and basil	Unknown	Faceted jar 8 oz	\$2.79
Store Brand	Chunks in oil	Plain, red pepper	Unknown	Plain jar 10.5 oz	\$3.79

A number of Wisconsin goat milk cheeses could be marketed in the north-central region, but are not. There are two possible reasons: 1) The market has not been researched yet by the southern companies, or 2) Expected sales would be too small compared to other markets the companies have targeted. Those companies are Mont Chevre' at Belmont, Bresse Bleu at Watertown, and Southwest Goat Coop at Mt. Sterling. They make a range of goat cheeses from semi-soft slicing cheeses to fresh chevre varieties, and some are similar to the out-of-state imports.

**3) Formulate two or three basic products that will be consistent with the market research results.**

Getting approved equipment in place has been my biggest challenge concerning this objective. In mid-August, the plant is still not licensed. Recommendations for making the process move more quickly and smoothly will be part of the "Developing the Homestead Cheese Business..." document. It would have been impossible for me to set up my prototype plant without funding from this grant. Some equipment was attained through leases, and the rest is being paid for out of my salary as grant manager. Year 2 will see fulfillment of this objective.

Even though I wasn't busy making cheese, I was busy researching my options. In November, I attended a two-day seminar on "Semi-Soft and Monastery Cheeses" offered by the UW-Madison Center for Dairy Research. It was an opportunity to network with other cheese makers on their suggestions for appropriate products.

During the Wisconsin State Fair I manage the Wisconsin Goat Products Booth in the Ag Products Building. Records of sales for 1999 suggest that flavor varieties of fresh, high moisture cheeses are in more demand than semi-soft (Jack, Cheddar) or surface ripened cheeses (Camembert, brie). The greatest demand was for fresh chevre in an oil and herb marinade.

**4) Acquaint the public and media with our regionally produced cheeses, and create an awareness of the value of goat milk products.**

I am an avid promoter of goats and goat milk products and take any opportunity I can to speak to audiences on the topic. Clippings, where available, are collected in **Appendix C**. The following media and outreach events took place during the past 12 months:

- Wisconsin State Fair Dairy Goat Products Booth--11 days of face-to-face promotion (August 1998).
- Radio interview with ag reporter, Jay Rudolph, (station?) in Fond du Lac (August).
- Radio interview with Bob Meyer, Goetz Radio Service, Marshfield (August).
- Sent news releases to *Wisconsin State Farmer* and *Country Today* about the survey. Both publications printed the article (August).
- Local newspapers announce Bredesen as ADD Grant recipient (August).
- Contacted 40 UW-Extension agents with information about the grant work (September)
- Sent news release to *Agri-View* about the survey (September).
- Was interviewed and quoted in *Wisconsin Trails* in a feature story on the goat industry in Wisconsin (September-October issue).
- Was interviewed by *Country Today* for a feature story (October)
- Featured in *Rhineland Daily News* Sunday edition (November).
- Presentation to Walworth County Dairy Goat Association on Alternative Incomes With Dairy Goats (February).
- Was featured in *Vilas News Review* story about receiving a cheese maker license (February).
- Acted as judges assistant at the Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association National Competition and was interviewed by a Green Bay radio person (? Station) (February).
- Was quoted in a *Farming Today* article on goat dairying as a new niche (March).
- Featured in *Antigo Daily Journal* story about cheese maker license and apprenticeship at Antigo cheese plant (April).

- Featured in *Agri-View* with front page photo and full page feature inside (April).
- Media features have lead to drop-in visitors touring the farm (all year).
- 1999 Wisconsin State Fair included 11 days of promotion again in the Wisconsin Goat Products Booth, as well as a daily product demonstration on the stage. I also had a good conversation with Joe Tregoening about his interest in helping promote homestead cheese production in the state, and a brief talk with Tommy Thompson to thank him for supporting the ADD Grant program (August 1999).

One of the requests that came most often from goat owners was for information on alternative income ideas. In response, I produced "*Alternative Incomes With Dairy Goats*," which is currently undergoing DATCP scrutiny. **(Appendix D)**

## **Project Results and Conclusions**

The grant project results met my original expectations in respect to creating much-needed baseline information about goat milk and its availability in Northern Wisconsin. I expect that the surveying will continue as long as media attention and word-of-mouth continue. My hope is to someday have a state-wide map of goat milk capacity and production statistics similar to what the cow people have always had.

The grant project results fell short of my expectations in respect to developing and marketing regional cheeses. As I have already mentioned, equipment problems have held up my progress in that area. I look forward to making up for lost time in Year 2 and expect that there will be several regional cheeses developed before the end of the grant. A positive outcome of my equipment problem is that Acme Equipment in Madison now has experience and new design information for making a small (100 gal.) batch pasteurizer. We have spent a great deal of time and money getting the equipment to meet both industry standards and my needs as a homestead operator.

From my survey results and general observations, I form the following conclusions:

- Setting up a homestead cheese operation is time-consuming and capital intensive. It can be a viable family business only if the operator has the right combination of enthusiasm, energy, business sense, curiosity, moral support, financial assistance, and luck.
- There is enough potential milk production to support a northern goat cheese industry, but the producers that are currently identified are too far apart and too unorganized for anything to happen in the near future. I would predict three to four years of concentrated effort by at least two people working full time to pull milk producers and cheese plants into a cohesive business. The questions are: Who are those people, and when can they start?
- Northern Wisconsin needs a network developed to cooperatively market available milk.
- A large number of goat people want to increase the number of animals they are milking, but they don't have the foggiest idea what the State requires for commercial operation. Education is badly needed.
- Several goat people want to make homestead cheeses, but they don't have the foggiest idea what is legal and what is not. *More* education is badly needed.
- Goat people want statistics about milk and cheese production, numbers of animals, locations of farms, etc., and it isn't available through the State.

- In areas where several producers are clustered, a private-label contract with an area cheese plant would be a reasonable alternative to a homestead cheese operation.
- In areas where potential producers are not clustered, a homestead cheese operation would be worth researching.
- Milk production, no matter how well managed, will not keep a goat farm in the black if there is not a meat market developed at the same time. Research is critically needed on market potential for goat meat.

## **The Impact on Wisconsin Agriculture and the Family Farm**

Farming in Wisconsin seems to be dividing itself down the middle, with massive industrial farms on one side and homestead direct-to-market farms on the other. The former depends on quantity and standardization of the final product, while the latter depends on quality and attention to details that make the product unique. As our small cow dairies feel the pinch of competing with industrial farms, more and more operators will be looking for alternatives that will make the best use of their facilities and return a larger margin on their investments. Goat milk cheeses have traditionally been a homestead product because they are considered "artisanal cheeses", and in both Europe and the United States, are considered high margin items.

This project lays down the basis for much needed statistics on milk availability, provides public information on alternative incomes with dairy goats, and presents a prototype homestead cheese operation for others to view. With every answer that is found, more questions are asked. I fully expect that this grant will lead to others grants, and each will bring us closer to realizing a fuller potential for agriculture in northern Wisconsin.

## Appendix A:

### ADD Survey: Potential Goat Milk Production

1. Do you have dairy goats?  Yes  No (go to 5 ) Name \_\_\_\_\_
2. How many does milking now? \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_
3. How many potential milkers by spring? \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_
4. What do you do with the milk now? eMail- \_\_\_\_\_
- Home use
  - Private fluid sales
  - Private sale of cheese
  - Pet milk sales
  - Raise pigs/calves/etc.
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
5. If you had the opportunity to sell goat milk commercially, would you?  
 Yes  No (go to 10)
6. Where would you like to see your milk used commercially?
- By a cheese plant (Grade B)
  - As Grade A fluid sales
  - Under my own cheese/product label, produced by someone else
  - I would be interested in making my own cheese/ product
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
7. If you had a commercial milk outlet, how big would you want to get? How many milkers?  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. If you had a commercial milk outlet, how soon could you begin shipping milk?
9. What would you have to do to your present facility to make it suitable for a commercial operation?
- Ready to go as it is
  - Add equipment only (bulk tank, sinks, pipeline, etc.)
  - Moderate remodeling of current facility
  - Build a milk house and/or parlor
  - Major building required
  - Can not be made suitable
10. Can you give me names of other goat owners in your area whom you think might benefit from being included in the survey process?

Return Survey to:  
Sara T. Bredesen  
7253 Hwy 45 N  
Three Lakes, WI 54562

## **Appendix B:**

### **Outline for "*Developing the Homestead Goat Cheese Business in Wisconsin*"**

- I. Introduction
  - A. Differences between goat business and cow business
  - B. Keeping it simple
- II. The Market
  - A. Where is it?
    - 1. Determining the area
    - 2. Determining the potential volume
  - B. What do people want?
    - 1. What is out there now?
    - 2. What am I going to provide?
  - C. What method am I going to use to sell?
    - 1. Wholesale options
    - 2. Retail options
- III. Producing milk
  - A. Legal requirements
  - B. Equipment needs
- IV. Producing the cheese
  - A. Homestead production
    - 1. Training
    - 2. Licensing
  - B. Contract private label
  - C. Options for whey disposal
- V. Packaging/labeling options
  - A. Legal requirements
  - B. Equipment needs
- VI. Helpful resources

APPENDIX C

**Alternative Incomes With Dairy Goats**  
**(Wisconsin 1999-2000)**

**by Sara T. Bredesen**

**in conjunction with**  
**Wisconsin Department of Agriculture,**  
**Trade and Consumer Protection**  
**Division of Marketing - ADD**

# **Alternative Incomes With Dairy Goats**

## **(Wisconsin 1999-2000)**

### **Asking the Questions First**

Some of us have had dairy goats for ever and want to look into new ways to extend our incomes using the animals, and others are looking at their first purchase and want to know what they are getting into. Whatever situation you are in, the following information is based on research, current information (1999) and nearly 20 years experience with dairy goats. The object of this pamphlet is to share ideas that have been used successfully by others, and to warn of some of the pitfalls.

The first step is to ask a series of questions that will help you determine where you are going and what kind of income you are realistically aiming for.

