Today on Across the Fence a growing trend in Vermont agriculture gets its own how-to guide. We're going to learn about goat dairying as we explore the brand new Guide to Starting a Commercial Goat Dairy. Good afternoon and thanks for joining us; I am Judy Simpson. The Vermont dairy goat business is minuscule compared to dairy cow farms but goat dairying is growing. Goat farms are generally small family operations which fit nicely with much of our landscape. Those farmers produce goat milk and cheese that is in high demand. Joining me is Carol Delaney. Carol is the author of the Guide to Starting a Commercial Goat Dairy. She worked directly with Vermont goat farmers over her 10 years as Vermont small ruminant dairy specialist and she now works with the northeast sustainable agriculture research and education program. Thanks so much for being with us.

Carol.: Thanks for having me here to talk about something I still think about and I still like to talk about.

Judy.: Excellent. What is the state of goat dairying in Vermont?

Carol.: In Vermont when I started working in 1998 there were about two or three small goat dairies where they made their own cheese and now if you go to the Vermont cheese council website there's 11. They not only make cheese some of them make caramel and bottle fluid milk and yogurt. So that has increased. The newer ones when they start they only make a few 1000 pounds after years they would make 40 or 50,000 pounds of milk so that's increasing also Vermont butter and cheese creamery which purchases and processes the most goat milk in Vermont and they make exquisite cheese by the way. They're purchasing the last year they purchased 2.8 million pounds of goat milk and they would like to purchase five million more. In fact are working in collaboration with other organizations to help the farm start in Rand off which Albee milking 6 to 800 goats.

Judy.: So how did this new guide come out? From soup to nuts anything you want to know about goat dairy is in this including lots of tips money saving information even comes down to plans for barns and dairy facilities.

Carol.: When I started working for UVM extension at the center for sustainable agriculture I started a quarterly newsletter and would write at least one in depth article covering technical information that I thought was lacking or needed to be conglomerated into one place. So the bases of this are it's from those articles and then even though I left the position in 2008 I was committed to finishing it. I collaborated with the center for sustainable agriculture to get a published.

Judy.: Who else was involved in putting together this guide?
Carol.: Yes first half to give credit to those organizations that help make it happen and it wasn't just me. As I mentioned the center for sustainable agriculture which is a programmer UVM extension. The Vermont agency of agriculture food and markets Dan Scruton wrote two chapters and he was very supportive of this and the agency of the AG has always been. Risk management agency with Bob Parsons and Pam Smith if I might drop some names and of course Vermont butter and cheese creamery with Alison Hooper and Bob Reese in command and the last push to get some of the cost covers a for Vermont sheep and goat association with Jane Woodhouse and others on the board.? The book itself is dedicated to Jamie Charronton who was a very staunch supporter of the sheep and goat industry in Vermont and helped bring it forward. Unfortunately she passed away in 2009 but I think she would be proud of this.

Judy.: So why did you write this guide?

Carol.: Why did I read this guide first there's a lot of information for dairy owl farms and how to do that volumes of it because of the history of the industry in the state and other regions and there are good books on managing goats that's not necessarily what this is and how to raise them and there's some introductory information from Wisconsin on starting a business but there are a lot of things are not covered so I wanted to try to answer the breath of questions that I would get to help them make a business decision. For example finding barn floor plan layouts. I couldn't find any. So I actually went two Quebec and France to help find those and then with the help of others translate of those articles so we have a few floor plans plus one by John Porter who is from the University of New Hampshire. The second one I worked with the new farmers what they have started already there are areas that I wish I had some advice in the past that helped out of season breeding. There's some areas that I said this needs to be covered if someone's going to think about starting a new business.

Judy.: What does that mean because I haven't heard that term before?

Carol.: Goats are seasonal breeders are kind of like deer they breed and fall they come into heat and that's when they can be bred and then five months later they have their kids. If you want to have your own milk supply that but they generally milk about nine months and you want to keep that level high indeed have some breed at a different time of year and kid at a different time so there's a way to do that using lights to encourage them to come into heat out of season. Also I wrote it because right now as far as I know in the region there's no dairy goat specialists so this way other people who work with livestock owners can have something to refer to.

Judy.: Because before this guide people would probably get into it may be a few goats at a time and learn as they go and that can take a lot of time and money.

Carol.: Write as I said he Vermont butter and cheese creamery is recruiting for the above to have more farms so this would give more support and help people make decisions. You can also use it to decide if you want to make cheese for self so it's not bias it's pretty neutral it's just giving you the facts so you can decide which one do.

Judy.: What would you say is unique about this guide?

Carol.: It not only includes information for business planning and setting up goals but it also emphasizes how to keep records and to monitor things so you can attain your goals. From the start again having worked with goat dairies I wanted new people to be setup to measure not only financial or feed numbers like a much it costs how much Feed to give but I also wanted what I would call is quality of life numbers or time numbers in fact there's a chapter called time production and financial management. I put time first for example. We have a photo on birthing and I want to bring that up. There we go.
Judy.: A baby being born.

