

Dairy Goats Gaining Popularity

Senior Editor Barbara Kieker with GrowingGeorgia
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Growing interest in locally grown foods and sustainable living are creating more interest in dairy goats. Unlike a dairy cow, a dairy goat produces just enough milk for a family, according to Mandy Latimer, president of the Georgia Dairy Goat Breeders Association. Given their smaller size, dairy goats are also easier to accommodate and care for.

“The interest in dairy goats has been cyclical. Back in the 1960s a lot of people were interested in living off the land. Now a new generation is interested in gaining more control over what they eat through locally grown foods,” Latimer said.

Georgia Dairy Goat Breeders Association is a non-profit organization dedicated to helping owners of dairy goats, and to the improvement of all dairy goat breeds. The association was established in 1976 and maintains between 50 and 100 members.

Selling local goat milk and cheese

State regulations make it difficult for small operators to sell goat milk and cheese. Any goat milk or cheese sold in Georgia must come from a Grade A dairy and a Grade A processing facility.

Currently there are no Grade A processing facilities for goat milk in Georgia. According to Latimer, existing rules are written for large operations and can make it cost-prohibitive to build a Grade A dairy.

“Most of the goat milk produced in Georgia is sold as fluid milk under a pet license for consumption by dogs or cats,” Latimer said.

Goat milk is more like human milk and easier to digest than cow milk. Yet because of the restrictive regulations, local goat milk cannot be purchased for human consumption.

Other ways to earn a living with dairy goats

Goat cheese is a high value-added product and can offer very attractive profit margins. Currently, there are three Grade A facilities in Georgia for making goat cheese.

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“The market for specialty cheeses is amazing and most come from out of state or out of country. Cheese is like wine; it picks up flavor from where it’s grown or in this case, what the goat eats. With the long growing season in Georgia and the diversity of grasses and other feeds, there is a great opportunity to use something like goat cheese to reinvent dairy in the state,” Latimer continued.

Again, the rules favor large operations rather than the many goat farmers who might produce 100 lbs. of cheese in a year. According to Latimer, a dialogue is needed with the Georgia Department of Agriculture to create a division for dairy goats separate from cows or at least a more positive, non-cow mentality.

Absent that, goat farmers today will often sell animals for showing to earn a living. Georgia has high-quality, disease-free goat herds. According to a recent U.S Department of Agriculture survey, there are 103 registered goat farms in Georgia. According to Latimer, there are at least that many farms that have at least one goat that are not registered.

For more information on dairy goats, visit Georgia Dairy Goat Breeders Association at www.georgiagoat.com or visit the American Dairy Goat Association at www.adga.org .