#### ***What do I want to be when I grow up?***

In other words, how many animals do I want to support and how much money do I want to make with them? Here are some broad categories:

- I am independently wealthy and love my goats more than life itself, and I don't care a hoot about getting money back from them.
- I want a hobby farm with just enough income to pay some of the feed bills.
- I want a hobby farm with a profit.
- I am working seriously toward developing a goat business but plan to keep my second job.
- I want to have a dairy goat business (and file taxes accordingly), so I need enough income for my animals to support me.

### *What do my animals really cost?*

Once you have identified with one of the categories above, the next step is to calculate your current costs or your expected costs. If it applies, be sure to include DHI test, advertising, semen tank charging, registration fees, etc., to your list of expenses. If you don't have any goats at this time, you will have the initial cost of purchasing livestock, basic equipment, housing, fencing and feed. The resource guide at the end of this brochure includes books that will lead you through the steps of getting your first goat and calculating expected costs.

Following is a sample breakdown of 12 months of expenses on a farm that has 35 goats, including milkers, bucks and kids.

Advertising	66
Breeding Fees	150
Contract Labor	430
Dues and Subscriptions	36
Show entries	191
Feed and Grain	6,750
New Livestock	120
Office (postage, printing)	52
Accounting	175
Building Repairs	160
Supplies	875
Telephone	166
Trailer Repair	130
Business meals	42
Utilities	245
Veterinary	445
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$10,033</b>

If the net expense of \$10,033 is divided by 45, the cost per animal is \$222.96. Fewer animals means fewer expenses over-all, but not necessarily a lower per animal cost. If you don't have animals yet, now is a good time to research the information as it applies to where you live. Call the feed mill, hay dealer and veterinarian you will be working with, and find out what your costs will be for the basics. Once you have an idea how much your animals cost, it will be easier to calculate how much income you need to meet your goals. Now it is time to look at the alternatives.

### *Where do I look for potential income?*

Potential income is hidden in three places:

1. The animal, as it stands
2. The by-products of the animal
3. Your talents as they relate to the animal

# Alternatives and Income Potential

## *The Animal as it stands*

The most obvious income with dairy goats is to sell the animal itself. If you love your animals, as most do, the dilemma is to decide which to sell and which to keep. In any case, the sale of a goat can go several ways: As a milker, for meat, for breeding stock, as a pack animal, for research, or for a pet.

**Milk:** There are milk goats...and then there are milk goats. If you are trying to sell kids or adults as milkers, you must keep accurate production records and have animals with body and mammary capacity to indicate good milkability. You might be able to sell the ho-hum backyard bag-bumper for \$65, but it will take better quality to ask the \$150 to \$400 that can be earned on a quality animal. Each year young stock is purchased for export to foreign countries, and buyers will pay from \$200 to \$400 for kids whose dams and grand-dams have superior milk records. You can get hooked up with an exporter by contracting a member of The Wisconsin Dairy Goat Association.

**Meat (Chevon):** According to Lyle Roe of Wisconsin's Equity Livestock Auction, prices on meat goats fluctuate wildly during the year because the supply fluctuates wildly during the year. Through the auction, the lowest prices are on 2-day to 2-week-old kids which are \$2-5 a head. Cull does, whethers and bucks in good condition run \$35-45 a head but drop in price if they are in fair to poor condition. Meat kids from 50 to 100 pounds go at \$.55-\$.60 a pound for most of the year but can get as low as \$.35 and as high as \$.80 as the demand fluctuates. Young kids between 18 and 30 pounds sell best a few weeks before the Orthodox Easter at a high of \$1.20 a pound, but generally run \$10 to \$12 a head (\$.55/lb.) at other times of the year. Roe suggests contacting Equity to check prices before bringing in animals, or to ask about upcoming goat and lamb pools when larger numbers are sold over the internet to on-line buyers. (Equity Livestock Auction, Baraboo, 1-800-356-9322).

Meat animals can also be sold from the farm if sold on the hoof. Prices vary according to your area of the state and the quality of the animal. Selling prepared meat off the farm or at a farmer's market has a whole set of state requirements to be considered. Two publications from the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (WDATCP) are of importance: *"Wisconsin Food Safety Regulations For Small Food Processing Facilities & Farmers Market Vendors,"* and *"Licensing and Regulation of the Direct Marketer (Farmers Market Vendors, Persons Seeking Value-added Sales, and Small Food Processors)."* Calculate the amount of feed that you have put into an animal, add something for your time and care, and set a price that is more than you would get at auction.

**Breeding Stock:** To sell breeding stock means that the animal is expected to produce dependable genetics that will pass along good milk production and sound body type to the offspring. The Wisconsin Dairy Goat Association and its members are dedicated to promoting quality dairy goats in the state. Toward that end, the Association recommends that animals that do not meet breed standards or are not structurally sound not be advertised as breeding stock. Having said that, show animals can range from \$150 to several thousand dollars, though the normal top in Wisconsin is about \$650. Kids are

at the low end, and adults with proven show records and outstanding pedigrees are at the top end. Developing a quality herd with market recognition takes a lot of time and expense. Even then, you are not guaranteed sales. If you want to pursue this avenue, expect to spend money purchasing top-of-the line stock to begin with, and then spending more money to campaign them around the show circuit and advertise them heavily.

**Pack Goats:** Goats are very popular in rugged terrain as sure-footed pack animals, but Wisconsin hasn't got much rugged terrain and not many pack goat enthusiasts. Just the same, anyone who has the interest and energy to train a big bodied whether to dependably carry a loaded pack can get from \$150 to \$750 per animal for the effort. Check out John Mionczynski's book *The Pack Goat* to learn more.

**Research:** Selling animals as research subjects is often a moral dilemma. The fact is, it is difficult to advance dairy goat research and veterinary medicine for the species if there are no animals to work with. If you see fit to sell animals as research animals, contact a mid-west veterinary school and ask what the needs are, and what prices are being paid. If you have any qualms, also ask what type of research is being done. Past prices paid for goats have been from \$65 to \$200, depending on age and availability.

**Pets:** Everyone would love to pawn off all those extra spring kids as pets. Unfortunately, the neighborhood can get flooded pretty fast. Don't expect to get more than meat prices for a pet. The same with "brushers," or non-milking animals used for cleaning up brambles and brush overgrowth. A recent story from the West Coast featured a woman who rented herself and herd of goats out for roadside brush clearing. It would be a unique source of income in Wisconsin, and one I have not researched seriously.

## *The by-products*

### Milk for Human Consumption

It is legal in the State of Wisconsin to sell raw milk from the farm for human consumption, but there are a number of "ifs" that must be understood. Milk can be sold from the farm:

- If the sales are incidental
- If the milk meets Grade A standards
- If the buyer provides his or her own sanitized container
- If you are willing to accept liability

Rules and regulations for this section come from what is referred to as ATCP 97, which is part of the Wisconsin State Statutes concerning food safety. A copy of Chapter 97 is available through your regional State Department of Ag office. Another good Chapter to request is ATCP 60, which are rules for dairy farms.

According to a spokesperson from WDATCP, incidental sales are those where a buyer stops at the farm "out of the blue" and doesn't come back at a regular (weekly, daily, etc.) time. There is nothing in the statute that says you can not advertise, but my contact assures me that a "milk for sale" sign at the barn gate would take the farm sales out of the realm of "incidental." In place of "milk for sale" signs, I have seen pictures of goats, or a sign that says there are dairy goats on the property.

ATCP 97 says that the milk has to meet Grade A *standards*, but don't try to promote yours as "Grade A" milk without the proper licenses. The fine could hurt.

Grade A standards include:

- No visible adulteration or odors
- **NO** drug residue, pesticides, or toxic substances
- A bacteria or "plate loop" count of less than 100,000/ml
- A somatic cell count of less than 1,000,000/ml
- An approved water supply and clean environment for collection and processing of the milk

The buyer not only has to provide his or her own container, but also has to sanitize it "in a manner comparable to the sanitizing of the utensils used in the production of milk by the producer."

Obviously, the Department of Ag doesn't make it easy to meet the *letter* of the law. The *intent* of the law is to provide wholesome, fresh goat milk in sanitary containers, from healthy animals that were milked in clean surroundings. The last point to consider if you want to sell goat milk from the farm is that of liability. Litigation, whether deserved or frivolous, can be costly to you and really bad publicity for Wisconsin's dairy goat industry. Consider your options--and your potential milk customers--carefully. The going price for farm sales of goat milk in the state run from \$6 to \$10 a gallon.

### **Milk For Pet Foods**

Goat milk has long been recognized as a superior replacement feed for other breeds of animals (not to mention people) because of its high level of digestibility. Calves and lambs rarely scour on goat milk, and documented sales have been made for every kind of baby from elephants to elk. If your area veterinarians know that goat milk is available, you will probably get calls from puppy, elk, llama and cat breeders. Be sure the area Department of Natural Resources folks know you have milk available for orphaned fawns and raccoons. If you choose to sell pet milk, Wisconsin wants you to pay sales tax, but you can advertise it anywhere you want and get from \$1 to \$6 a gallon for your efforts. There is a question as to when you need to apply for a retail sales license. Check with the Trade part of the Wisconsin Department of Ag, Trade and Consumer Protection for particulars.

A good business can be made of feeding your own livestock with goat milk and selling the finished critters at healthy "milk-fed" prices. At a time when pork prices were in the basement, mine went for \$1.30 a pound hanging weight. Other meat animals that grow well on goat milk include rabbits, chickens, calves and lambs. Contract heifer raising may also be an alternative income if you have the facilities and management techniques and live relatively close to a cow dairy.

If you choose to sell meat animals you have raised, the state is particular about you either selling them on the hoof, or having them processed in a licensed plant. Check out the two WDATCP publications, "*Wisconsin Food Safety Regulations For Small Food Processing Facilities & Farmers Market Vendors*," and "*Licensing and Regulation of the Direct Marketer (Farmers Market Vendors, Persons Seeking Value-added Sales,*

and Small Food Processors)."

