

# SNAP DRAGON GOAT DAIRY

BY JANE E. BURTON

The next time you bite into a piece of Salt Spring Island Cheese you will be supporting Vancouver Island's newest micro goat dairy, located on Holiday Road in Fanny Bay. Snap Dragon Goat Dairy owners, Karen Fouracre and Jaki Ayton, shipped their first load of milk to Salt Spring Island on May 10th, marking the end of nearly six months of painstaking preparations.

Karen and Jaki have lived in Fanny Bay for fourteen years. They have experimented with different types of farming on their 1.6 acre property over the years but goats have been a part of the mix from the start. Self-sufficiency and having a dairy have been long-term goals for the farm. The dairy idea was relegated to the "when we win the lottery" shelf until last year. Two things made that goal a more realistic target. First, a desire to have their goats help pay for their upkeep and Salt Spring Island Cheese's search for Vancouver Island sources of goat milk.

Jaki, who works full-time in public health, has been showing the goats at exhibitions for a number of years. "I have quite a few goats now and quite a few purebreds and,



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Karen Fouracre (L) & Jaki Ayton (R) • Jane Burton photo

they're not cheap. They're not the most expensive pets, not as expensive as a dog. We did some stats for the Vancouver Island Goat Association (VIGA) a couple of years ago and it is about \$750 per year to keep an adult female goat. And when you start having ten, then it starts costing money. So it was like, gee, it would be nice if they could pay for themselves."

Thus, when David Wood, owner of Salt Spring Island Cheese, approached VIGA last year looking for new suppliers that would help him reduce his costs and carbon footprint, Karen and Jaki decided to see if they could make their dairy dream come true.

The following months were filled with new learning and many challenges as they worked their way through constructing a facility that meets the stringent requirements of the BC Dairy code. Getting equipment to fit a micro dairy proved to be the biggest challenge. Karen: "One of the hardest things to do was find a dairy tank that was small enough." Jaki: "There really

isn't any micro dairy stuff, there is home dairy and big dairy and we're just trying to feel our way through the middle." After three months of searching they did finally find a tank that would work, but it was so much bigger than expected that Karen had to add eight feet to the milking parlour and processing building.

I asked the two women if they had any suggestions for people thinking of setting up a micro dairy. Without hesitation they said the most important thing is to get experience with the animals, to perfect the animal husbandry. Jaki: "If you don't have healthy animals you don't have a good product." Other advice included: estimate high on all your expenses, have a business plan and budget, and, be willing to be a farmer and make tough choices about culling your herd. Karen: "That took a long time to learn. That is a whole mindset. That took two or three or four years to start thinking that way; to actually be able to do it."

Running Vancouver Island's second-only goat dairy will employ Karen full-time as they work toward reaching their production target of 300 litres of milk per week. If tending the fourteen milking goats plus the non-dairy herd, the chickens, hogs and ducks doesn't keep her busy enough, Karen also hopes to open a farm produce and fruit stall.

Karen and Jaki are very grateful for all the help they have received from their friends and neighbours to set up the dairy. They are looking forward to returning the favour and also making a list of everyone who has assisted them with the thoughts of throwing a party to celebrate. I'm guessing that Salt Spring Island Cheese will be on the menu. ~

*Jane E. Burton is a freelance writer who operates her company Memorable Lines from her home in Fanny Bay.*