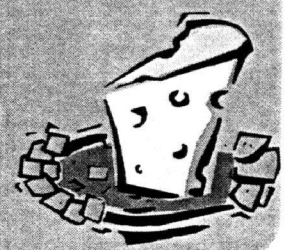


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Special Sample Issue

CreamLine

a new voice for little dairies



ISSN: 1530-3500

Making Profitability Part of the Plan

“We came from a generation who thought it was a sin to make money. We had to get past this mental block before we eventually learned that in order to do the things we wanted to do we had to be able to make a living, and that means making enough profit to pay the bills.” So began cheesemaker Alyce Birchenough during the Southern SAWG (Sustainable Agriculture Working Group) conference session by the same name as the title of this article.

Alyce and her husband Doug Wolbert operate “Sweet Home Farm” in – where else? – southern Alabama, on the “Redneck Riviera,” near Gulf Shores. Although Alyce’s cheesemaking began as a hobby after Alyce received her dreamed-for cow as a wedding present, over the years the couple has developed a strong, stable business selling farmstead cheeses from their on-farm store, made from milk produced by a herd of only 10-12 Guernsey cows. They began farming in Michigan, but got tired of shoveling frozen manure, so picked up the whole operation and moved to the balmy climate of Elberta, Alabama. While the two were selling milk to a co-op, they calculated their milk production cost at \$11.68/cwt. At \$17/cwt from the co-op, they weren’t making a lot of money. Adding value by making cheese offered them an opportunity to gross between \$40 and \$70/cwt, a noticeable improvement.

The couple built their processing business over time, having to take off-farm jobs in the beginning to save enough money to capitalize the business. Alyce advises anyone interested in value-added processing to milk to start small, and start with the inspectors. At Sweet Home they must pass inspection on three different levels – county, state and federal. The inspectors signed off on their plans before they began building; this helped them to avoid problems later. For a cheese vat, Alyce and Doug converted a 200-gallon ice bank cooling tank, in which they can make cheese from three days’ production of milk. The conversion consisted of removing instrumentation and the copper coils for cooling, and welding shut any openings that resulted. Then hot water pipes were installed in the jacket to allow for heating the milk. This was a cost-effective way to obtain a cheese vat, but appropriate sized equipment was not easy to come by. Alyce suggests looking for equipment in the Midwest, while noting that it took eight years to find her 30-gallon pasteurizer. They made their own cheese presses using Corian (the countertop material) arms. Bleach bottles filled with water are hung from the arms to apply weight to the presses, an inexpensive and flexible system. Alyce says plastic food grade buckets with holes

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Do you know the singular, gender-neutral term for “Cattle”?
See page 2.



CreamLine is conceived as a networking and information tool, with topics that cover a wide range of small dairy concerns: from getting started with a family cow, goat or sheep, to how forages affect milk quality, to selling value-added products in the fancy foods market.

Before embarking on this publication, I asked lots of people for advice and opinions. In these days of web surfing, e-mail discussion groups and instantaneous information, is there still a need for a good old-fashioned, snail-mail newsletter? Though there were a few dedicated web-heads who questioned the sense of a paper newsletter, the overwhelming answer was "go for it." There are many of us who are relatively proficient on the Internet but who still prefer sitting down with a real newsletter and filing it away for future reference, without concern that the computer will someday say "unable to open file CreamLine1" or "sorry, your disk is ditzy." The pile of newsletters waiting to be read on the kitchen table is testimony to my preference. And believe it or not, there are even a few folks out there who don't have a computer! But the final impetus for this publication came from Duncan Hilchey of Cornell University. He's been working with small dairies on a value-added project there, which he spoke about at the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group conference in January. Afterwards I approached him with some questions, and he showed vague interest in the project I am working on (described below), until I mentioned that I was planning to produce a small dairy newsletter. With that, he lit up, shook my hand and gave me the last bit of encouragement I needed to get going on this. Thanks, Duncan.