### Milk for Cheese

The sad fact is, Wisconsin's goat cheese plants will not be taking on new producers until their current producers have grown as large as they want to get. Discussion is underway for small cheese plants in several parts of the state to do contract production, but the business is in its very earliest stages. **Don't expect to be able to sell milk to a cheese plant just because you want to.** If, by some tremendous stroke of luck, you find yourself in a position to have **guaranteed** sales to a cheese plant, get a copy of ATCP-60 and go over it carefully with your area WDATCP inspector. He or she is the one who will keep you on the right track toward licensing. Current Grade B milk prices run from \$22 to \$36 cwt (a "hundred weight"), depending on cleanliness of the product, time of year it is produced, and level of solids in the milk.

If you have an interest in making your own cheese, you are among a growing number of Wisconsin goat and cow milk producers who are looking at ways to increase the value of their milk. Whether you sell to your neighbor or to a chain of grocery stores, the cheese has to be made in a licensed plant by a licensed cheese maker. Wisconsin is very serious about maintaining its reputation as a producer of wholesome, safe, quality cheeses, and there is no room for accidents. Because of that, the process for becoming a cheese maker and setting up your own licensed plant are stringent.

At the present time a cheese makers license requires one of the following:

- A dairy degree at an approved four-year university or college, plus six month apprenticeship as a cheese maker
- 18 months experience in a cheese plant with at least one month working directly with cheese making
- 12 month experience in a cheese plant with the one-month cheese making requirement, plus one of the following: 1) cheese technology short-course through UW-Madison, 2) associate dairy degree, or 3) equivalent short course or degree work at another higher education institute.

After meeting the requirements, there are two licensing exams: One as a milk sampler/hauler, and one for the cheese maker license. Two documents are suggested to help you make decisions about homestead cheese production. The first is *Considerations for Potential Farmstead Cheesemakers* by Bill Wendorff, Department of Food Science, UW-Madison. The second is *ATCP-80 - Dairy Plants*.

There is an option to making your own cheese on the farm. It can also be produced with your milk on a contract basis through an existing cheese plant. In that case, the only license you need is a producer's license for milking the goats. When it comes time to market the cheese you will need a vendor's license which is available through WDATCP. Contract production of cheese means that you hire a cheese plant to make your cheese, using milk you provide, then you take the cheese home when it is ready. It may be possible to work out a marketing program with the cheese plant, and the cheese maker will probably work with you to develop the type of cheese that suits you. Three problems may arise: 1) You have to figure out how to get your milk to the plant, 2) The most convenient cheese plant may have vats too big for you to fill with milk, 3) You may have trouble fitting into a full production schedule during the flush summer months when you have the most milk.

Goat milk cheeses are currently selling for \$6 to \$12 a pound in Wisconsin. Grocery stores take a mark-up of 35 to 150%, so direct sale to the consumer could put that profit in your pocket. Be aware. It takes a lot of work to be all things to all people. If you are planning to manage the animals, get the cheese made, direct the marketing, deliver the cheese, keep the records, and make the coffee, you might be biting off more than you can chew. Keep your sanity in mind when analyzing this option.

### **Lotions and Soaps**

Goat milk makes wonderful lotions and soaps, but it doesn't use very much milk to get to the final product. Because it is not eaten, the Food Safety part of DATCP is not involved. However, vendor licenses and sales tax are your responsibility. The Federal Food and Drug Administration has jurisdiction if the product is sold across state lines, or if the ingredients are brought in over state lines. A spokesperson from the Green Bay office explained that there are few regulations on cosmetics and soaps, and they have mainly to do with prohibiting dangerous ingredients and labeling properly. Registration of a manufacturer is voluntary. Check online at [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov) for the latest on registration, as well as all you need to know about labeling and ingredients.

### **Manure**

Believe it or not, what you pitch onto the pile can earn you money. The Three Lakes, WI, Boy Scout troop averaged \$200 a year in donations off of the local goat herd manure. They cleaned the small pens each year and advertised "Garden Gold" on grocery store bulletin boards and the local public radio station. Gardeners were happy to dig their own compost and leave money in a bucket by the manure pile. Goat manure is not as hot as cow or horse manure and breaks down more quickly because of its pelleted form. It also carries fewer weed seeds because of the efficient digestion of a goat. The Three Lakes project was as simple as possible. With proper composting, packaging and marketing, goat manure could make a nice little side income for a farmer.

### ***Your Talents or "Offshoot Income"***

Dairy goats are still fairly uncommon farm animals in Wisconsin and draw public attention easily. Fortunately, they are also friendly, energetic and photogenic. Here are a few more places that you can earn extra income using both the goat and your experiences raising them:

- Petting Zoo. You may not want the liability and long hours of setting up your own petting zoo, but you might lease animals to an area petting zoo or arrange to board someone else's animals over the winter when their business is on vacation. There are also a number of summer camps that will lease pet farm animals and return them when youngsters leave in the fall. \$25 to \$50 a head is normal.
- Herd research. Let area animal science schools know that your herd is available for research projects. This is not the same as selling an animal to a research program where it might be sacrificed for the project. This is more likely to be part of a large-scale study of feed additives, nutrient needs, disease prevention programs, long-term breeding studies, etc. You will be asked to maintain a rigid management practice,

then record the results. Payment is either on a straight contract basis, or expenses plus a fee.

- Writing articles for publication. If you are a journalist or have a talent with art or cartoons, farm and dairy goat publications are looking for your work. Payment is by the column inch or piece and is determined by the publication.
- Product testing. All new products need guinea pigs to try them out. The trick is to find out who is attempting to market a new product in your area and volunteer to be the local "example." Dairy and agriculture trade magazines usually have a "new products" section that can offer a lead. While the returns might not be monetary, you might end with a barn furnished with free stuff.
- Speakers forum. Take your kids on the road visiting schools and telling about dairy goats and goat products. A lot of goat people do it for free, but there is nothing that says you can't ask for a fee. Of course, you have to make it a worthwhile, organized program, and you have to advertise through area schools, libraries and community service organizations. Presenters get from \$25 to \$250 an hour, depending on the audience and the sophistication of the program.
- Grant income for research. There are any number of topics needing serious research to further the potential of dairy goats in Wisconsin. Supervising a grant is the same as having a paying job, but you do it in your own home and on your own time. The topic has to be of serious value to Wisconsin agriculture, and you have to compete for the available money. Contact WDATCP for a list of grant programs.

*Sara T. Bredesen operates Buckwheat Acres Goat Dairy in Three Lakes, WI, where she maintains a herd of about 100 dairy goats of all breeds for milk and commercial cheese production. She is a board member of the Wisconsin Dairy Goat Association and operates the Wisconsin Goat Products Booth at the Wisconsin State Fair, where Wisconsin goat milk cheeses are featured. This publication is the result of research carried out as part of an Agricultural Diversification and Development Grant from the WDATCP-Marketing - ADD program. For more information, contact Sara at 7253 Hwy 45 N, Three Lakes, WI 54562, or e-mail: [bkwht@newnorth.net](mailto:bkwht@newnorth.net).*

# Helpful Resources:

## Books and Publications

*Cheesemaking Made Easy* by Ricki and Robert Carrol (Storey Communications, Inc., Schoolhouse Road, Pownal, VT 05261) *Simple step-by-step instructions on making 60 soft and hard cheeses with both cow's and goat's milk.*

*Considerations for Potential Farmstead Cheesemakers* by W. W. Wendorff (Department of Food Science, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, WI 53706) *A pamphlet designed to help with the decision-making process.*

*Dairy Goat Journal* (P.O. Box 10, Lake Mills, WI 53551) *Newspaper published 10 times a year with timely articles on health, beginner info and commercial producer features.*

*Goat Health Handbook* by Thomas R. Thedford, DVM (Winrock International Livestock Research Training Center, Petit Jean Mountain, Morrilton, AK 72110) *Diagnosing and treating goat diseases in understandable language.*

*Goat Husbandry* by David Mackenzie (4<sup>th</sup> edition by Faber and Faber, Boston, available through book stores). *Excellent information from start to finish, but intended for the more advanced goat person.*

*Raising Milk Goats Successfully* by Gail Damerow (Williamson Publishing Company, Church Hill Road, Charlotte, VT 05445) *One of the easier sources of information on care and feeding of dairy goats.*

*Raising Milk Goats the Modern Way* by Jerry Belanger (Garden Way Publishing, Schoolhouse Road, Pownal, VT 05261) *One of the standards on goat raising, aimed at the do-it-yourselfer.*

*The Pack Goat* by John Mionczynski (Pruett Publishing Co., 2928 Pearl St., Boulder, Co 80301) *The original source on selecting and training pack goats.*

*USDA Goat Extension Handbook* by George Haenlein and Donald L. Ace, editors (Extension Service-USDA, Washington, DC) *Chapters on breeds, health, housing, kidding, etc., in a three-ring binder.*

*Your Goats: A Kid's Guide to Raising and Showing* by Gail Damerow (Storey Communications, Inc., Schoolhouse Road, Pownal, VT 05261) *Basics on choosing, caring for and showing goats. Written for kids, but great for beginning adults.*

## **Catalogs**

### ***Caprine Supply***

913-585-1191

[www.caprinesupply.com](http://www.caprinesupply.com)

33001 West 83<sup>rd</sup> St.

P.O. Box Y

DeSoto, KS 66018

### ***Hoegger Supply Company***

1-800-221-4628

160 Providence Road

Fayetteville, GA 30215

### ***Nasco***

1-800-558-9595

e-mail: [info@nascofa.com](mailto:info@nascofa.com)

901 Janesville Ave

Fort Atkinson, WI 53538-0901

### ***New England Cheesemaking Supply***

413-628-3808

e-mail: [info@cheesemaking.com](mailto:info@cheesemaking.com)

85 Main St.

Ashfield, MA 01330

### ***Premier Fencing Systems***

1-800-282-6631

e-mail: [premier@se-iowa.net](mailto:premier@se-iowa.net)

2031 300<sup>th</sup> St.

