

Brian J. Lowney — Fur, Fin and Feathers: Miniature goats a growing business

When you drive down the old dirt lane that leads to Rosasharn Farm in Rehoboth, you can almost hear the beautiful voice of Julie Andrews singing “The Lonely Goatherd,” a lively tune made famous in the classic film “The Sound of Music.”

The only differences are that farm owner Anne Petersen isn't yodeling, and there's nothing lonely about her pristine family farm. The minute a visitor pulls into the farmhouse's gravel driveway, a pair of large guard dogs rise from their spots in the cool shade and join their owner as she welcomes the guest to the farm that is known throughout the United States and Canada as a leading producer of pedigreed Nigerian Dwarf dairy goats.

The 80-acre farm is located 10 miles east of Providence, in a rural section of Rehoboth still dominated by many family farms and large vegetable growers. Petersen began raising goats in the 1980s, and after owning other larger breeds, eventually developed a nationally recognized herd of Nigerian Dwarf dairy goats.

“They are the smallest of the dairy-goat breeds,” Petersen begins, adding that her current herd has 80 members, ranging from infants to older adults. She adds that the size of the herd constantly fluctuates as kids and some of the does and bucks are sold to make room for new babies.

“I am a professional goat breeder,” says Petersen, a trained studio artist. “I am lucky to do what I love to do.”

Petersen occasionally exhibits at goat shows conducted under the auspices of the American Dairy Goat Association. Her goats have won 14 national titles.

“I go to national shows if they are within 20 hours driving distance,” she tells. “Since I'm taking 25 goats, I can't fly.” She also exhibits at licensed shows within the region.

These miniature dairy goats, whose breed originated in West Africa, produce milk known for its high percentage of butterfat, which is ideal for making cheese and soap.

“My bread-and-butter job is raising quality breeding stock,” Petersen continues, noting that she also breeds hogs and guardian flock dogs that are sold to other farmers and produces goat's milk soap that can be ordered from the farm.

“The dogs go hand-in-hand with the goats,” she says, noting that she breeds Great Pyrenees, a large white dog developed in the Pyrenees Mountains between France and Spain by Basque shepherds. Petersen sometimes also crosses Pyrs with Anatolian shepherds to create canines that are watchful protectors in the field yet loyal family companions in the home.

Petersen and her husband Mark Winsor, a social worker, have a combined family of six children, and depend on the farm for most of their food. The couple maintains a large garden and raises pigs and lambs, chickens, ducks, turkeys and geese for their family's consumption.

The active mother and farmer makes goat cheese for her family, and sells rich goat's milk to local dog breeders who are raising litters of puppies.

“I don't sell milk for human consumption,” Petersen emphasizes, adding that some crafters occasionally purchase the milk to make their own soap.

The goat breeder is happy with her life on the farm.

“It's exhilarating, inspiring, exhausting and challenging,” she says. “It's fun. It's tremendously rewarding for me to get to see the progeny of many generations.”

Petersen admits that, despite the many rewards, her days are long and there is always some chore to perform. She recently enjoyed her first vacation in more than a decade.

“It ties me down,” she says. “I have to be there.”

Barns and pens must be cleaned and the goats must be fed three times a day. She sometimes also acts as a “goat mid-wife” and helps to deliver babies born at other farms throughout the area.

Petersen says the greatest challenges are coyotes and parasites.

“The presence of the dogs keeps the coyotes at a distance,” she says.

The goat breeder's daughter Eleanor, age 10, is following in her mother's footsteps.

“I like delivering the baby goats and the baby puppies,” the young animal lover reveals.

Eleanor also enjoys exhibiting and won a grand champion title with her goat named Sonnet at the Barnstable County Fair two years ago.

“She's been exhibiting goats since she could walk,” says Petersen.

For more information about Rosasharn Farm, visit the web site: www.rosasharnfarm.com

— Swansea resident Brian J. Lowney has been writing about pets for more than a decade. He is a past president of the Wampanoag Kennel Club, an active dog show judge and shares his home with shelter-adopted cats.



A pair of Nigerian Dwarf dairy goats.
BRIAN LOWNEY/FALL RIVER SPIRIT