



Say Cheese

Nettle Meadow Dairy

Lorraine Lambiase
Sheila Flanagan

Success Magazine:
How did two fine women working at a law firm in San Francisco become goat and cheese farmers in upstate New York?

Sheila Flanagan: I had a bad habit of surfing the web for agricultural properties and found a listing for the Nettle Meadow Goat Farm one day while taking a break at work. We had spent a couple of years making goat cheese with our Nigerian dwarf goats in California and we were looking for a change to spend more time with our animals and less time at the office. The price of the facility was right and the cheeses they were making were of superior quality, so we took a trip out to New York to visit the farm. Many aspects of the farm were still in a rustic state, but we saw the potential and have been growing the business ever since. When we started we had about thirty milking goats and were called “Nettle Meadow Goat Farm.” With the addition of our sheep we became “Nettle Meadow Goat and Sheep Dairy.” Now, with the addition of Jersey cows, we are just simply “Nettle Meadow Dairy” making cheeses with three different milk types.

SM: What inspired you to become entrepreneurs as opposed to working at your law firm?

SF: We were both a little tired of pushing paper. I had been a partner in two law firms, but a law practice was not my dream of the type of business I wanted to run. We wanted to work with animals and make something healthy that made people happy. Our cheese fills just that niche.

SM: You have three jobs: goat herder and farmers, gourmet cheese makers, and now marketers of your fine product. How do you enjoy being an entrepreneur? What functions do each of you specialize in?

SF: We have a farm manager and assistant manager who handle the day-to-day on the farm side. We are still closely involved in herd health and handle most of kidding and lambing season, but the milking is largely done by other people now. Lorraine and I split the cheese-making responsibilities. I am the primary Kunik, Three Sisters, and hard cheese cheese-maker while Lorraine makes all the chevres and the Crane Mountain semi-aged cheese. I handle much of the marketing while Lorraine does the majority of the state-wide deliveries.

SM: Do you specialize in any particular method of cheese-making or cheese products?

SF: We have several categories of cheese. We are most well known for our semi-aged bloomy rind cheeses. Those include the trademarked triple crème “Kunik” made from goat milk and Jersey cow cream; the three milk farmstead cheese known as “Three Sisters” from goat, sheep and cow milks; and the all goat milk “Crane Mountain.” We make fresh goat cheeses in 11 flavors including our award winning honey lavender from-age blanc, local maple walnut, spicy horseradish, and oil & garlic.

We also make a selection of hard cheeses. We make an aged goat cheddar, a cow gouda, and a cow parmesan, all of which are usually available in the fall and winter months.

SM: The work of a farmer is 24/7 365 days a year. How do you maintain such a difficult schedule?

SF: We try not to think about it too much because we might start feeling sorry for ourselves. It is true that we work 365 days a year and put in very long hours every day. I think we do it for the animals—

to keep them healthy and fed, and because we take pride in our cheeses, and because everyone really has to roll up their sleeves and give 110% in this economy to keep succeeding.

SM: What is your favorite aspect of being an entrepreneur?

SF: I like being able to do things our own way. At most farms, the old and the weak would be culled and sent to auction. At our farm, we put all of the older weaker animals in our animal sanctuary. We have also been known, in certain circumstances, to take farm animals into the sanctuary. There are not many farms that would do that, but it gives what we do more meaning. We like that we can give whatever we do make from our cheeses back to the animals that help to make them.

SM: What plans do you have to expand your farm and distribution of your delicious cheeses?

SF: One of the exciting changes we have made this spring is to send most of our cheese down to a warehouse that specializes in high-end cheeses in the New York City region so that more distributors from around the country are able to more easily access our cheese. This has already resulted in a broader range of distribution around the country. We will continue to expand our herd of goats, sheep, and cows to meet the demands of this enhanced distribution chain.

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