Washington, IA 52353

# **Appendix D**

## **Clippings**

For more information, contact  
Sara T. Bredeesen  
(715)546-3735

Published in Country Today and  
Wis. State Farmer

## Goat Milk Producers Sought For Study

Potential goat milk producers across the northern half of Wisconsin are being targeted in a new research project funded through the Agricultural Development and Diversification Grant program of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection.

Using telephone and mail surveys, project researcher, Sara Bredeesen of Three Lakes, WI, hopes to develop a list of dairy goat owners who would have an interest in producing milk commercially.

"The goat cheese industry in the United States is a booming business, and Wisconsin goat milk producers are reaping the benefits...but only if you live in the southern part of the state where the existing cheese plants are located," Bredeesen explained. "I would like to find out whether there is a potential supply of northern goat milk that might support cheese production outside of the area that is already serviced."

Bredeesen is seeking names and addresses of people who have dairy goats and live north of a line from Onalaska through Appleton. "I get a few phone calls every week from people who want to know what they can do with their goat milk, and some that have pretty sizeable herds. Up to this point, there hasn't been any baseline information to tell us where the milk is, and how much could be made available for processing," Bredeesen said.

A recent report by WDATCP stated that the estimated total volume of goat milk used commercially in the U.S. is at 24 million pounds a year. The report goes on to say that the U.S. imported "523 tons [of goat cheese from France] by 1990, indicating a strong growing demand. Currently, demand for cheese product is exceeding milk volume."

Because dairy goats are efficient browsers and are able to produce high quality milk on marginal quality feed, they are very popular in northern counties of Wisconsin where alfalfa and protein concentrates are difficult to grow. Goat dairying is also becoming a viable alternative for small to middle-sized Wisconsin cow dairymen who are unable to compete in a highly competitive market because of limited barn and pasture capacity. Goats lend themselves to small farms, requiring 1/5th the floor space of a cow and 1/5th the feed.

"At a time when small cheese plants in Wisconsin are hunting for ways to diversify in order to stay in business, goat milk cheeses might make an interesting option," Bredeesen said. "Of course, the milk supply has to be there first."

Bredeesen said that the survey is ten short questions to be conducted over the phone or by mail. She can be contacted at 7253 Hwy 45N, Three Lakes, WI, 54562, or by phone at (715) 546-3735 ([bkwh@newnorth.net](mailto:bkwh@newnorth.net)).

###

# Bredesen gets grant for goat farm

Gov. Tommy G. Thompson announced that 24 Wisconsin agribusinesses will receive grants totaling \$500,000 from the state's Agricultural Development and Diversification (ADD) program, including Sara Bredesen of Three Lakes.

Bredesen, who operates Buckwheat Acres Dairy Goat Farm in Three Lakes, will receive \$21,082.

The project is to provide the foundation for further development of the dairy goat industry by identifying market supply and demand potentials for the industry, including identifying the potential for additional goat milk processing facilities and the creation of goat milk products.

Established in 1989, the ADD program provides grants for new and innovative approaches to enhancing Wisconsin's competitiveness in the agriculture industry. The program is directed by the marketing division of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection.

"These recipients have bold

*Rhineland Daily News  
August 7 1998*

and exciting visions for Wisconsin agriculture in the 21st century," Thompson said. "Their innovative ideas will enhance the productivity and profitability of agriculture for years to come."

The program, created by

Thompson, has awarded \$2.5 million for 137 projects during the 10-year period from 1989-1998. About 80 new products have been developed and more than 400 new jobs have been created as a result of grant projects.

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## Sara Bredesen receives state cheese maker license

Sara Bredesen, Three Lakes, recently received her license as a cheese maker from the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture (WDA) and plans to begin manufacturing goat milk cheeses later this spring at a homestead plant on her farm.

The state cheese maker license required Bredesen to attend the cheese technology short course at UW-Madison College of Ag and Life Sciences, in addition to two exams and a one-year apprenticeship which she fulfilled at the Antigo Cheese Co.

Bredesen will continue to work on special projects for the Antigo Cheese Co. while developing her own line of traditional and regional goat milk cheese products.

She has an Agricultural Diversification and Development Grant from WDA to survey northern Wisconsin for the availability of commercial goat



SARA BREDESEN

milk supplies and to develop a plan for other goat dairymen who want to build a homestead cheese business.

## Dairy

place to get experience," Ms. Bredesen said.

Her formal training is in journalism, and she became interested in dairy goats while doing a story about a farm 20 years ago. "I got hooked on showing and milking them, then got into serious dairying and an interest in cheese making," Ms. Bredesen explained.

"The problem that I ran into was that I needed an apprenticeship to get a license. I had to spend a year in a commercial cheese plant, and Antigo was the only place within shooting distance."

After interviewing with CEO John Jacobs and her immediate supervisor, Matt Dochtermann, she waited nervously to hear whether there was a job or not. "I wasn't looking for your normal job at the cheese plant where I would learn to hoop cheese and hope to be moved to another responsibility over time. I needed to have exposure to the entire cheese making business, from milk micro-biology to maintenance. Even more of a problem was the fact that I needed TACC more than they needed me, and I had to sell myself as an asset to the company," Ms. Bredesen said.

"She came out of the blue," Jacobs said. "The first time that I heard about the idea of hiring Sara as an apprentice, it didn't seem too interesting. But then she started asking lots of good questions, so we decided 'why not?' In the long run, I think we've gained more through her inquisitiveness than we've given back."

Jacobs explained that the company had made a commitment to research and development but didn't have the personnel to carry out projects. Summer interns weren't able to provide the follow-through needed for aged cheeses.



Sara Bredesen and a few friends.

## *Cheesemaker who learned trade here has twist to traditional dairying*

Cheesemakers are in long supply at The Antigo Cheese Company, but the newest one is out of the ordinary. She wants to make goat-milk cheeses.

Sara Bredesen, Three Lakes, recently received her cheesemaker's license from the Wisconsin Department of Ag after completing the required Cheese Technology Short Course in Madison, a one-year apprenticeship at the Antigo plant and two exams.

"I know it's kind of strange to have a goat cheesemaker at a company that specializes in cow cheeses, but Antigo is the right

See Dairy Page 13

"With Sara, we've been able to address a lot of questions we wouldn't have gotten to, and, of course, one question leads to another."

At Antigo Cheese, Ms. Bredesen has had assignments in all areas of cheese manufacturing. "Without a real title, I've been kind of a 'special projects' person," she explained. "I've done everything from creating a trucking protocol to being elbow-deep in experimental cheese curd. The last year has been a great blend of using what I know and learning what I don't know," she said.

She is often called on for her journalism experience. "I've been writing news releases and radio spots, and I'm working on a grant proposal and tour booklet for the company right now," she said.

"The most eye-opening project, outside of cheese making, was putting together the newspaper insert for TACC's five-year anniversary last October. After researching the history, I'm in total awe of the people I work with and how much of their lives they put into creating this place.

"Now that I've got my license, I'm looking forward to making my own cheese," Ms. Bredesen said. "My experience at Antigo has me really interested in trying some aged goat milk cheeses."

Ms. Bredesen is building a small licensed cheese plant on her goat farm in Three Lakes where she hopes to begin operation in June. The facility will also be available for experimental cheeses.

"The Antigo Cheese Company took kind of a gamble hiring me, but I must be doing something right," Ms. Bredesen commented. "I've not only finished my apprenticeship and got my license, but I've been asked to stay at Antigo a little longer, and the 'do' list is pretty long."

*Dairy prices getting your goat?*

# Goat dairy producers find an agricultural niche

by Kellie Spellman  
News Publishing Company

Why do people milk goats? Sara Bredesen of Three Lakes, and the contact person for the Wisconsin Dairy Goat Association, says first and foremost, the goat dairy industry is driven by the product's distinctive flavor. Goat milk produces cheeses that are a little more tangy than cheeses from cow milk.

A number of producers have discovered what is a small but growing niche. The demand for goat's milk is actually growing, though industry watchers caution that it should not grow too fast. Right now, there aren't enough plants to process all the milk that is being produced.

"Goat cheese has a more severe flavor. You can almost call it astringent," Bredesen said. Some of the finer goat cheeses have their

origins in France, Bredesen said. She said the French liked the harsher flavor better.

The second reason goats are milked is for the nutritional value, according to Bredesen. Goat milk is more digestible for some because it has smaller fat particles and its protein chains are smaller. She said people that believe they are lactose intolerant may just have trouble digesting the larger protein chains in cow milk.

"In the late 1800s and early 1900s, it was common for a doctor to advise families with a colicky baby to go out and get a goat," Bredesen explained.

At present, there is no distributor of fluid goat's milk or yogurt, but the potential is there.

But for two farmers just north of Black Earth, there are a couple more reasons for milking goats.

Donna Huntington has had goats on her family's farm for 26

years. She said the family got its first two goats from one of her daughter's nursery school teachers. Ever since then, milking and caring for the goats has been a family project.

She said it is a supplemental

income for her, but it is also a good feeling knowing her farm on Carter Road is productive.

"I really like working with the animals. I like the hard work and the challenge. It is also fun to breed better goats," Huntington said.

Huntington milks around 40 goats once they freshen. For the most part, goat dairying is seasonal - most goats dry up in late fall/early winter. Kids are born in the spring, and with them comes the milk.

The goats love attention, and it's easy to tell: once they are petted or talked to, they begin wagging their tails. In terms of temperament, they are like a cross between a cow and a dog.

Because her closed herd is rather small, at around 50, Huntington names all the animals and keeps close tabs on their daily activities. She even has an intercom between the barn and the house.

The intercom helps Huntington to know when kids are born. She said on her farm the kids are immediately taken away from

their mothers to stop the spread of the CAE, caprine arthritis encephalitis. It is a viral disease kids can get from their mother's milk. The disease causes hardened udders in mature goats.

The Huntington family drinks the goat milk, as well as sells it for goat cheese production. The milk goes to the Mont Chevre cheese factory in Belmont. The factory picks up the milk from the farm.

