

The goat barn:

Fat Toad Farm

Sweet Success

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Just a few years ago, Steve Reid and his family took a big risk: they started milking goats and launched a business selling high-end goat milk products. They named the dairy Fat Toad Farm and have invested plenty of hard work into the business. Today, their biggest challenge is to keep up with the high demand for their products.

"We try to focus on doing what we're good at," says Steve. They appear to be good at many things, including raising chickens and pigs, and growing all of their own vegetables and fruits. What they're best at, however, is making an unbelievably decadent caramel made from the milk of their Alpine and Saanen goats.

In the processing plant, Steve's wife Judith and daughter Calley oversee all operations. Calley also helps with milking and there are several interns working on the farm as well. Steve manages the herd and spends many hours a day car-



One of Fat Toad Farm's Alpine does.



A good problem: Fat Toad Farm struggles to keep up with the demand for its goat milk caramel.

ing for the goats and milking them twice daily. Because of his seasonal breeding program, all does freshen in the spring and go through their 10-month lactation together (current average days in milk is 80). There are 45 lactating does in the herd, and milk production is an impressive 7.5 pounds per day. This is particularly remarkable considering the does are nursing one or two doelings for the first three months of lactation. Production wasn't always this good, however.

According to their nutritionist, Kevin Kouri, milk production was a major issue when he started working with Steve in 2009. Before working with Kouri, Steve was bringing in a standard feed line and was dealing with milk production issues in the face of increased demand for their product. Another issue was that many of the goats were losing condition during the grazing season, which of course decreased milk production performance. When urged by a fellow goat farmer, Steve contacted Kouri to help him beef up his nutrition program. Now, Steve feeds a customized nutrition program designed to meet the needs of the herd based on his grazing and housing schemes.

The initial focus was to increase the energy in the rations when the goats were on pasture, and they also incorporated forage testing which has really helped to build a more targeted nutrition program.

Although milk production is strong, current goals include achieving more consistent milk production across the herd, and increasing milk solids (fat is currently at 2.4% and protein is at 2.6%). Kevin attributes the low milk solids to pasture quality. Normally, the quality of the pastures is quite good but this year, the weather has really hit hard and created some issues. According to Kouri, one of the reasons for Fat Toad's success is that Steve is very open to experimentation and likes testing out new ideas. On several of his dairy herds, Kouri had previously seen some nice responses to OMT's Performance Enhancer (Xtract Dairy), an encapsulated blend of essential oils shown to increase milk production in both cows and goats. Last year he mentioned this to Steve, who was enthusiastic to try the product with his goats. The results have been striking, and goat performance has never been better. Says Steve, "I have no doubt that switching to a customized nutrition program, and incorporating performance enhancer into the ration, have played a key role in bringing milk production up to where it is today. I'm really looking forward to seeing how they do this summer and fall."

Their hard work and focus has resulted in an amazingly rich and unique caramel, and people just can't get enough of it.