Right now my interest in small dairies stems from a project I'm working on, The Hometown Creamery Revival (HCR), funded by Southern SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education). The HCR consists of a small group of dairy farmers, myself and consultants from various organizations, who are working to get the farms established in their own on-farm processing businesses. We are in the late phases of this project. Two of five farms have been able to establish themselves in on-farm processing, one making cow cheese and the other making goat cheese. Two others are in a "wait till we can afford it" mode, another couple sold their portion of the farm. This is perhaps representative of farms everywhere. My job as coordinator has put me in touch with many people who have the same ideas, the same concerns and the same frustrations. There are three major publications expected from the Hometown Creamery Revival project:

- ◆ an annotated bibliography of small-dairy related publications and materials (*now available - see page 8*)
- ◆ a booklet describing and illustrating examples of farmstead dairy processing facilities
- ◆ a how-to manual for getting started in dairy processing (*these last two will be combined*)

Small-scale, legal equipment seems to be the #1 issue, particularly for goat dairies. In the three years of this project we have seen several new manufacturers arise to meet the need, but the equipment is still not readily accessible to very small farms because of its price, and the price is not expected to go down a lot. Our conclusion: to start a business requires an investment. Although it is not the comforting news I'd like to offer, I can say this -- it costs less to start a small dairy, even from the ground up, than to open a mom-and-pop restaurant. While purchasing an \$8000 piece of equipment may appear to be insurmountable, it has been done with successful and profitable results.

The HCR project is projected to last until mid-2000, but my personal interest in reviving small-scale dairies is ongoing. As a consumer of dairy products I want choices beyond the bland, mass-produced stuff available now. I want to be able to give my daughter dairy products without fear that her body is being deluged with antibiotics and overwhelming doses of hormones and their byproducts. As a long-time proponent of sustainable agriculture, I want to see dairy farming once again become a humane, environmentally sound practice that is economically viable for the farmer who wants to produce a clean, quality product without indulging in technological "miracles." My hope is that *CreamLine* will help to nurture the dreams of others who have the same goals.

Answer: Singular for "cattle" is "neat." Ever heard of "neat's foot oil"? This enlightening tidbit came from *The American Livestock Breeds Conservancy News*, in an article by Ian Mason, "A Linguistic Diversion on the Word 'Cattle,'" July-August 1998.

Vicki Dunaway

drilled in them work fine as molds. For storing cheeses, they built an aging room which will hold 400 eight-pound wheels of cheese.

Alyce began making cheese 20 years ago, and has been producing commercially for 15 years. They found universities to be particularly free with information on processing, and Alyce attended a cheese school at the University of Guelph to enhance her skills. Experimental-size equipment is used at Guelph, which is somewhat smaller than typical commercial size. Alyce found this course helpful in making the transition from home production to commercial production. "In the beginning," she says, "I wanted to make every type of cheese there is," but she soon found it more practical to limit herself to a few varieties that are especially popular with her customers. Still, these varieties cover ten of the twelve basic families of cheese, and offer the customer lots of choices. She says it is important to "bend over backwards" to please customers; she will even make custom batches of cheese in small quantities on occasion. Being sensitive to consumer demand has enabled Alyce to develop a line that is well accepted. "Sample freely," she says, to sell a new product.

Milking is not a seasonal operation at Sweet Home Farm. It is a "relentless job," Alyce says, but provides a consistent income. She and Doug have had to accept that they must take separate vacations, but "when you work together all the time, that may not be such a bad thing." Alyce does most of the cheesemaking, Doug most of the farm work. They share the milking and other daily chores. The weekly cheese production schedule is based on volume of milk and perishability. Generally, cheese manufacturing occupies two or three intensive days each week; on other days there is light work such as inspecting and turning cheeses, and other maintenance chores. The farm store is open four days a week, closed Sunday, Monday and Tuesday. When asked whether visitors try to come to the store on other days, Alyce said they were pretty casual about opening up in the beginning, but learned that they would have no privacy at all if they didn't set limits. At first they tried a sign announcing store hours at the farm entrance, but visitors just ignored it. "For some reason, they respect a gate," she notes.

"Your time is valuable," Alyce says, and advises producers not to sell themselves short. If people want to take tours of your farm, she recommends charging for that service (Sweet Home does not give tours). Once you are experienced, you can also sell your knowledge by giving seminars and workshops. Alyce does not give tours of her processing area, mainly because of the possibility of contamination. However, there is a variety of farm animals that people can observe, and a picnic area where customers can enjoy their farm experience, which is part of what Sweet Home is selling. People from all walks of life come to the farm, in everything from "Jaguars to jalopies." They "enjoy getting a little dust on the car" as they drive up the long drive to the store. When hosting visitors, it is important to be aware of potential hazards, such as animals that may bite children, bees and other farm inhabitants that visitors from the city may not be accustomed to, and to have appro-

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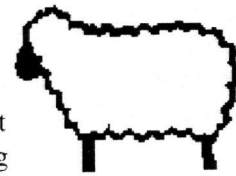
Please include your name, address and phone number or e-mail address when ordering a subscription.

