



JP and Rebecca Oravets sell cheese at local farmers markets and to stores and restaurants in nearby Cleveland, Ohio.

Cheese-Makers Started With A 10-Cow Dairy Herd

JP and Rebecca Oravets started their dairy operation with just 10 cows, but they made a good living thanks to a solid business plan and their passion for making cheese.

"When we bought our farm, we looked at how we could make a living here," says Rebecca. "Raw milk cheese was the most difficult to produce with the most investment and the greatest learning curve. However, it also had the best financial return."

The first year was spent redoing the barn and building a cheese house by themselves. That included pouring concrete one bag of mix at a time. They also needed cheesemaking equipment. Some was purchased second hand online and from restaurant supply companies. Most of it was homemade by Rebecca and JP, who is a welder, blacksmith and farrier by training.

"JP made the knives for cutting the cheese curd as well as the cheese presses," says Rebecca. "He designed the cheesemaking vat, which holds 1,200 lbs. It was built at Midwest Fabrications, a local metal fabricator."

The young couple already had a family cow, an Ayrshire, and liked the taste of the milk. The protein/fat balance provided the texture and taste they wanted in their cheese. As they prepared to start production, they added 9 more Ayrshires to the herd. During the preparation period Rebecca did a lot of reading and practiced making aged cheese.

One of the big challenges was the lack of income for the first year after production started. Once the cheese had aged for the full year, marketing began. The Oravets were soon planting and harvesting forage, pasturing and managing the herd, hauling manure, milking and making cheese and selling it.

Buyers included customers at local farmers markets and several restaurants and stores in nearby Cleveland, Ohio. They also started supplying a winery in Richfield, Ohio. Soon they were making and marketing as many as 10 different cheeses, including Gouda, Cheddar and Alpine types aged from several months, in the case of Gouda, to 12 mos. for Cheddar. Extra sharp versions were aged as much as 18 mos. to 24 mos.

"The nice thing about aged cheese is that it's okay if it doesn't sell right away," says Rebecca.

As commercial demand built, it was soon outstripping the milk supply. At the same time, the Oravets recognized that after 3 years of farming, making cheese, and marketing, they were burning out.

This past summer they made a major change, selling the herd and sourcing their milk supply from a 20-cow dairy in the area.

"We miss the cows something terrible, but the transition has allowed us to increase cheese production," says Rebecca. "I wouldn't want to make cheese without having milked ourselves. It gave us a deeper understanding of why milk changes and how."

The couple is now scaling up their cheesemaking equipment with a new vat that holds triple that of the old one. Where they previously had to store milk at times to have enough for a batch of cheese, they will now work with fresh milk on cheesemaking days.

The new and larger supply is allowing them to cut back to making cheese 2 or 3 days a week versus their previous 3 to 5 days. They are also focusing on spring to fall, pasture-produced milk.

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Sheep Farmer Sells "Fun With Wool" Kits

Laura Berlage makes it easy to learn how to felt wool into cute little critters. She'll send you a kit and you can follow her directions in a 3-hr. Zoom video conferencing class (for an extra fee), or you can watch a video for instructions (free with your kit).

At \$25, her kits come with everything you need: wool roving, a foam work pad, two 38-gauge felting needles, eyes, and needle and thread. Many of the kits contain material for two of the hand-sized critters - including bunnies, birds, livestock and pets. Berlage has a video for each one on her Erindale Tapestry Studio website.

Before the coronavirus, Berlage offered classes in her on-farm studio as well as other venues she traveled to. Laura encouraged area folk schools to embrace online learning and was part of the initial team of instructors that launched live virtual classes through North House Folk Schools. She started with just 5 participants in June to create a wool felt loon via Zoom.

"It was so popular we had to run it 4



Sheep farmer Laura Berlage sells kits that make it easy to learn how to felt wool into cute little critters.

times. It's really taken off, and I've done nearly 2 dozen classes this way," she says, adding people have signed up from all over the U.S. and Canada.

Check out Events on her Facebook page for upcoming classes. Or, order kits from the farm website.

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With online farmers markets, vendors pass products directly to customers who don't even get out of their cars. Everything is prepaid.

Online Farmers Markets Catching On

Facebook group-based farmers markets are connecting growers and consumers in a COVID-19 safe manner. Called REKO Rings, growers post what they have to sell, and consumers lock in their purchases and payments.

"It's similar to an in-person farmers market, but it's prepay," says Julie Kintzi, Cart Before Horse Farm near Seattle, Wash. "We've had great feedback from customers. Our farmers like it because they know just how much to pick, pack and bring to market."

The concept was developed in Europe in recent years. REKO stands for rejäl konsumtion in Swedish, or reilua kuluttamista in Finnish. Both mean fair consumption. Scandinavia boasts more than 500 rings, with one in Norway claiming 20,000 members.

REKO Rings really picked up steam in the U.S. after COVID hit. Kintzi produces and sells turkeys, garlic, onion and cilantro at the local farmers market that she helped organize. She became one of the founders of the Enumclaw REKO Market. She notes that one of her fellow area growers suggested setting up a REKO several years ago. Last spring the time was right.

"We dove in because of COVID-19 and not knowing if the markets could or would open," says Kintzi. "We set it up quickly, covering the basics and learned as we went. We are following farmers market regulations and health codes as much as we can, because

there are none for REKO markets."

The Enumclaw REKO Market kicked off in early May. The Facebook group soon numbered nearly 1,500 members. Under the rules, order taking closes at noon on Friday. Growers take payment in the method they prefer. On Saturday afternoon, vendors and customers meet at a designated site. Unlike a farmers market that can last for 5 to 6 hrs. or more, this is only open for 2 hrs.

"Vendors are present and pass products directly to the customers, who don't even get out of their cars," explains Kintzi. "We follow all the COVID guidelines with masks, gloves and social distancing."

Kintzi says that while there have been no complaints about the new market, grower success with it varied. The most successful growers had consistent product offerings and promoted the market to their customers. Getting the word out on the new market is one of the challenges, she adds.

"Some of our vendors could do this year round, but we need the delivery under cover," says Kintzi. "One of the positive things is that it's local. Our growers are all within a 30-mile radius, and our customers are too. It lets me sell more locally. In the past I sold to people in areas farther away."

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"Hawk Mom" Teaches The Art Of Falconry

"Hawk Mom" Kitty Carroll has been a licensed falconer since 1974. Her fascination with birds of prey began when she read the book "My Side of the Mountain" as a teenager. The story about a young boy who learns to work with a falcon.

She convinced a licensed falconer to mentor her and worked her way up to be an Eagle Class falconer. By 1989 she was in business fulltime running Accipiter Enterprises Educational Birds of Prey in Live Oak, Fla.

Carroll offers short educational programs for schools and the general public. For those who want to get into the falconry business, she offers half-day or full-day falconry workshops as well as International Falconry Academy courses.

Carroll emphasizes that becoming a licensed falconer requires more dedication and time than most people want to put in. The workshops satisfy most of her participants' curiosity about working with birds of prey.

"They get a little sample of what birds of prey are about. Some just want the thrill of and interaction with the birds," she says.

For those who are committed to falconry,



Kitty Carroll demonstrates the art of falconry, and educates the public about the value and beauty of these unique birds.

able to find a mentor, and work as a Master Class falconer for at least seven years, there are plenty of opportunities for creating a business. Many parts of the U.S. use falconers to protect crops and also businesses such as golf courses, resorts, beaches, and airports.

Check out her websites for information about all her programs.

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