

He Switched From Dairy Cows To Dairy Goats

Dairyman Jeff Utech more than tripled his dairy herd size without putting up a new building. He just switched from dairy cows to dairy goats. Four years after making the change, he's milking 250 head twice a day where he once milked 70 cows.

"I couldn't add more cows without building, so I needed to make a change," says Utech. "Goat milk prices are more stable, though production varies through the year."

In early December, Utech was getting \$34 per hundred lbs. for his goat milk when dairy cow milk prices were down in the low teens. Of course, Utech's goats only average about 8 lbs. per day. His best producers double that during their first four to five months of milking. When breeding season hits in mid September, he says production takes a big dip.

"I was used to dairy cattle where there isn't so much up and down in production," says Utech.

Switching the facility over was easy. He pulled out stanchions and created a large loafing barn. It serves as holding areas for those milked and yet to milk. At one end Utech sectioned off an area for a parlor. He built two large tables at a height that makes it easy to attach milkers. Each table holds a bank of 12 head gates. Six milking units

make fast work of one set of goats, while the other table is emptied and refilled.

"I open the sliding doors, and they come in and know right where to go," he says. "I didn't have to make any changes to the milk house. The bulk tank and wash tanks stayed the same."

Another big change with the switch was kidding season. He says goat breeders joke that kidding season is all work, no kidding.

"It's the biggest challenge of the year," he says. "You have to create pens for them to kid in, and they have two to three kids each. Suddenly you are maneuvering all these baby goats around and feeding them."

The kids nurse once to get a dose of colostrum before being put on milk replacer. Male kids are sold young or fed out to be marketed for meat to various ethnic markets. This year Utech is sending one batch of feeders to New York City. Some females are raised to add to the milking herd, which Utech continues to expand. Some are sold as breeding stock to others getting into the dairy goat business.

Getting into the business isn't easy. Utech started with 15 head in the spring of 2006. By 2007 he was up to 175. Getting there involved buying goats throughout the Midwest and as far east as Pennsylvania.

"It was kind of rocky going at first," re-



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calls Utech. "Nobody wants to sell milking goats in the fall because milk production is low and every gallon counts. When you buy them later, you don't know if they're actually pregnant or not."

The goats are a better match for Utech's 15 acres of sweet corn and 8 acres of blueberries. People come from throughout the region to pick blueberries on the farm from the third week of July through the second week of August.

"We have a lot of people touring the farm," says Utech. "The goats are a better match for visitors than the dairy cows were. They are easier to display and better for kids and adults to interact with."

Utech and his wife Janet hosted more than 1,000 people at their Blueberry Blitz this last July 25th. Goats played a big role. Events included a catapult launch, blueberry picking contests, and hay rides. They also included goat milking, goat and llama walks, and goat cart races.

"We've done the Blitz for four years now," he says. "The first year we had 400 visitors, and it has grown every year."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Utech's Rainbow Farm, 3880 Rainbow Drive, Merrill, Wis. (ph 715 536-7271; rainbowgoatfarm@earthlink.net).



Bracelets keep the memory of favorite horses and pets alive.

She Braids Horse & Dog Hair Jewelry

Every time Kate Haisch enters a show ring, she wears a bracelet that got her into competing professionally on the hunter/jumper circuit.

The unusual bracelet quickly caught the attention of other horse lovers, and for the past five years Haisch has been making custom horsehair bracelets for people across the U.S. and overseas. More recently, she started making dog-hair bracelets for dog lovers.

"It's a way to remember the amazing horses I've known through the years," Haisch says of several bracelets she has in her own collection.

She became interested in leatherwork while in high school. During her 10 years on the hunter/jumper circuit, she continued to work with leather and came up with her own braiding style mixing leather and horse hair, adding beads and sterling charms such as horseshoes. Most of the bracelets she sells to customers are all horsehair.

"I prefer tail hair because it is significantly stronger than mane hair," Haisch says. She asks customers who want custom bracelets to send her their wrist measurement and enough 12 to 15-in. long hair to equal the

diameter of a pencil.

She cleans the hair, braids it and adds the sterling charm. She adjusts the end fittings and sends the bracelet in a leather box.

"I know of kids who wear them 24/7 and have been wearing them for over five years," Haisch says.

Haisch uses horse hair for other items: necklaces, key chains, decorative pieces and fly whisks using the whole tail of deceased horses.

Haisch says her dog hair bracelets require two pencil diameters of hair 8 to 12 in. long. If the hair is shorter, Haisch modifies the design with more leather or additional beads or charms.

"As dog hair is a finer, more delicate hair than horse hair, these bracelets should be handled with care," Haisch says.

She sells both dog and horse hair bracelets through her website starting at \$75.

She also does custom leatherwork and blanket repair with a polymer product.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Kate's Equine, 18 Paradise Cove, Timberlake, N.C. 27583 (ph 434 429-0251; www.katesequine.com).

"They come out looking as good as new," says Dale Shearer, who refinishes old claw foot tubs. Currently he has about 80 tubs available for refinishing.



He Specializes In Claw Foot Tub

Dale Shearer takes out the ring around the tub, fixes cracks and leaves a tub as good as new when he finishes his 'redo.' He and his Surface Solutions crew renovate bathrooms and kitchens in the tri-state area of Nebraska, Kansas and Iowa. At the same time, Shearer may be negotiating the sale of a tub, buying another or pricing a custom redo on the owner's tub.

"Refinished claw foot tubs sell for less than \$1,000, or I can refinish a tub in your home for around \$500," says Shearer, who runs a rural business restoring big old bath tubs. "New claw foot tubs sell for \$2,000 to \$3,000 so it makes a lot of sense to rework an old one."

The tub expert sandblasts the outside and then applies the desired color before baking on the finish.

"I use temperatures between 300 and 350 degrees to accelerate the cure," says Shearer. "At 72 degrees it would take 72 hours to cure. Then we go to work on the inside."

Interiors get an acid etch. Once neutralized, they are wet sanded, dried and repaired. "We use a double priming method and put three heavy coats of acrylic resin over the top," he says. "It's catalyzed for a very hard durable finish, which can be baked on or cured over time. It's then good as new."

Shearer and his crew also renovate entire bathrooms and kitchens. They can refinish and repair ceramic tile and grout and can convert a standard tub into a step-through

for handicapped use. He works with every type of tub for this, from fiberglass to steel or cast iron.

"We've done dozens of conversions," he says. "Everyone wants to stay in their home as long as possible, and a step-in tub can help."

Conversions usually run around \$750 depending on mileage. He points out that doing a full bathroom conversion to handicapped can cost from \$5,000 to \$10,000 or more.

Of course, you can't convert or redo what you don't have. Luckily for Shearer, he and his wife began collecting old tubs several years before starting the business. It's a practice that continues.

"I buy tubs from auctions, from contacts made at home and builder's shows, and word of mouth," says Shearer. "If someone has a tub for sale, I need measurements, length and width from outside rim to outside rim. Pictures would be nice and also a close-up of the feet."

Currently Shearer has around 80 tubs available for refinishing. In addition, he works with all types of ceramic tile, making repairs, cleaning and regrouting, as well as putting a sealant on both.

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