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The *Other* Dairy Animal

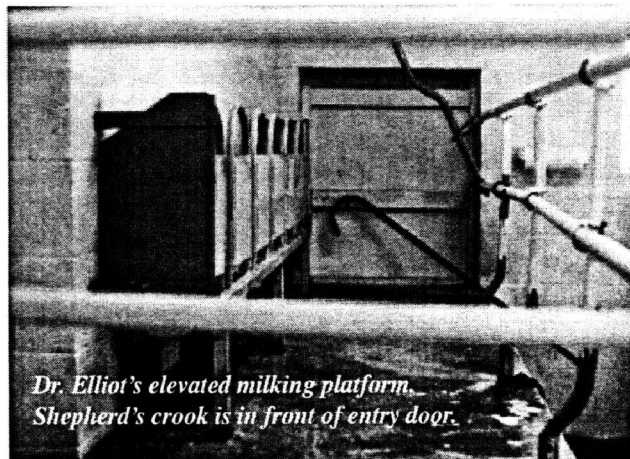


In the past year I've had the opportunity to visit two sheep dairies, a rather remarkable fact in itself considering the small number of sheep dairies in the United States. For a long time, a lot of factors have worked against sheep dairying here – lack of availability of dairy breeds and appropriate equipment, spotty consumer interest, minimal support from research facilities, high costs for entry, low yields from sheep, etc. Most of these barriers are still in place to some degree, but new opportunities have grown with the rise of interest in farmstead cheeses and ethnic foods in general, and the premiums paid for sheep milk products have encouraged a few entrepreneurs to proceed.

A Virginia Pioneer

Sheep dairying in the U.S. is being spearheaded by a few brave souls who have faith that their unusual products will find a place in the American diet. One of these pioneers is Dr. Patricia Elliott of Everona, a farm of about ten acres of rolling pastureland, located near Rapidan in eastern Virginia. Dr. Elliott is a general practitioner in her other life, and sees patients in an office at her home. She originally bought sheep, Friesians and milking Shropshires, to give her sheepdogs something to do, but then started practicing making cheese with the milk they gave. Currently she has about 20 Friesians and six Shropshires. While the Shropshire lambs are better for the meat market, Pat says she loves the temperament of the Friesians, and has recently sold some of the Shropshires. She has developed her own style of hard cheese, and she makes cheese every day from the 25-30 pounds of milk produced by her ewes. Dr. Elliott currently makes cheese in a large pot, but would like to find a small, well-designed cheese vat and cheese harp. (Sound familiar?) As sheep milk is more concentrated than cow or goat milk, it contains more solids (35-45%), and Pat has been able to make cheese without the use of weights for pressing. She washes the rinds with brine on three sides once a week (more often when younger), and keeps the cheeses in a commercial “dough retarder” for aging. This she got from a restaurant equipment company. Dr. Elliott also makes feta and ricotta cheese, and yogurt for her own use.

Last year Dr. Elliott built a milking parlor/cheese plant from the ground up. This 22' x 40' block structure consists of three rooms: the milking parlor, a holding room and the cheese room, in a linear arrangement. She says if she had it to do over she would not have a straight walk-through, but would arrange rooms at 90° to one another, and she would provide a separate space for her office and sales area, as well as more storage space and a bathroom. She estimates the total cost of the building and equipment, including contract labor, to have been between \$30,000 and \$40,000. The furnace was a substantial part of that cost at \$7000, and plumbing cost around \$5000. The block, roof and finish carpentry were about \$15,000. Her son did some of the labor, especially painting, but most was hired. The milking parlor arrangement, with the sheep on an elevated platform, allows her to milk without too much bending; she says they get used to it fairly easily. The ewes go up a ramp on the outside of the building, enter through a small door and then file onto the milking platform. Only the last position is open at first, and when the first ewe reaches that place and sticks her head into the yoke to get to her food, it closes and opens the next one; this happens all the way down the line, admitting seven ewes at a time into the cascading yokes. When milking is finished, the ewes exit at the opposite end and more ewes are admitted. Pat milks with a surge bucket system. Ewes are milked by machine only for a very short time – about 90 seconds maximum!