Carol.: But most people think of milk production lots measure that because that's the way we get paid well if you want to know what a large part of time that some farmer spend not necessarily in the milking parlor they spend it in the kidding process and if you spend a lot of time extra time doing that when you could be doing something else are losing money? And you're getting tired so choose animals that have ease of birthing like look at this one or that maybe your management system maybe you have disease at birthing time so think of things the take your time measure that and say what's the problem OK I'm going to change this next year because I want to spend an hour each kidding. That was another thing efficiency of time I would also say that I boldly put in that one should only plan to milk 1 1/2 hours at each milking. This is what the French say in their books and I got information from this book here written in French. It's unique because that took international information and if you want to work milking 1 1/2 hours us time to clean up you want to design your milk parlor and spend money two to sign it so you can put that many animals through. If you don't have the money as Vermonters are very frugal to start plan for the larger part maybe start with a smaller one set it up and sell that one. You know when you reach 2-300 animals are going to have a larger parlor so you're not spending 4 hours set each milking that's too tiring to do which I saw a lot on farms. But you that's somewhat unique using information from around the world and I'm trying to emphasize looking at your time.

Judy.: That's important time is money and I think if you don't know how much time you should be spending milking then you would think maybe 4 hours is what is required but if you go into it thinking I have to stick to 1/2 hours for milking how can I accomplish that maybe any more equipment and it cost more but if I put that money upfront and it's not money on spending.

Carol.: Later because you can't gain time. The other thing I think is unique about the guide is eyeing included diagrams that I didn't have the ability to write or make or draw. I got permission from other book authors and credited them in that so that was neat. And their plumbing other topics that I covered.

Judy.: The diagrams also like milk and parlors and how to set that up and the like and how to position barn buildings for light.

Carol.: Also there some chapters on browsing and grazing and feeding dairy goats which you don't usually see in business. Here's a picture now of these replacement Dollings standing up. That's what they do. They will take out a lot of the trees and and brows that something if you have land that has browsing at and trees than you can use your replacement animals go out there to clear that and that's great. I give guidelines how to do it what plants maybe ideas how to maintain brow they don't kill it and they can come back to a year to year.

Judy.: Again that saves money on feed if they can you what's out there.

Carol.: Yes. Also I was looking at having a Sarah grant as well as the extension agent where we look at dairy goat nutrition. At a lot of Data Scientific Data that I presented in the book so was great to get the published in this book because this sera as the reporting system that you can find results but let's get it out more into the public. I was lucky to work with Kevin Khoury from Poulin grain to help come up with a nutrient level guideline for dairy goats which is unique in this.

Judy.: You also talk a little bit about maybe you want to grow your own hay how do you go about doing that?

Carol.: Yes the decision to fire on equipment and make a or do you pay someone else by hay or do custom have it done. Chet Parsons was great there's a very nice succinct chapter on that.
Judy.: As far as exactly what the equipment's going to cost you and how long it's going to take to recoup the costs.

Carol.: Right and the other at all remember if I said there 17 chapters in here and I wrote 10 and seven are written by agency of AG and industry consultants so has a nice breath of authors.

Judy.: This is all that someone would need if they want to start a goat dairy?

Carol.: It would certainly get them started and give them the basic information. There's charts to put numbers in for example was a cost to raise your Jericho replacement? I tell you how much milk they need well you might have to change the figure of what it cost you to buy that or what does it cost producer milk. You have it in the table and you can change the final numbers.

Judy.: Or even what kind of goats you may want to have and how much milk they produce?

Carol.: Right. I give examples of breeds and ways to look at it numbers and how to choose healthy animals so that's in there to. Weather's not in here in the back I have exhaustive resource section of state people regional national and international people and associations they can go to to get more information.

Judy.: If the answer is not in here there's a way to get the answers.

Carol.: Yes.

Judy.: Who should get this guide do think?

Carol.: I think anyone who's at the stage of turning their passion for goats. I hear that you share that.

Judy.: I do. I won't be getting another couple hundred anytime soon.

Carol.: But turn that passion should I have a business? Even though they might know a lot about ghosts they don't need to know about birding are things like that management but O should turn into a business. The other might be maybe someone like a cow dairy farmer is thinking maybe I should switch I live close to Vermont butter and cheese creamery they're looking for more goat milk maybe I should do that and there's a difference between goats and cows so that would be great for them. Anyone who works with a beginner farmers who may be haven't decided what they want maybe they have land maybe they don't. This might help them in the doing enterprise budgets also. Anyone who teaches students say their livestock professors universities or colleges this would be a good resource for them too.

Judy.: Excellent. Where can people get this guide?

Carol.: Luckily because as part of UVM Extension it's free at their website for download so you go to the UVM Center for Sustainable Agriculture. Go to their home page and you get it for free downloading it also it's about 160 pages, spiral bound, color photos, and has that appendix and if you want to buy it I often like things to write in its $20.00 plus $5.00 shipping and handling. You can either call them at the number or you can e-mail them. Also I do it on the side not part of my SARE job so you can contact me for presentations or consulting at this e-mail and phone number.

Judy.: Tell me a little bit let's remind folks the reason the driving force behind this in dairy goat farming is because there's a market for the milk.
Carol.: Definitely. People who were selling cheese their shipping out of state there's a big demand for it their winning awards again Vermont butter and cheese creamery has an increase of cheese sales increase in demand and they need to triple their production so there's definitely a demand.

Judy.: This mirrors a national trend as well of what's happening here in Vermont.

Carol.: Yes for sure this one of heard.

Judy.: Once again if people are interested in getting this information they can get it online or let's put the address up one more time. You can call Carol directly or contact her by e-mail and once again it answers any question you can possibly have and probably lots you haven't even thought of before in this guide. Thank you so much for coming on and talking about it.

Carol.: Thanks for having me.

Judy.: Sure; that's our program for today. I'm Judy Simpson will see you again next time on Across the Fence.

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