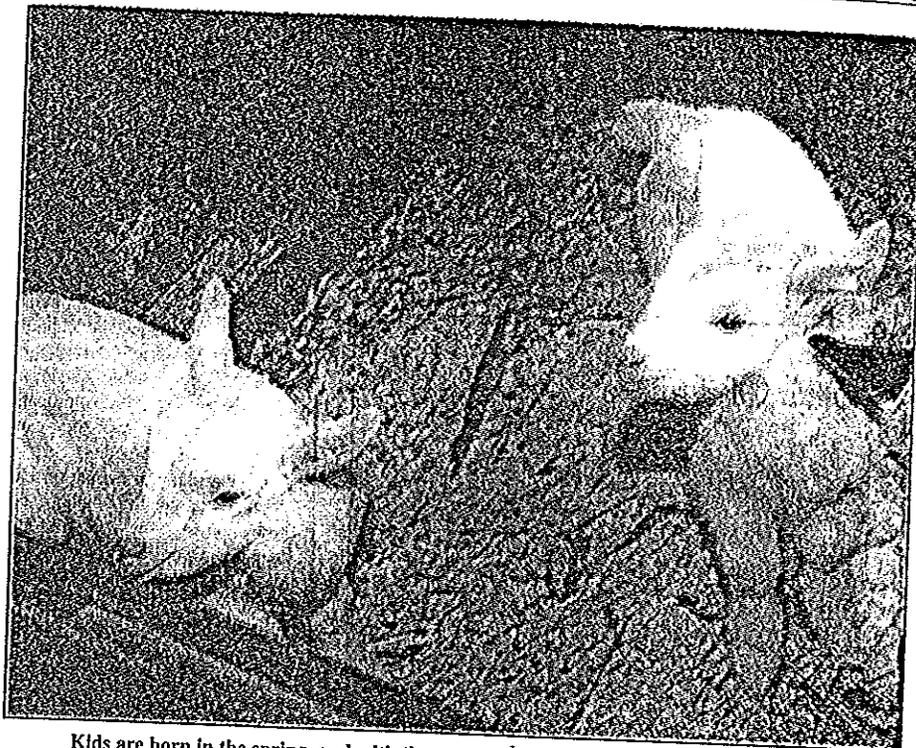
Mont Chevre also picks up goat milk just around the corner at the Terry and Dustie Seston farm on

CTH F north of Black Earth. Terry Seston milks goats for a living. What got him started into goat dairying was an advertisement in a farming magazine calling for goat milk producers.

Within the next month, Seston will be milking around 250 goats. That means he will be spending about three and a half hours in the milking parlor twice a day fairly soon.

Seston milks year-round, which is uncommon for most goat dairies. He does this because he gets a higher price for the milk in the winter. Seston can milk up to ten goats at once in his parlor.

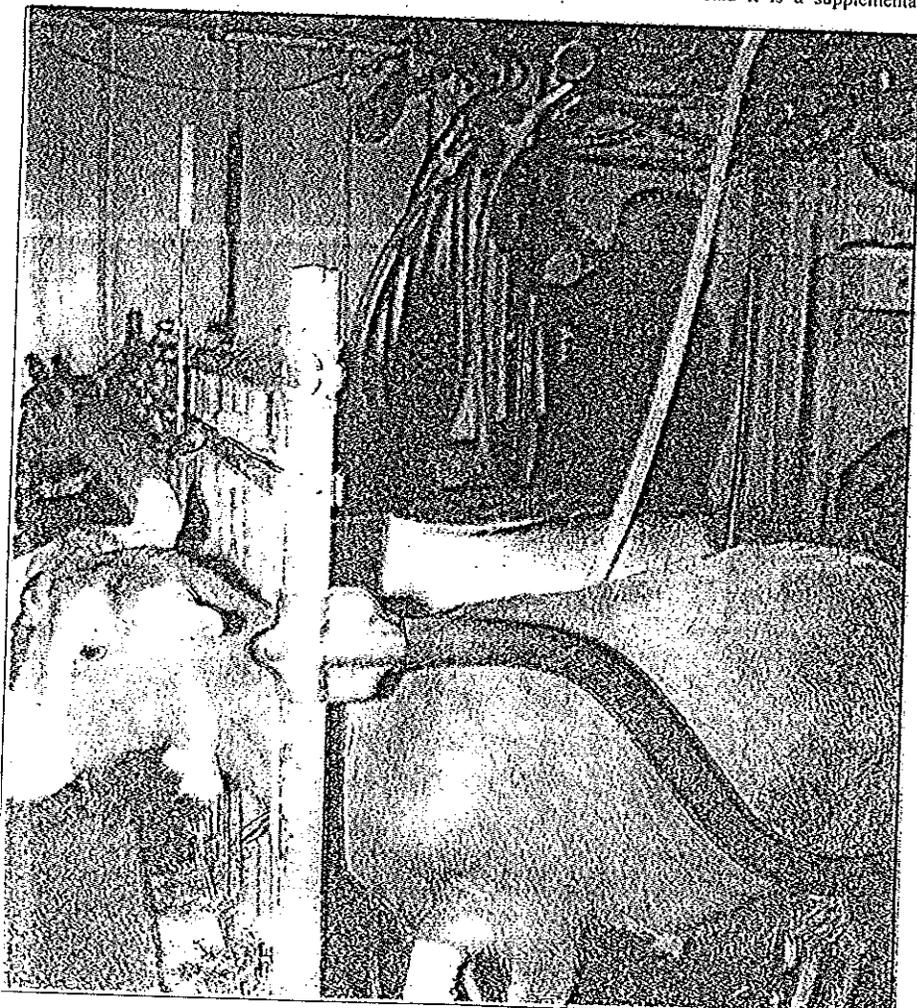
There are three major cheese plants that buy goat's milk in Wisconsin. These factories pick



Kids are born in the spring, and with them comes the milk. Photos by Kellie Spellman.

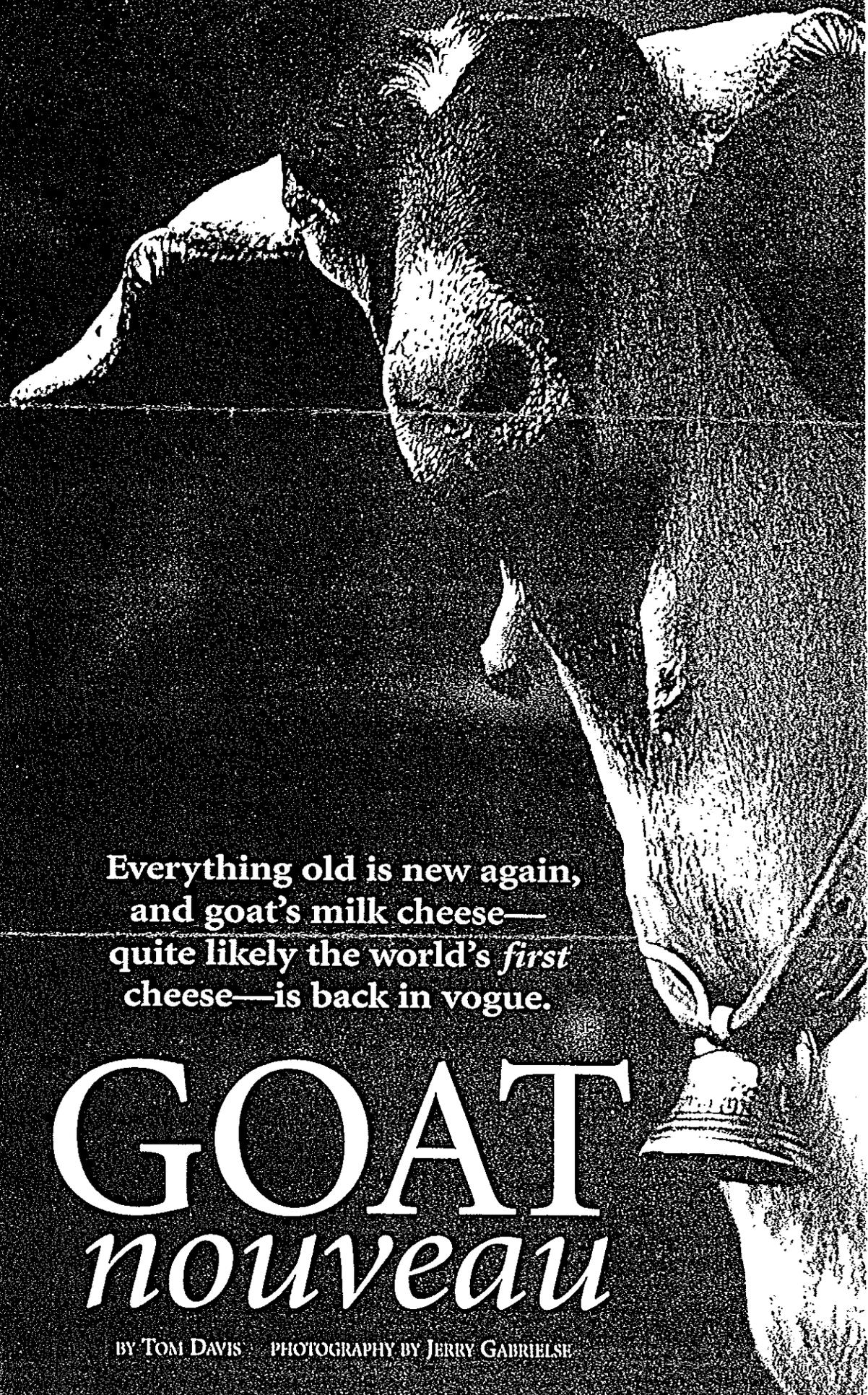
*'We don't want to get more animals producing unless someone is there to process the milk...'*

Goat dairy spokesperson



Terry and Dustie Seston milk 250 goats on a year-round basis. Both the Sestons and the Huntingtons have milking parlors.

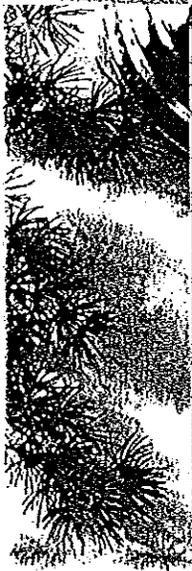
continued on page 10.



