

# Rocky Run Farm

## Bringing Raw Milk to Southwest Washington

by ANDREA WATTS

Paycheck-at-a-time is how Pat Hendrickson describes Rocky Run Farm being built, with each brick of the milking barn bought and laid individually as the budget allowed. With her decades of experience raising goats for breeding and milking, you would expect that Pat grew up around goats, but she willingly admits that she had never milked a goat in her life before

her late husband, Don, introduced her to one. And the decision to purchase one goat turned into the 40-year-old-plus Rocky Run Farm, whose goats are shipped around the world and milk satisfies the local demand for wholesome raw goat milk.

Rocky Run Farm is nestled on the outskirts of Napavine, a small town located just off of Interstate 5 in southwest Washington. The farm's name doesn't match the landscape —there

isn't a creek running through the property, nor does the area flood.

"When we lived at the other farm [in Maple Valley], it was a gravel pit with a creek running through it," said Pat. Back East, *run* is used to describe creeks or small streams so they thought, "Rocky Run sounds like a good name for goats."

The first goat the couple purchased was originally for clearing the brush around their Maple Valley farm. Being a milking doe, she required milking, and Don, having milked goats as a youngster, taught Pat how to milk. She remembers not expecting the goat to grow on them, but soon they grew a herd of registered stock. One of their early milk customers was a cheese processor in Chehalis, which meant twice-a-week, 100-mile-plus milk deliveries. Five years later, seeing the development encroaching on their land, Pat and Don sold their 6-acre farm for 9 acres in Napavine. Pat recalls visiting the farm a few years after they moved and not recognizing the area, with most of the houses torn down and replaced with new ones.

The Napavine farm included a barn and house, but there wasn't a milking barn.

"I milked all over the farm, and in the elements many times as we were building the dairy barn," said Pat. She added that their farm has a "pretty interesting evolution through the building process," having been built over a couple of years. Throughout the years their herd size has fluctuated, at one point their 9-acre farm boasted a herd of more than 80 goats and a few beef cows. But now that Pat runs the farm by herself, it's a more manageable 30 or so — which suits her just fine be-



Goats at Rocky Run Farm in the holding area.



Pat Hendrickson has honed the milking process so it takes less than 2 hours.

cause she says that with a larger herd it wasn't enjoyable milking or working with the animals.

With the income of Rocky Run Farm derived primarily from milk sales, Pat selected for long lactation as a necessary quality in her does. Over the years she tested a variety of breeds to form her herd, from earless Laman-chas, which she says have good personalities, to Nubians before settling on Saanens as her breed of choice.

"The first goat I got was a Saanen," said Pat. "When it comes right down to production, Saanens are better."

She said their milk has a high butter fat content, which is preferred for use in cheese. In addition to being productive, Pat prefers does who have agreeable personalities because as the sole operator, she doesn't have time to deal with troublesome does. "Temperament is the thing that will send them out of here, and temperament can come through in the family line." Her herd is maintained through natural addition, but Pat also looks to other lines when the genetics would benefit her herd.

With days revolving around the mandatory 5 a.m. and 5 p.m. milkings, Pat can't travel too far away from the farm, and vacations require finding someone experienced with milking. Of her milking process, Pat describes the does as knowing the procedure, except for the errant ones who crop up every so often and give her a challenge. Her experience has honed the milking process so it takes less than 2 hours, including setup and cleanup.

When it comes to running the farm, Pat considers the camera sys-



Rocky Run Farm is one of the few producers in Washington State that sells Grade A raw goat's milk.

tem installed throughout the farm in 2011 to be the "best investment I've ever made." From her house she can monitor the barns, driveway and fields. And with cameras overlooking the kidding pens, Pat can observe the does giving birth from a comfy chair, and she doesn't miss the frequent trips back and forth to the barn which were necessary with only an intercom system.

Rocky Run Farm is one of the few producers in Washington State that sells Grade A raw goat's milk. Pat credits a change in legislation nearly 14 years ago that allowed hand capping, permitting Rocky Run Farm to become a small dairy. Pat welcomed the licensing change because she said raw milk for consumption used to be sold on the black market but now that it's sold legally consumers can be guaranteed a safe product.

A sample of milk is tested each month, the well is tested four times a year and her goats are tested too. Of improvements required to become certified to sell raw milk, Pat recalls only a few minor things. One of those changes required not allowing cus-

tomers in the room when the milk is being bottled, so Pat had to stage the milk for sale in a different place. In 2009 a small retail store built by the

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## SMALL-SCALE SUCCESS

Napavine High School woodworking class was added to the farm allowing customers to purchase their milk or fresh eggs that are sold by a neighbor.

The customers who purchase the average production of 225 gallons of milk a month include farm customers, the Olympia Co-op, and dog and goat breeders. Of her farm sales, Pat says that most are within a 30-mile radius, with some traveling from Yelm or the Castle Rock area. Some drop-in customers happen to be visiting the area and found Rocky Run Farm on Washington's raw milk directory.

"I enjoy finding customers from different areas," she says.

She became a supplier to the Olympia Co-op because of a milk surplus in 2008.

"A friend suggested I approach them and I recall the dairy managers saying, 'Oh, yes we wanted to have raw goat's milk.'" Her sales through the Co-op are now two-thirds of her income, with farm sales the other third. Farm customers purchase mostly by the gallon, while her Co-op customers buy milk in half gallons or pints, the latter size being marketed to the lunch crowd, Pat says.

Over the years, prices have been raised in relation to the cost of doing business, but Pat says the customers take it in stride, and they are pleased with having access to raw goat milk. A recent agreement will see her milk ap-



Rocky Run Farm's goats produce an average of 225 gallons of milk each month.

pearing in a goat milk ice cream that will be sold at the Phillies Ball Park.

Over the years the Rocky Run herd name has become well known, with many animals sold around the United States and exported to Canada, the Philippines, Mexico and South America. Her does are preordered and shipped at 4 to 5 weeks of age. In spite of the demand for raw goat milk and does, running the farm

solo means that Pat isn't interested in expansion.

"It's been nice to be doing it at the scale I'm doing." And even though she has every right to take a vacation or desire a relaxing retirement, Pat continues her work because "There are a lot of people who want good wholesome food."

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For more on Rocky Run Farm, visit [rockyrun-farm.com/dairy.htm](http://rockyrun-farm.com/dairy.htm).