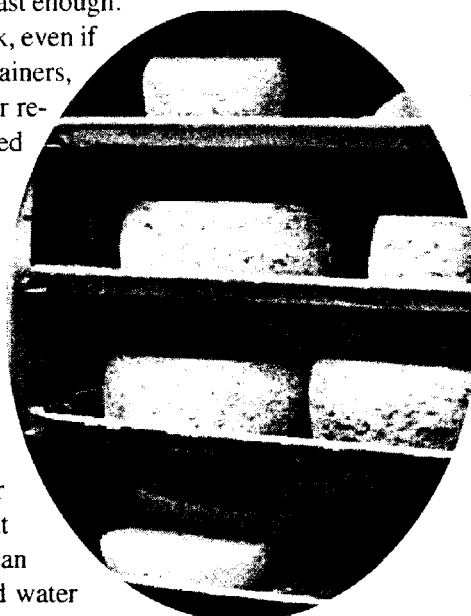


*Dr. Elliot's elevated milking platform.
Shepherd's crook is in front of entry door.*

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A major problem Pat has encountered has been with cooling the milk fast enough. The quantities of milk she gets do not justify the purchase of a bulk tank, even if she could find one small enough. Even when poured into small containers, the fresh milk doesn't reach the required 40° in two hours in a regular refrigerator. She has temporarily solved this problem by purchasing finned plastic milk coolers (Superior Products, 1-800-328-9800, web site www.superprod.com), which are frozen and then dropped into the milk to cool it quickly. Ideally, Pat would like to find a usable old can cooler.

How to cool milk quickly was discussed during the HACCP session at the American Cheese Society conference in August. Someone mentioned that DeLaval sells an in-can cooling unit, but that it is very expensive. Mary Falk of Love-Tree pours milk into five-gallon disposable milk bags, used for "milk on tap," and floats them in chilled water (30° F). One woman said she was using an old freezer with a thermostat in the manner of a can cooler. For those unfamiliar with the old-timey can cooler, it is an insulated box in which milk cans were set, while cold water circulated around the cans. These used to be very common on dairy farms until the rise of the bulk tank. Occasionally a working can cooler can still be found on old dairy farms.



Dr. Elliott's Everona cheese is marketed mostly by mail to upscale outlets such as Zingerman's Deli in Ann Arbor, MI and Cheeseworks in New York, in Williamsburg, VA, Tomales Bay, Linden Vineyards and to a restaurant group in Washington DC. To contact her write Dr. Patricia Elliott, Everona, 23246 Clarks Mountain Road, Rapidan, VA 22733. Her phone number is (540) 854-5147, and e-mail address is pelliott@ns.gemlink.com.

Feta Cheese

There are many different recipes for feta. The following recipe is actually a composite of three similar recipes, allowing a little leeway in temperatures. Experiment!

Heat milk to 33-35° C (about 90° F). Add 3-5% *Lactobacillus lactis* (subspecies *lactis* or *cremoris*) starter culture or DVI mesophilic culture as directed. Add rennet at the rate of 2-3 drops per liter/quart of milk; rennet should be diluted with tepid water. Allow to coagulate at 90° for about an hour, or until curd is firm and makes a clean break when tested with a knife. When firm, cut into 2-3 cm (one-inch) cubes, then allow to set for about 15 minutes. After this, there are varying methods for continuing. The following method results in a large cheese to cut in blocks, rather than small cubes or balls. Scoop the curds into a large mold lined with cheesecloth and allow to drain for 4-6 hours, then turn and drain overnight. Some cheesemakers allow the curds to drain in a bag for about an hour before placing in the mold. The cheese may be pressed lightly with approximately the weight of the curd. Mature the cheese for 2-3 days at about 16° C (60° F), rubbing with coarse salt on both sides. Then rinse with clean water, cut the cheese into pieces. Place the cheese into 10% plain brine or 10% whey brine (use fresh whey instead of water, plus 10% salt, with pH of 5.1 or less) for two weeks. (R. Scott suggests a 16% brine for 24 hours with no dry salting.) Remove from brine and age for 30-60 days at 9-10° C (50° F) or lower, or eat fresh.



Sweet Home -- Continued from page 3

appropriate liability insurance. Alyce also obtained product liability insurance as a rider on their regular farm insurance. Although expensive, liability insurance is a cost of doing business and offers some protection in a very litigious society.

In addition to the dairy cows, Alyce and Doug raise about 20 beef animals, vegetables and organically grown hay, though they are not certified. Neither is the cheese certified organic, mainly because they are unable to obtain organic feed easily. They prefer to emphasize the local and fresh qualities of their products, distinguishing themselves in the marketplace by making waxed raw milk cheese from Guernseys and selling flavor and wholesomeness. But since Sweet Home is the only farmstead cheese operation for cow's milk cheese in Alabama, distinction is not really a big problem at this point! Diversification in cheese varieties is important here – if they made all the same type, they would have had to go wholesale, but with a full line, they have never needed to go that route. Even chefs come and pay retail prices at the farm store. [In *The Cheese Primer*, chef Steven Jenkins says of Alyce and Doug, "I have a particular fondness for their efforts because they live just up the road from my mom and dad, who live nearby in Gulf Shores."]