Everything old is new again,  
and goat's milk cheese—  
quite likely the world's *first*  
cheese—is back in vogue.

# GOAT *nouveau*

BY TOM DAVIS PHOTOGRAPHY BY JERRY GABRIELSH





Between 150 and 200 goat dairies supply the state's five major goat cheesemakers. The farms are serious operations: The herd at Geno and Gwen Zimmermann's G&G Double Dairies, Fox Lake, numbers some 600 goats in varying breeds, pictured.

**N**OT LONG AGO, the only place you could find goat cheese, assuming you could find it at all, was in a few gourmet food shops. As far as finding it in your neighborhood grocery store, you might as well have been

shopping for quail eggs.

But as America's tastes have matured; as we've become more discerning, more broad-minded and less parochial about what we eat and drink, goat cheese has emerged from the shadows. A staple in Europe and the Middle East since antiquity, it first became fashionable on the East and West coasts, and now is showing up with increasing frequency on restaurant menus, dinner tables and grocery shelves here in the Heartland. And while hard data is lacking—the dairy goat industry is not closely tracked the way the dairy cattle industry is—the “soft” numbers derived from an informal survey suggest that American production of goat's milk virtually doubled from 1989 to 1991, and that demand has increased by as much as 50 percent per year since then. It's estimated that some 45 million pounds of it was used to make cheese in 1997.

Wisconsin alone has between 150 and 200 goat dairies. They in turn supply the needs of some five major goat cheesemakers here. The largest of these, the Watertown-based, French-owned Bresse Bleu, also happens to be one of the best anywhere. At the 1998 World Championship Cheese Contest, Bresse Bleu took two awards in the fresh goat's milk cheese category: The company's Montrachet in oil with herbs and garlic won first place and its Saladena Provençal, crumbled goat cheese flavored with thyme, basil and sweet red pepper, won third place. The cheesemakers of record were John J. Schmid and Gordon Schmidt, respectively, but as Bresse Bleu plant manager Kurt Premo explains, it's really a collaborative effort.

“The perception that a single person is responsible for this cheese or that cheese is not quite right,” he says. “In fact, there are many people involved all the way down the line. And a lot of credit goes to our patrons [suppliers] for providing us with a high-quality product. It all starts on the farm.”

While goat's milk can be used to make virtually any

style of cheese, Bresse Bleu specializes in the variety that's probably most familiar to average consumers: a soft, silky-textured, mild but tangy-flavored product that resembles cream cheese. It's sold plain or, as in the case of the award-winners, with various flavorings, and it's equally good for dressing up hors d'oeuvres or adding a touch of elegance to more complicated recipes. The Montrachet in oil and Saladena Provençal, by the way, aren't super-specialty items developed expressly for competition—you can buy them right off the shelf.

And no, goat cheese does not taste “goaty,” any more than goat's milk does. According to Sarah Bredeson of the Wisconsin Dairy Goat Association, “It's very hard to tell the difference in taste between fresh, cold properly handled goat's milk and whole cow's milk. However, because of its smaller fat particles and shorter protein chains [the same qualities that make goat's milk more easily digestible than cow's milk], it's more perishable and quicker to develop strong flavors. If it's not properly handled, it'll taste like the goat walked through it.”

Making goat cheese conjures images of wizened, avuncular Frenchmen who, via a mysterious process of coaxing, coddling and whispering sweet nothings—the language of love and all that—work a kind of magic. Although the making of cheese always retains a whiff of the magical, that's obviously not how it happens at Bresse Bleu. A thoroughly modern, gleamingly sanitary facility with 70 head-netted, blue-bootied, white-costumed

employees, it fairly hums with efficiency. Still, by the standards of the industry, Bresse Bleu's method, while not strictly "artisanal,"—a term that crops up often in discussions of specialty cheese—is extremely labor-intensive.

"It's a unique process," emphasizes Premo. "We use a minimal amount of rennet [the enzyme that transforms milk into cheese], and we use cheesecloth bags instead of plastic or metal forms for separating the curds and whey."

The cheesecloth stage is where the handwork comes in. Following pasteurization and 16 to 20 hours of acidification (the first step in the milk-to-cheese alchemy), the thickened slurry is bagged. The cheesecloth bags, each

a far cry from the 27 does they milked in 1987, the year Bresse Bleu first tooled up for goat cheese production. Until a couple of years ago, the Zimmermanns also maintained a herd of dairy cattle, but as Gene puts it, "We'll never milk cows again. Dollarwise and workwise, there isn't any reason to."

He adds, "Milking goats requires more brain power than back power. Physically, goats are easier to handle than cattle—but you have to be a little smarter."

Like cows, goats are milked twice a day, every day. It takes the Zimmermanns about two hours to milk 250 goats; once a doe is hooked up to the milking machine, she's milked in five minutes. And while a goat produces significantly less milk than a cow, the goat's efficiency as a milk producer is significantly higher. According to Zimmermann, the average goat produces 8 to 9 percent of its total body weight in milk per day, with a peak of 12 to 14 percent. That's as much as 16 pounds of milk per day for a 130-pound doe. The average cow, on the other hand, produces 6 to 7 percent of its body weight in milk.

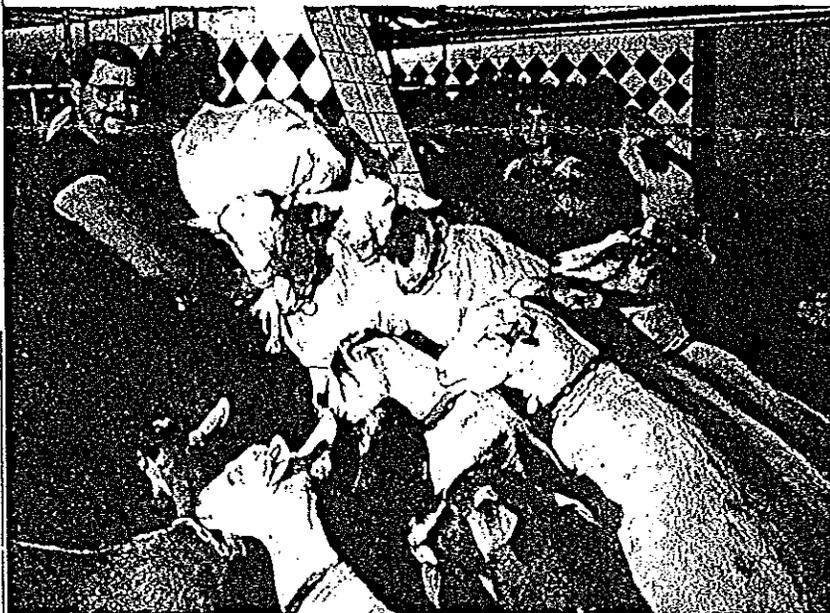
Goats are also approximately one-third more efficient at converting a given quantity of feed into a given quantity of milk than cows are. This comes as no surprise, really, when you stop to consider that the goat, like its distant cousin the deer, is a generalist browser rather than a strict grazer, and therefore better suited to "living off the land"—an attribute that, along with its thriftiness, hardiness and relative freedom from disease, historically has endeared it to nomadic herdsman from Mongolia to Mozambique. Contrary to the Dogpatch stereotype, however, goats emphatically do not eat tin cans—although they have been known to nibble on hanging laundry, just to determine if it's edible.

Like deer, too, goats left to their own devices breed in the fall and kid in the spring, which creates an abundance of milk in spring and summer but a comparative shortage in late-fall and winter. Because producers and processors alike benefit from a consistent year-round supply, progressive goat dairies like the Zimmermanns' essentially trick Mother Nature by subjecting half of their does to carefully controlled periods of artificial light, inducing estrus in the spring. It's another example of the brain power required to run a successful goat dairy.

In this same vein, Bresse Bleu's Premo warns that individuals thinking of starting a goat dairy really need to do their homework. It's especially important, he notes, to establish a market *before* you begin milking. "We get calls every spring from people who say, 'We have goat's milk—when can you pick it up?' Well, that's not the way it works. For one thing, you need to milk a minimum of 50 to 75 goats to make it worth our while to pick it up. For another, we're not, at the moment, taking on any new goat's milk providers. We're very pleased with the patrons we have and we want to do everything we can to help them grow and succeed."

Like the man said, it all starts on the farm. ✂

Tom Davis is senior editor of Wisconsin Trails.



It's milking time for the Zimmermanns and their herd. Goats are more efficient milk producers than cows, yielding 8 to 9 percent of their body weight in milk each day, compared with cows' 6 to 7 percent.

weighing 60 to 70 pounds, in turn are placed in layers inside wire baskets. The rows of baskets look a little like bassinets in a nursery, an analogy emphasized by the fact that the bags are "changed"—rotated from bottom to top—every few hours, ensuring they drain evenly. After about 12 hours in the "cheese nursery" the liquid whey has drained off, leaving behind the semisolid curd. It's then cooked, cooled, lightly salted, seasoned as necessary with herbs or other flavorings, and packaged for sale.

Bresse Bleu relies on a network of approximately 40 patrons here in Wisconsin to supply it with the raw material for its products. These aren't hobby farms, either, but serious working dairies, like Gene and Gwen Zimmermann's operation. Located a few miles east of Fox Lake, the Zimmermanns' G&G Double Dairies has more goats than most of us have ever seen in one place. There are floppy-eared Nubians, erect-eared Alpines, tiny-eared La Manchas, white Saanens, brown Toggenburgs, and various crosses thereof. There are adorable newborn kids, stolid, matronly does, and yes, a handful of randy bucks.

The Zimmermanns' herd numbers some 600 goats in all, and they milk 250 to 300 does at any given time. It's

# AGRI-VIEW

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4 Sections



### Kids Cuddle

The future holds promise for Wisconsin's goat industry, of which these kids at Buckwheat Acres are a part. Three Lakes dairy goat raiser and licensed cheesemaker Sara Bredesen sees plenty of room for goats in America's Dairyland. She's setting up a prototype goat cheesemaking facility at Buckwheat Acres in Oneida County. She also has a state ADD grant to study potential dairy markets and get a handle on the amount of goat milk across northern Wisconsin. She's finding there's a lot of it.

