

Goat's Milk: Not *just* for cheese making



What do luxurious shampoos, silky soaps, and goats have in common? For Peter and Bunny Merrill, owners of Elmore Mountain Farm in Morrisville, quite a lot. The couple began to craft an array of handmade bath and body products using goat's milk in 2006. They had started experimenting with the rich milk from their two goats by first making soap and cheese. "Our chevre cheese was unremarkable—think wallpaper," Peter says. "But people loved our soap."

They began to give the soap away to family and friends, and then sold it in a few local stores. The soaps, which the couple made in their kitchen and cured in their garage, grew in popularity. Soon Peter was loading up his truck for sales trips, seeing how many stores he could visit within one or two days. "Two years ago we renovated space in our barn and moved the business there," Peter says. "What used to be a part-time hobby for my wife is now more than full-time for both of us."

In addition to soap, Elmore Mountain Farm also produces shampoo, bubble bath, body oil, lotion, face cream and a variety of balms for fingers, lips, feet and hands. "Some people think we put goat's milk into all of our products," Peter continues. "I don't know about you, but I don't think I'd be wild about a goat's milk-based lip balm!" In reality, the farm's soaps and lotions are the only products that contain goat's milk.

All of the products are made on the farm, however, and the goat's milk soaps and lotions use milk from the farm's "working girls," Clarise, Helen, and Lucy. They're Oberhasli and Oberhasli/Alpine crosses. (According to the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, there are 13,500 milk goats in New England, although the data does not reflect how many of those goats produce milk used strictly in body products.) From just three goats, Elmore Mountain Farm makes approximately 25,000 bars of soap in a year.

As Elmore Mountain Farm continues to grow, Peter says it's important that the farm does not lose its down-to-earth image. "Despite the fact that we still have no real sales effort to speak of, the business continues to grow, and our products are now available in stores throughout New England and beyond."

Still, the couple believes the business has probably gone as far as it can under the current configuration, and they've recently begun thinking about expanding both the product space and staffing, including hiring someone to handle distribution. "It's exciting and scary at the same time," Peter says. "We'd like to be able to continue to grow without losing the 'farm-based' feel of the business that we enjoy so much."

—Joy Perrino Choquette

More info: elmoremountainfarm.com

