



PRODUCER PROFILES: Fruitful Seasons Dairy

By Tim King

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HOLMES CITY - Kathy Hoffman, of Fruitful Seasons Dairy, makes cheese two times per week during the grass harvest. In her spotless cheese making room right next to the milk room, she produces Gouda, Tomato-Basil Gouda, Colby, Caerphilly, Holmes City Spice (onion, garlic, and chili pepper Gouda), and Farmhouse Cheddar.

Caerphilly is a traditional Welsh cheese with a buttery color, a lemony tang, and a thin light brown rind.

“When it has been aged four months or more it has its characteristic crumbly center and is smooth and creamy on the outside,” Kathy said.



Photo by Jan King.

All the cheese that Kathy, her husband Marv, and their six children produce is made from raw milk from their small herd of Jersey cows. It is aged at least sixty days and often more than that.

“We make raw milk cheese because you can get the best cheese that way,” Kathy said. “It has the best flavors and all of the healthful properties of the milk are still intact. We add different cultures to the milk to help steer the milk in the right direction for the particular cheese.”

Jersey milk is rich in solids and during the grass season the cows only eat from the rotationally grazed paddocks. No grain or dry hay is fed although Thorvin kelp, minerals, and a little molasses are provided as nutritional supplements.

“Rotational grazing is much better for the pastures than continuous grazing,” Marv said. “Some people move the cattle every three days or so. The goal is to get them off an area before it starts to re-grow. Having it clipped down again at that point weakens the roots.”

Instead of moving the cows every three days, the Hoffmans move them three times a day. The rich pastures, with a broad diversity of grasses and clover and the cattle hungrily grazing, speak volumes about the wisdom of doing so.

“The cattle really love getting a fresh salad bar three times a day,” Marv said. “They eat more and better. For example, on a hot summer day they don’t necessarily feel like eating much during the

heat of the day. But, if you go out there after lunch and give them a fresh salad they perk right up.”

The intensive rotational grazing is not only improving the health of the paddocks. It is also increasing the plant diversity.

“When we started grazing these pastures there wasn’t much clover,” Kathy said. “Now there is a lot. We have found that just improving the fertility of an area makes all kinds of desirable forage grow without having to add any seed.”

The Hoffmans generally milk their Jerseys in their four stall flat parlor two times a day during the height of the grass season. They have experimented with once a day milking but haven’t been entirely satisfied.



Photo by Jan King.

“We lose about thirty percent of the production when we milk only once a day,” Marv said. “Later in the season we do drop back to one time a day in preparation to drying the cows up in November.”

Cheese making itself reduces the quantity of milk by a substantial percentage.

“When you make cheese it is normal to get a 10% to 12% yield,” Kathy said. “In other words, up to 90% of a batch of milk ends up as whey.”

Whey, however, is not a waste product on the Hoffman farm. They are experimenting with using some of it to fertilize their pastures. The major use for whey, however, is to raise pigs.

“You can raise pigs feeding them solely on whey forage and food scraps from the garden,” Marv said. “There’s no grain to buy. This year all our pigs were spoken for before we got them for the summer.”

Not all of the milk at Fruitful Seasons Dairy goes to make cheese.

The Hoffmans also feed their calves some milk from a milk bar.

“Last year we separated the calves from the cows and fed them from a milk bar,” Marv said. “This year we started out with a nurse cow. It worked great for the calves but not so great for the cow. She had three calves on her and was getting too thin, getting damaged teats, and the calves mostly ignored one of her quarters. So we put her back with the herd and got the calves back on the milk bar. The calves also have kelp and salt on their own pastures.”

The cows start to freshen with new calves in early April, just before the grass starts to grow. They have their own pasture near a loafing barn. The youngest calves are kept in the loafing barn, on deep-bedded straw, until they are old enough to graze.

Fruitful Seasons Dairy is diverse with its Jersey cows and its whey fed pigs. The family also raises layer hens and fryer chickens.



Photo by Jan King.

“My sons are responsible for the hens,” Marv said.

The Hoffmans welcome customers and visitors to the farm. They prefer to have them come on Saturdays so they can focus on farm work and selling at farmers markets throughout the week. But the customer contact is important to them.

“We like to show people how their food is raised and where it came from,” Marv said.

You can purchase Fruitful Seasons cheese at the Whole Farm Cooperative website or at our store in Long Prairie.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Freshen Farmers generally say that when a cow has her calf, she “freshens”. The point is that not only did she have a calf, but she now has milk again. Before the calf was born the cow was “dry”.

Milking parlor. Cows are often milked in a milking parlor. Many old time barns did not have parlors, or special milking rooms. In those older operations cows were milked in the main part of the barn where all the cows were kept part or all of the time. Parlors are smaller, specialized rooms dedicated to milking.

Milk Bars are simply containers that hold enough milk to feed more than one calf. The container will have two or more rubber nipples for the calf to suck on. They are often used in goat dairies as well.

Loafing Barns are buildings with a roof and, often times, less than four walls. They generally are not partitioned and are open for cattle to move around in freely. They protect the livestock from the weather. On many farms the entire herd waits in a loafing barn while the farmer moves smaller numbers of cows into the milking parlor.

Deep Bedded Straw is used in a variety of livestock settings. It is a way to keep animals on a clean, dry, and soft surface. When farmers use deep bedded straw they add new straw every day thus covering up the manure from the previous day.