*Agri-View photo by Jane Fykssen*

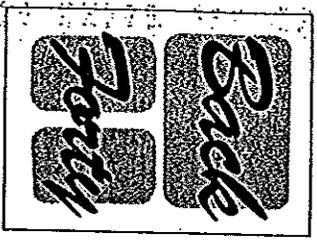


Oneida County goat producer and licensed cheesemaker Sara Bredesen has a state ADD grant to explore the supply of goat milk in the northern portion of the state, not presently serviced by existing goat processing plants. Also looking at potential markets, she sees nothing but opportunity. Sara is also in the middle of setting up a pilot on-farm cheesemaking plant. Shown here are some of the faces that endear goats to their owners. Immediately below are buck kids Sara artificially rears for the ethnic meat market. At right are does in the milking parlor. At bottom right are two of the bucks used at Sara's Buckwheat Acres.

*Story and photos by Jane Fykssen*

# Potential Great for Dairy Goats

Three Lakes



As large as Wisconsin's dairy industry is, one would think there'd be plenty of room for a smaller dairy animal with a beat instead of a moo.

Move over Bossie. Goats also belong in America's Dairyland, maintains Sara Bredesen, an Oneida County dairy goat producer and licensed cheesemaker. She's waging a campaign for goats to claim their rightful place in Wisconsin's dairy products lineup.

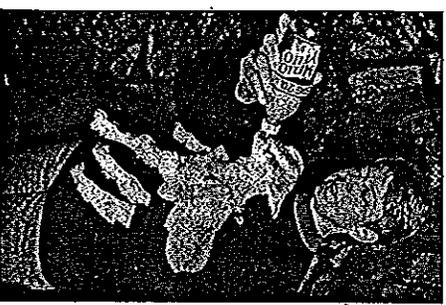
"The goat cheese industry in the United States is a booming business, and Wisconsin goat milk producers are reaping the benefits - but only if you live in the southern part of the state where the existing cheese plants are located," says Sara, whose own



Buckwheat Acres is north of Three Lakes, in the heart of "northwoods" vacation country, near the Eagle River chain of lakes. She's trying to find out whether there's a potential supply of goat milk in the northern half of the state that might also support cheese production.

Sara has received an Agricultural Development and Diversification (ADD) grant from the state ag department to the tune of \$21,082. She's smack in the middle of the project - trying to identify supply and demand potentials for the dairy goat industry, particularly in portions of the state not serviced by a trio of existing plants.

Ideally, she'd like to see some smaller established cheese plants in the northern portion of the state diversify into goat milk cheese. However, she



producers had best be prepared to take matters into their own hands - with "homestead" cheese production. She's setting up a prototype on-farm cheese-production facility at her own farm in northeast Wisconsin, which she hopes to have up and running by June.

(Finding huge potential for dairy goats in Wisconsin, Sara has also applied for more ADD grant funding to continue work on this project for a year beyond the August conclusion of her existing grant.) Sara is still seeding names and addresses of people who have dairy goats and live north of a line, basically from Onalaska (west) through Appleton (in eastern Wisconsin). "I get a few phone calls every week from people who want to know what they can do with their goat milk, and some that have pretty sizable herds. Up to this point, there hasn't been any baseline information to tell us where the milk is, and how much could be made available for processing," she says.

Sara cites a recent state ag department report estimating total volume of goat milk used commercially in the U.S. at 24 million pounds a year. Even back in '90, the U.S. was importing 523 tons of goat cheese from France. Demand for the cheese contin-

ues to exceed milk volume.

The three "majors" in goat milk processing are Bresse Bleu at Watertown, Monchere at Belmont and the Southwest Wisconsin Dairy Goat Co-op at Mt. Sterling.

"At a time when small cheese plants in Wisconsin are hunting for ways to diversify in order to stay in business, goat milk cheese might make an interesting option," notes Sara, adding, "Of course, the milk supply has to be there first."

She's finding that it very well already is. Goats are coming out of the woodwork, so to speak. There are many producers who'd like nothing better than to expand their numbers and gear up for milking. Lack of an outlet for the milk is holding them back.

Sara also sees huge potential for new folks to get into goats. Dairy goats, she notes, are efficient browsers, able to produce high-quality milk on marginal-quality feed. They're well-suited to northern counties where prime cow feed is tough to grow. She also sees goat dairying as a viable alternative for small to mid-sized cow dairymen, unable any longer to compete due to limited barn and land capacity. Goats lend themselves to small farms, requiring one-fifth the floor space of a cow and one-fifth the feed. The Bredesens' Buckwheat Acres is only 15 acres (mostly hay).

Sara is a veteran goat raiser of 18 years. She and husband Tom became interested in goats at one of Sara's class reunions. "Self-sufficiency was the rage," she notes, and this former classmate was telling all about her hobby farm. Inspired, the Bredesens decided to acquire a few farm animals.

"It (the goat end of things) has gone so far beyond his plans!" grins Sara. Sara, who's the farmer in the family. Her husband, she notes, "is a tremendous supporter." Tom is director of instruction and technology for the Three Lakes school district and was formerly a grade school principal. It was his job that brought the family to the northwoods in the first place. In 1985, from their former home in southern Wisconsin. (Sara grew up in rural Beloit, Tom in Whiteaw. Neither had a farm background.)

The Bredesens have three children: Kellen, a high school senior; David, a sophomore; and Paul, in seventh grade. All three have shown goats in the past at the Wisconsin State Fair, and the boys will be working in the goat products booth in the ag products building there this summer. (Their mom coordinates the state fair booth.)

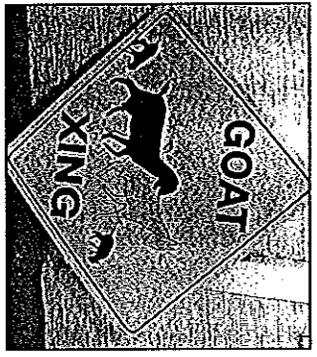
"I always said I was going to marry a farmer," says Sara. "I married a teacher instead. So I decided I had to be a farmer myself to fulfill my life-long dream."

Besides tending goats, Sara works part-time (ironically perhaps) in the cow dairy industry. She does public relations work and special projects for the Antigo Cheese Co. in Antigo. Antigo Cheese was in the news about five years ago when the former plant owner, Kratt, announced it was moving out. The employees took over, wholesaling Italian cheeses and selling their own cheeses under the "Wisnigo" label.

Setting up her own on-farm cheesemaking facility is occupying a lot of her time of late. Because of her location, Sara has never had the opportunity to ship her milk commercially. "Frustration" is behind her pursuit of farmstead cheese production.

Extremely dedicated to Wisconsin's goat industry, Sara says, "I really want other producers, who really love their goats, to also have the opportunity to make a business of it." Thus, she intends to write how-to booklets on such topics as: Farmstead goat cheese production, alternative incomes with dairy goats and setting up a goat milk dairy.

In addition to making cheese and other retail dairy products, goat milk is ideal for feeding to calves and pigs. She knows of other goat producers who are making soap, hand cream, even salad dressing. Goat milk can also be turned into fudge and caramels and ice cream. Sara is in the middle of cranberry country; she's hoping to somehow capitalize on that. Buckwheat Acres is also ideally located for direct sales on a main highway in a heavy tourist area.



ment, Sara explains. The original sucklers were used to grow buckwheat. Sara, a logging company picked up the name. The Irens house is more than 100 years old and belonged to one of the managers of the logging company. When Buckwheat Acres becomes a licensed dairy farm, it will be only the second in Oneida County, where, she notes, there's only one cow dairy farm now.

Buckwheat Acres is home to roughly 65 goats. Some of the goats are owned by fellow Three Lakes producer Scott Anderson. He keeps his herd at the Bredensens' and shares the chore load. The two producers are not, however, in business together, and the on-farm cheese venture is strictly Sara's. There are six breeds of dairy goats, and their combined herd is mostly Saanens and Nubians.

Saanens are a Swiss breed noted for high milk production. They're always white with erect ears.

This notably calm breed tips the scales at around 135 pounds. Sara calls them 'the Holstein of the dairy goat world.'

Nubians she likens to 'Jerseys,' with more modest production but high butterfat. Their coats are any combination of white, black or brown, but Nubians are easily recognized by their roman noses and long droopy ears. They're a Mediterranean breed. Sara describes Nubians as 'obnoxious, noisy, but darn cute.'

The four remaining dairy breeds are: French Alpine, Toggenburg, Oberhasli and LaMancha. The latter is a breed originating in the U.S. LaManchas are born with extremely short to nonexistent external ears.

At present, Sara is milking 23 does, with another 25 bred to freshen in the next couple months. She runs them into a milking parlor, where they hop up onto a platform with locking headgates, nibbling on grain while they're being milked. She can milk four on one side, six on the other side of the parlor. It takes her 45 minutes to milk 23 goats (not including cleanup).

Goats have a 305-day lactation and '60 days of vacation,' notes Sara. Gestation is five months. Does are bred at seven months to kid as yearlings. Their natural breeding period is September through February. They will breed out of season with the use of artificial lighting and lutalyse.

