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MARIA STRINNI/Star-Gazette

Chris Parsons lets his goats out to pasture at Capricorn Hill Farm in Pine City.

# Pine City goat farm fills need

■ Operation meets growing demand for exotic meat.

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PINE CITY — It's tough to tell what part of goat farming Pine City resident Chris Parsons likes best.

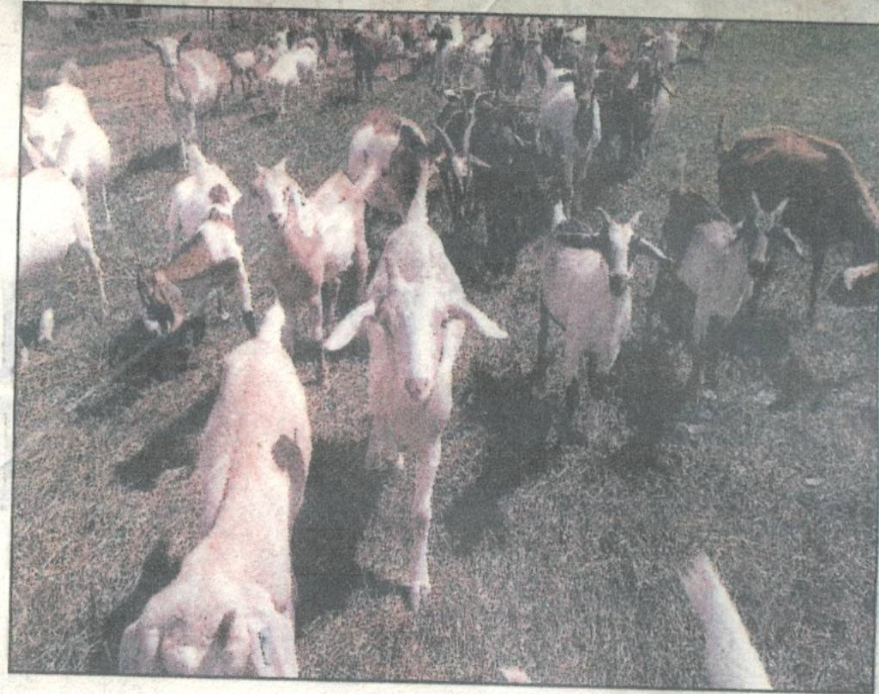
Is it advocating the meat as a menu staple or raising the animals on a picturesque 107-acre spread about 10 miles outside of Elmira?

Since 1998, Parsons, 45, has raised goats, free-range chickens and ducks on what once was the Bower Dairy Farm on Clark Hollow Road in Pine City. He and his wife, Colleen, have renamed the operation Capricorn Hill Farm.

Parsons, the former owner of Elmira's Pet Boutique, has teamed with the Northeast Sheep and Goat Marketing Program to improve the link between goat producers and their customers through live markets, where customers can buy live goats directly from the farmer.

Parsons has also used a grant to build a state-approved facility to process the animals purchased during the live markets. The next live markets are scheduled from 9 a.m. to noon Oct. 12 and Nov. 2.

What's more, he also raises 20 goats for a Cornell University research program called Goats in the Woods. The experimental program uses hungry goats to eat underbrush in wooded areas to bet-



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Farm owner Chris Parsons has devised a chute that allows individual goats to be easily transferred from carrier to pens, which makes for calmer animals during the live markets at his Pine City farm.

ter allow the growth of crop trees. The goats graze in fenced-in portions of the Arnot Forest near Spencer.

A full plate? Yes, but look at Parsons relaxing at a picnic table under a shade tree in his yard with a cup of coffee in hand. See him surrounded by nothing but verdant, rolling sun-splashed open space. Here's a man at ease with his career choice.

"It's a lifestyle we enjoy," he said. "But we're still trying not to deplete the savings account while we find out how to improve the industry and make it all profitable. We do have producers who are

banging at the doors. Customers are still slow coming," said Parsons.

## Attracting a customer base

Currently, most of Parsons' clientele are members of the Muslim faith. His goal is to continue serving that religious group while helping more members of the general public appreciate the attributes of goat meat.

According to the USDA, goat meat has half the calories of beef, about a sixth as many fat grams and the same amount of protein. Pound for

pound, it has about the same calories as chicken, with one-fourth less fat.

However, many of Parsons' clients still eat goat because of cultural tradition, rather than health reasons.

The same is true for customers who patronize other live markets across the state, said Tatiana Stanton, educational chairwoman for the Empire State Meat Goat Producers Association.

