

If You Got 'Em, Milk 'Em!

By Maggie Leman

I have pygmy goats, lots of them. I've had them and shown them for years. One of the recurring questions has always been, "What do you DO with them?" Pygmy Goat owners have often been at a loss for a good answer, but I have one, I milk them!

The National Pygmy Goat Association website describes the pygmy goat like this:

"The Pygmy Goat is hardy, alert and animated, good-natured and gregarious; a docile, responsive pet, *a cooperative provider of milk*, and an ecologically effective browser. The Pygmy goat is an asset in a wide variety of settings, and can adapt to virtually all climates..."

So even the registry organization promotes them as a milking goat! Personally I like to tell people they are an IDEAL dual-purpose goat, you have to admit they look like little meat goats. But it's hard to eat anything that cute. Many of my fellow pygmy goat breeders were diversifying into Nigerian Dwarfes because they wanted to try milking. I always asked why they didn't milk their pygmies and never really got a good answer. So I decided to show them and any doubters once and for all that pygmy goats *are* useful goats. So for the first season or so I hand milked about 4 of my little darlings, and I was hooked. Really, their teats are no smaller than Nigerian Dwarf teats, some of my does can be milked with 3 fingers, and I can use two fingers on all of them. The following year I treated myself to a very fine birthday present and bought a milking machine with inflations and cups sized for sheep and Nigerian dwarfs with the intention of greatly expanding my efforts. The girls thought the machine was a wonderful improvement, and so did I! I could easily milk as many as 15 does in the same time as it was taking me to milk 4 or 5. My machine has been ticking along for over 5 years and my girls and I have made the milking routine a part of our daily life, so much that I miss it during our dry time.

Pygmy Goat milk, while not given in great quantity, is arguably the richest of all goats' milk at 6 to 9 percent butterfat. It is also very high in other milk solids. This makes it absolutely PERFECT for cheese making. I started milking and cheese making just about the time the goat cheese craze hit too! In my other life (away from the farm) I work in a large corporate dining facility. The company that manages the dining facility specializes in fresh food cooked from scratch with the best ingredients from local sources. I work with some very fine chefs who have experience in fine dining from large country clubs to fine restaurants and our menu reflects that background. My cheese and little goats have gained a nice little following amongst the clients I serve and the professionals with whom I work. I make a very rich and creamy chevre, plain and in several flavors, and an outstanding herb and olive oil marinated feta. I would like to add fresh mozzarella. For Christmas I want to make some Mexican Cajeta for gifts, I have several wonderful Hispanic friends at work.

Don't like goat cheese? Make soap and other goat milk skin care products. These don't take much milk but the richer the milk the higher the quality of your product. So a small herd of pygmies would clearly fit the bill. There is a high demand for natural skin care products. These kinds of products are much easier to market too as there isn't as many regulations as with food products.

I have found that the bond between the milkmaid and the doe is a very special feeling, an incredible trust and communication exists between two intelligent species. And to have that with one of the cutest creatures in God's creation is just the best feeling in the world. To be able to share an exotic treat with people that may not appreciate a living goat, as you do, be it pygmy goat chevre or soap, helps to strengthen the bond between the farmer and the public. Everybody wins! So I say if you got 'em, milk 'em!