Sweet Home Farm has a near-ideal location for a direct marketing operation, situated on Route 98 between Pensacola and Mobile. Between the city folks who are willing to drive a little to buy cheese regularly and the "snowbirds" who enjoy the farm as a tourist attraction, Alyce has no trouble finding takers for her 16 varieties of cheese year-round. Production is about 10,000-12,000 pounds

of cheese per year, with sales prices from \$3.75 to \$10 a pound. Alyce does not apologize for the high prices of some products; she says that if price is what matters to a customer, that person can go to Winn-Dixie. Christmas is the best time for sales, when two-pound waxed gift cheese rounds and gift boxes are very popular. Wedges of aged cheeses and soft fresh cheeses are also big sellers in the store.



Alyce has found it profitable to stock the store with "go-with" items that customers can pick up when they visit. Wines, crackers, and fresh produce help fill up the shop and make it attractive. She says it is important to make a display appear "fresh and abundant." Alyce also emphasizes the importance of keeping good records and advises that you "never stop researching your product."

Very little marketing and advertising are necessary to promote Sweet Home's cheese. The couple printed up a double-fold brochure, which is distributed at Alabama Welcome Centers. Press releases to newspapers offer abundant free advertising; word-of-mouth and repeat customers are extremely important. Local restaurants feature Sweet Home cheeses on their menus. As mentioned, the farm was listed in *The Cheese Primer*,

where Steven Jenkins rated their products as "first class."

Sweet Home Farm has found a way to spin their milk into gold. The owners have made a conscious decision to keep their business small and be content with their current production because it provides them with a good living and allows them to stay home on the farm. By providing unique, high-quality products they have built a loyal base of customers and stability in their income, a far cry from the roller-coaster cycles that most dairies are experiencing in the 1990s. In a world with lots of Sweet Home Farms, the term "market share" might really have something to do with sharing. ☞

A Case for Unhomogenized Milk

The natural homogenization of goat milk is, from a human health standpoint, much better than the mechanically homogenized cow milk product. It appears that when fat globules are forcibly broken up by mechanical means, it allows an enzyme associated with milk fat, known as xanthine oxidase, to become free and penetrate the intestinal wall. Once xanthine oxidase gets through the intestinal wall and into the bloodstream, it is capable of creating scar damage to the heart and arteries, which in turn may stimulate the body to release cholesterol into the blood in an attempt to lay a protective fatty material on the scarred areas. This can lead to arteriosclerosis. It should be noted that this effect is not a problem with natural (unhomogenized) cow milk. In unhomogenized milk this enzyme is normally excreted from the body without much absorption.

--excerpted from "Goat Milk versus Cow Milk," by G. F. W. Haenlein and R. Caccese, University of Delaware, Newark, in the *Extension Goat Handbook*, fact sheet E-1, 1984.

Artisan Cheesemakers discussion group

If you haven't already found the "Artisan Cheesemakers" discussion group on the Internet, you are in for a treat. Host Julia Farmer, a cheesemaker from West Virginia, has gathered hundreds of like-minded folks from around the world into one cyberplace to discuss the details of making cheese and other products, as well as milk quality, animal problems, etc. Most members seem to be amateurs making goat cheese, but some of the discussions are fairly advanced and very informative. This is a good place to get your questions answered quickly. To subscribe, send an e-mail message to Artisan_Cheesemakers-subscribe@onelist.com. You can also reach the list by going to www.onelist.com, then search for "cheesemaking." You must allow your browser to accept cookies, at least temporarily, to sign up for a OneList group. This group was formerly known as Cheesemakers-L.

DairyCreamery discussion group

Also on OneList there is a new discussion group devoted to small commercial scale dairying. This list is co-moderated by author Andy Lee (*Backyard Market Gardening, Chicken Tractor*) and Vicki Dunaway. To sign on, send an e-mail message to: dairycreamery-subscribe@onelist.com. Or follow the above instructions for OneList and search for "dairycreamery."