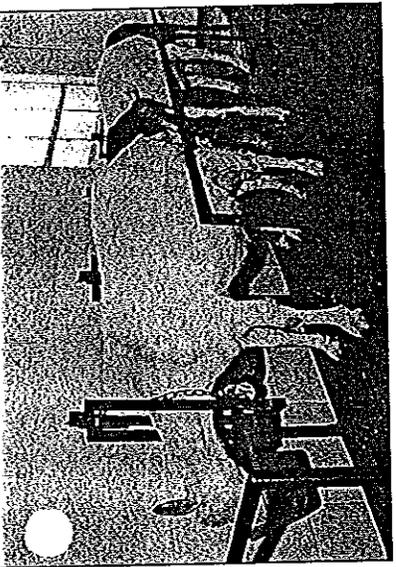
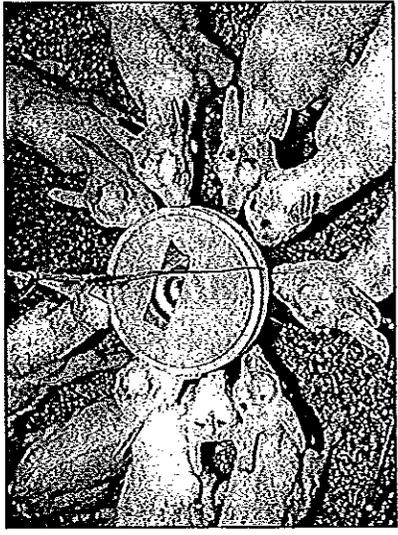
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be productive milk producers for 6 to 10 years, a 'good milker' will make 3,000 pounds plus during a lactation. A commercial herd of Saanens typically averages 1,800 to 2,400 pounds annually produce between 3 and 4 percent butterfat milk, with Nubians doing more like 4 to 5 percent.

"Goats are the type of animal that can grab you pretty fast," says Sara of their endearing qualities, highlighting their intelligence. Goats have certain "stereotypes," like they'll eat anything, when, in reality, they're pretty picky eaters. They've acquired that reputation because they're "extremely curious," says Sara. They explore the world as toddlers do - by putting everything in their mouths.

Another stereotype is that "goats smell bad." The bucks during the rut are rather odoriferous. "There's no way around it," says Sara, noting, though, that the bucks don't smell the rest of the year and does never do. In fact, goats are very clean animals.

"Goats are also 'extremely affectionate' and 'social animals,'" she adds. "People who like peace and quiet shouldn't have just one goat (as it'll try to garner their attention whenever it sees them out and about)."



Sara leaves buck kids on the does to nurse until they're sold into the ethnic meat market at 25 pounds, typically garnering 80 cents to more than \$1 a pound. Doe kids get heat-treated colostrum and pasteurized milk from the bottle from day one, as a preventative against John's and CAE (an arthritic disease in goats). While Sara is concerned about both, she says she hasn't had cases of either in the herd.

Her milkers are on a 16-percent ration of corn, oats, a 40-percent protein pellet, minerals and molasses as a binder (goats don't like fines). A half-ton mix also includes 200 pounds of sunflower seeds, which provide roughage and extra oil. There's no soybean in the mix. They also get good-quality alfalfa.

Sara is on the board of the Wisconsin Dairy Goat Association, established in the '30s and reactivated in '46. Roughly 50 families belong, she estimates, noting that the state's goat industry pretty well divides itself between commercial dairy producers and people into showing goats. Sara also enjoys showing goats.

Sara says California is the major goat milk producing state. Wisconsin is second - but a distant second, despite the fact that the potential here, with Wisconsin's great cheese reputation, is so great. That's why Sara would like nothing better than to find investors interested in developing goat cheese production in northern Wisconsin. That's what's missing in the equation, she contends - the cheese producer. From what she's discovering from her grant project, the milk producers are already at the starting line, and the retail markets are ripe for the taking. It's the processors that are missing.

She contends that some of these smaller cheesemakers, instead of trying to expand their plants to become more efficient in cow milk cheese, might be better off looking at higher-value products from goat milk.

To prepare for her own pilot farmstead plant, Sara became a licensed cheesemaker by attending the cheese technology course at UW-Madison and then apprenticing for a year at Antigo Cheese. Any cheese that isn't aged has to be pasteurized, and Sara's 100-gallon pasteurizer alone is setting her back \$10,000.

"Despite of all my bravado, I'm scared to death," she admits of the investment into cheesemaking and

the prospects of retailing her own product. "I'm starting a new business, and I have a daughter going to college in the fall."

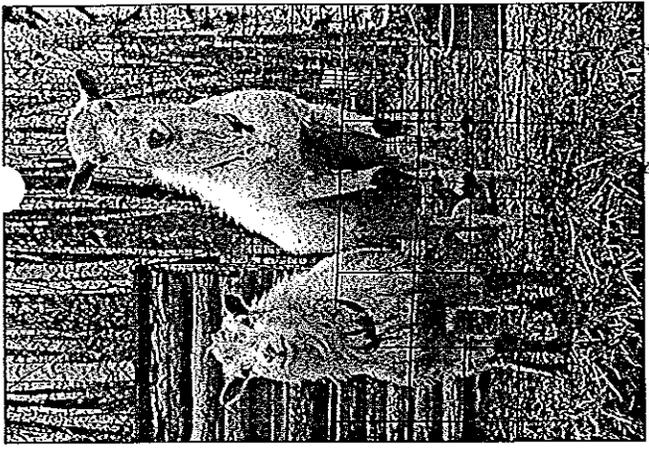
What keeps her going is that she's "deep-down confident" of the potential for a viable goat dairy industry in Wisconsin. She'd like nothing more than to turn dairy goats into strong "income producers" for smaller farmers.

A ballpark estimate for the pay price for goat milk is \$22 to \$36 a hundredweight, with the highest end prices paid for "out of season" milk (produced in October through March) and component pricing.

At peak lactation, a good producer might be giving two gallons of milk a day or 16 pounds - eating 8 pounds of grain mix a day and probably 4 pounds of day hay. (Sara buys all her feed.) A good-producing registered doe might cost anywhere from \$150 to \$300.

Sara stresses that goat producers are not out to compete against cow dairymen. There's room for everybody in the cheese case. Admitting that the state's goat industry has struggled for recognition, she smiles, "We've had our feet in manure to this point, and thanks to all that good compost, we're about to blossom."

Sara wants to hear from any farmers out there with dairy goats - even if they only have one or two. She has a survey with 10 short questions, to be conducted over the phone or by mail. Contact her at: 7253 Highway 45N, Three Lakes, WI 54662 (715-546-3735) or e-mail (bkwhit@newnorth.net).



Rhinelandier

11-15-98

## -Living the good life-

### *Eclectic lifestyle provides great fodder for story telling*

BY TONI TSCHIRKI  
Daily News Staff

How are cheesemaking, puppetry, storytelling and parenting related to dairy goat farming? For Sara Bredesen of Three Lakes, almost all components of life are related and connected to the art and business of raising these curious animals.

"Maybe the reason I like dairy goats is because they are very expressive and they have a sense of humor," said Bredesen. "They do anything to solve a problem."

Just a few miles from the downtown Three Lakes area is Bredesen's own private paradise, featuring a collection of pigs, chickens, dogs and cats. A tour through these facilities provides a visitor with up close and personal meetings, especially with the friendly Saanen goats that will tug at a sleeve or snag a piece of paper at moments notice. In addition, the paradise, known as Buckwheat Acres, also includes a milking parlor and the first stage of construction for a future cheesehouse.

This journey is quite a different route for a woman who, by the time she entered fourth grade, knew she would be a writer.

With extensive experience as a freelance writer and in the world of public relations, this dairy goat farmer and mother of three has found inspiration and storytelling material from the animals which graze behind her home.

"The things I've always sought are things that allow me self-expression," said Bredesen. "Pretty much all I do is about self-expression."

Over the years the avenues through which she expresses herself have changed as her interests, goals and direction in life have changed. For the last 17 years, dairy goats have held a significant role in Bredesen's daily experiences. From milking dairy goats to her newest endeavor of serving as a cheesemaking apprentice, there seem to be no limits for Bredesen.

Although cheesemaking is a newly acquired project, the training demands as much focus as does her storytelling, puppet ministry, farming and family. Yet in the midst of it she finds time to enjoy each

cheesemaking to the upcoming storytelling extravaganza, Tellebration.

While she has spent much of her adult life writing, reading and creating stories, the art of storytelling has become another extension of her literary passion. For years she has gathered with other members of the Northwoods Storytelling Guild to share tales and published works in a celebration of storytelling.

"I've been telling stories all my life," she said. "This is just a different method of getting a tale out."

The stage for this tale spinning event is the Gateway Lodge in Land o' Lakes. In storytelling week, Nov. 15-21, and in honor of Wisconsin's Sesquicentennial, Bredesen and other Northwoods storytellers are preparing to share historic stories of communities and events within the Northwoods. In preparation for this presentation Bredesen researched and examined many tales and historic events in choosing her special story. Research is made easier for Bredesen who credits reading with providing her with a wide spectrum of selections and storytelling cornerstones.

Although many of her stories are historically inspired or based, a good majority are unknown or vaguely familiar to audiences, with the exception of her favorite tale, "Billy Goats Gruff."

For this storyteller the opportunity to gather with others to present a tale offers a rush of excitement, entertainment and the chance to share knowledge. While visitors often join the group, a small core of regulars have provided the springboard for new members to leap from. From the circular seating to the talking stick, the process fosters sharing and encouragement.

"It's intentionally inclusive," said Bredesen. "The talking stick produces conversation, it's intended that we inspire each other."

Yet, in the midst of all these activities, she has formulated a process to prioritize and organize without forgetting that her family is the golden key that unlocks all of life's gifts.

of reading, Bredesen has taken her own learning lessons and passed them on to the next generation.

"I think that reading is the greatest gift a parent can give," said Bredesen. "First to read to them then to inspire them to read on their own."

While there are always goats to feed, puppets to mend, stories to write, school events to attend and cheesemaking skills to perfect, Bredesen is preparing for the special night of storytelling set for Nov. 19. The event will be held at the Gateway Lodge, Land o' Lakes and includes a dinner and story concert. Dinner begins at 5:30 p.m. and is available at Brown Street Books in Rhinelandier, Garden of Readin' in Three Lakes, My Sister's Closet in Minocqua and Olson Memorial Library in Eagle River.



Animation is the key to successful storytelling, as demonstrated by Sara Bredesen, left. For Bredesen the world of storytelling takes on many forms, including puppetry, below, although the puppet ministry includes a collection of characters; a favorite friend has always been Kow, the goat. Bottom, an inquisitive nature and good humor are some of the characteristics Bredesen appreciates in her dairy goats. Many times these characters are the inspiration and sometimes the topic of her stories. (Daily News photos by Toni Tschirki)