"We have a new influx of immigrants who don't want to lose their ethnicity," said Stanton, who is also an extension associate with the

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## **Goat:** Pine City farm fills need

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Northeast Sheep and Goat Marketing Program at Cornell University.

"They don't want to see how quickly they can become a part of the meat-and-potatoes generation. They want to keep their traditional eating habits alive," she said.

Because of the dietary trend among immigrants, goat meat consumption has doubled throughout the Northeast, the area served by the Cornell marketing program.

### **Goat farming grows in respectability**

As the demand for goat meat increases, raising the animals is gaining in respectability.

"Initially, (raising meat goats) was met with skepticism, but now it is being more accepted because people are seeing the demand for it. There are already ready-made customers. We aren't trying to convert people," Stanton said.

Color Mohammad Zaman, a pharmacist from Elmira Heights, is one of those ready-made customers who gets goat meat from Capricorn Hill Farm. Zaman's previous arrangement was to order

goat meat from another producer.

"Now, I can call Capricorn Hill and go up and choose the goat I want," said Zaman. "I learned about the farm through a newspaper and gave them a call because they could accommodate our religious requirements for slaughtering meat."

Parsons hopes to strengthen his link with customers like Zaman through associations with several meat goat trade groups. Cornell's meat goat marketing program has a similar goal.

The program's strategy includes getting more producers interested in pooling their goat herds for live markets to compete with goat farms in Texas and the Southeast.

The program is also developing more humane methods of slaughtering goats, publishing directories listing meat goat producers and finding rural locations where live markets can be successful.

Parsons' farm is the site of a program designed to improve live marketing.

"We started in the summer to see if everything was in place, and it all seems to be working," he said.

# Live Goat Market Featured At Multifaceted Capricorn Hill Farm

by Ken Thomas

"A baa baa here, and a baa baa there. Here a baa, there a baa. Everywhere a baa baa!"

If your name is Old Mc Donald then Capricorn Farm is the right place for you. Not only will you hear baa baa, but there's a cluck cluck, a gobble gobble, a honk honk, a moo moo, a woof woof, and an occasional cock-a-doodle do, too!

Situated on the winding Clark Hollow Road in Pine City, NY, the farm is home to Colleen and Chris Parsons and their animal menagerie.

"The farm began as the Bower dairy in 1894. The bottled and delivered milk to Elmira and Chemung County," shared Chris Parsons. "We took over in 1998 first with dairy goats, and now meat goats. We have turkeys, pastured chickens, ducks, a calf, some geese and our herd dogs. Oh, and hear that? Some roosters, too!"

On this evening, the farm was host to a group interested in Capricorn Hill's goat enterprise that includes its own custom slaughterhouse. Kerri Bartlett, Steuben CCE Livestock Specialist helped coordinate the event. "The Parsons have a lot of different animals on the farm. They have built up their goatherd, renovated the milking parlor into a well-equipped, state-approved processing house. Now, they are working hard to promote their bi-weekly 'live goat market.' Meat goat producers bring their animals here and potential buyers can look over the animals, talk to the owners about their care and feeding. Then they can pick a goat and have it processed right

for that program on their farm as well. The object is to use goats that are confined to designated woodlot areas by portable fencing to help with woodlot management. The goats peel off the bark of saplings to help maintain good tree spacing.

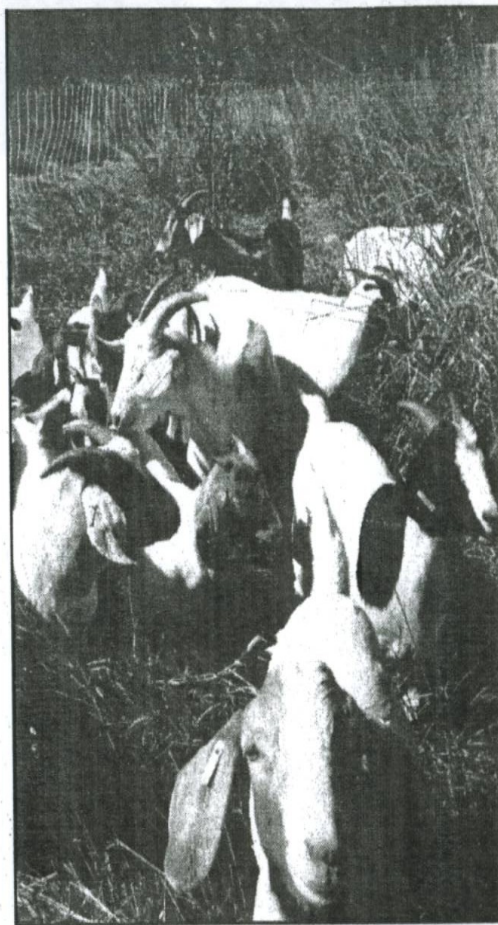
"Our 'Woods' goats are used in another way as well," stated Chris. "We have set up three sites on the power line right-of-ways near here. A quarter acre at a time the goats help eat down the brush and weed growth on areas that are very steep and difficult for human pruners to reach. Our hope is that NYSEG will use our goats as another power line trimming resource. We have noted a real impact on areas we have tried."