The Small Dairy Project

The pasteurizer is often a limiting factor to small-scale producers, particularly wannabe goat cheese producers, who want to sell their unaged cheeses legally. Appropriately sized pasteurizers start at \$7500 and go up from there. The Small Dairy Project has a unique offering for farms in this situation. They have a Pasteurizer Lending Program, in which the farm can borrow a 25-gallon pasteurizer (which costs around \$12,000) for six months to see if it works for that operation. The borrower then has the option to buy or lease the pasteurizer. A \$1500 security deposit and a shipping charge estimated at \$500 are required initially. In addition, the borrower must become a member of the Small Dairy Project (\$25) and agree to several other minor requirements. Recently the Project has developed a bottling attachment to go with the pasteurizer, which may be added on at an additional cost of \$3200. There is a waiting list for the available loaner pasteurizers. For more information contact Courtney Haase at The Small Dairy Project, HC 65, Box 45, Bradford, NH 03221. Telephone (603) 927-4176. E-mail: nunsuch@conknet.com. Their Web site is at www.haasefam.com/sdp/small.htm.

Mothers and Others/Rural Vermont BGH-Free List

Mothers and Others and Rural Vermont have jointly published the "Mothers' Milk List" on the World Wide Web. This is a list of certified organic and rBGH-free dairy products and dairies in the U.S. They are interested in updating the list, and encourage qualifying dairies to contact them. Organic dairies should send proof of organic certification to: Mothers & Others, 40 W. 20th St, New York, NY 10011. (Phone number: 888-326-4636.) Dairies who can guarantee that milk does not come from animals treated with rBGH should contact Rural Vermont at (803) 223-7222. A print copy of the list can be obtained from either of these sources. View the current list on the Web at: www.igc.apc.org/mothers/fieldwork/mo_field_milklist.html

ACS Takes a Stand on CODEX Pasteurization Policy

The American Cheese Society (ACS) has formed a task force to influence the international food rules (CODEX Alimentarius) currently being developed to govern trade in food products. The original draft of CODEX requires pasteurization of milk products. This practice is opposed by cheesemakers worldwide. ACS is looking for assistance from interested folks. Contact them at (414)728-4458. ACS has drafted a pasteurization platform, which is on the Web at: www.cheesesociety.org (or call for a copy).

Small Dairy Resource Book Released!

The first major publication of the Hometown Creamery Revival, *The Small Dairy Resource Book*, has recently returned from the printer. To order, send \$8 plus \$3.95 shipping, check or money order to Sustainable Agriculture Publications, Hills Building, Room 12, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT 05405-0082; or call (802) 656-0484 to order with Visa or Master Card. Questions? E-mail lhendric@zoo.uvm.edu for more information. Bulk orders are available. See the Sustainable Agriculture Network web page: www.sare.org/san/htdocs/pubs/

About *CreamLine*:

This issue is a small sampling of the contents of the first four issues of *CreamLine*. Issue 1 was 8 pages, and issues 2, 3 and 4 each consist of 16 pages. As of issue 5, *CreamLine* has expanded to 20 pages! Regular additional features include a chef's column, book reviews, notification of cheesemaking and other dairy processing classes and conferences, and classified ads. *CreamLine* subscribers also receive occasional "surprise" bonuses. Individual back issues may be ordered.

Issue 1 -- Spring 1999

out of print, but very similar to the sample issue.

Issue 2 -- Summer 1999

Ice Cream for Fun and Profit
So This is Retirement? (Gwamma's dairy goat farm in Ohio)
Chef's Corner - Ricotta cheese
Ice Cream Recipes
Book Reviews - five ice cream books
Do Weeds Make Good Feeds?

Issue 3 -- Fall 1999

Raw Milk Cheeses Endangered?
The Other Dairy Animal - features two sheep dairies
Friesian sheep and minor breeds
Chef's Corner -- sheep milk cheeses
Preparing Pastures for Winter and Beyond
Book Reviews -- Cheesemaking Practice, Practical Sheep Dairying
Feta Cheese recipe
Ethnic Cheeses Project

Issue 4 -- Winter 2000

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Titratable Acidity and pH
Chef's Corner -- Butter
Devonshire Cream and Whey Butter
Butter Resources

Issue 5 -- Spring 2000

Maple View Farm Milk Co.
On-Farm Bottling
Bottling Resources
What to Do with Goat Milk
Trail's End Goat Dairy
Batch Pasteurization

Issue 6 -- Summer 2000

Mozzarella!
Ricotta
Blue Ridge Mountain Dairy
(milking water buffalo)
Chef's Corner - Fondue
The Mysteries of Cheese
(consultant column)
Resource Review (mozzarella)

www.metabolab.unc.edu/creamery

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