Additional food is brought to the sight as well as a mineral block. A tarp is erected for shelter. After two weeks the goats are brought back and fed regular goat rations. There is always a noticeable compensatory weight gain in this group of goats.

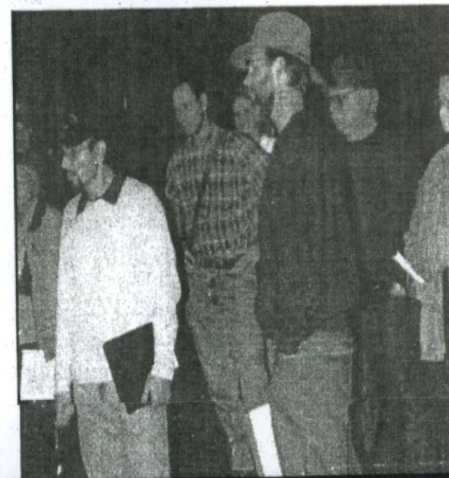
The Parson process 25 chickens every two weeks. They have set up an efficient area in a former concrete bunker area. The processing takes about three hours to complete. Turkeys and ducks are also processed here.

"Our chicken coop is on wheels. I move it about twelve feet everyday. I also give them 5 to 6 pounds of food a day. They are much healthier. We have not lost one," Chris explained. "Free range chickens have a lot of leg problems. These birds are also parasite free."

Capricorn Farm also has an outside



This group of Capricorn Farm goats is moved every day. A portable fence appropriately confines them while providing them with a new section of pasture. "The goats get good nutrition while I manage pasture," shared Chris Parsons.



A recent Cornell Cooperative Extension evening workshop brought thirty current

daily 'live goat market.' Meat goat producers bring their animals here and potential buyers can look over the animals, talk to the owners about their care and feeding. Then they can pick a goat and have it processed right on, or come back later for their customer process goat meat."

The goats are confined in various structures with 21 inch high tensile, electrified fencing with a barbed wire strand at the very bottom. Every color combination can be seen. The Parsons' border collie dogs keep them controlled. Chris noted that if it starts to rain, or soon as it is getting a little dark out, the herd comes off the hillside pasture and heads for the safety of the barn.

Colleen Parsons is now working with Cornell University's Dr. Tatiana Stanish in a research project called Goats in the Woods. Chris manages 20 goats

per day. They are much healthier. We have not lost one," Chris explained. "Free range chickens have a lot of leg problems. These birds are also parasite free."

Capricorn Farm also has an outside slaughter area for those customers that want to slaughter their own goats according to religious requirement. The facility meets state standards. Chris was quick to add he makes sure they know the most humane way to accomplish the slaughter so the animal does not suffer. He has built a small adjustable cradle to hold the goats off the ground. He states it has a calming effect on the animal.

"We are making gains in our live market awareness. We hear that we are doing things right. We have used newspaper ads, and made visits to potential customers. Most of our customers

are of the Muslim faith. Our goal is to expand that base by increasing the awareness of how healthy goat meat is. It has half the calories of beef, way less fat, and good protein levels," he continued. "Our next live market here at Capricorn Farm is on Saturday, November 2."

The farm is a very interesting visit.

Chris and Colleen are very knowledgeable and would be happy to answer any question about their farm, or the live market. The telephone number is (607) 732-4987. The e-mail address is [Meats@CapricornHill.com](mailto:Meats@CapricornHill.com). The farm is only 15 minutes from downtown Elmira.



Goats are herded into the former dairy barn and then channeled to individual pens by their owners. The owners stay at the pen to answer questions about their goats and their care for any potential buyer who attends the live goat market. The market is held about every two weeks. The next market is scheduled for Saturday, November 2.



Brightly colored roosters provided the punctuation marks to comments made by Chris Parsons in the former Brower Dairy barn. This area has been refitted to accommodate the 'live goat market'. Individual producers bring their animals to the pens that were previously stalls for dairy cows. Photos by Ken Thomas