

Co-Op Sells Easier-To-Digest A2 Milk

Naturally Golden Family Farms Co-op of Enon Valley, Penn., specializes in A2 dairy products from Guernsey cows. Founded in 2020, the co-op is managed by Cara Itle, Vickie Baker and Dave Trotter.

Inspiration for selling A2 milk came from travels across the UK in 2016. "Dave was judging a Guernsey Show," says Itle. "Their farmers introduced us to A2 milk, which sparked our interest in selling it. A2/A2 milk is more easily digestible, thus causing less stomach discomfort than A1 milk."

The two women came up with the co-op component after commiserating on the challenges of running farm businesses as busy mothers. "Processing milk and selling products directly is a lot of work," says Itle. "With the co-op structure, we work together. Each of our members has different skills and talents, and we utilize them all," Itle says. Today, the co-op is managed by a six-member board.

"Our co-op purchases 100% Guernsey A2/A2 milk directly from local farms," Itle says. "We haul the milk to two processing plants that co-pack for us under our Naturally Golden Family Farms brand. Then, we handle our own sales at farm stores, our producer's farms, and grocery retailers in Western and Central Pennsylvania. We've recently taken a big step to sell in Texas, too." The co-op's website contains the complete list of retail locations.

Guernsey's milk averages over 5% fat. The co-op initially sold this full-fat milk but has since standardized their whole milk to 4 to 4.25% to use the cream for other products, including whipping cream. "We're fueled by our love for the Guernsey breed and the family tradition of milking them to create a market for niche Guernsey A2/A2 milk," she says. "We market as Golden Guernsey A2/A2 milk because we know the value in a higher quality, more digestible milk product."



"Our co-op purchases 100% Guernsey A2/A2 milk directly from local farms," Itle says.

"Running a co-op has many responsibilities, just like any business," says Itle. "It's a structure that works best for us, as it allows us to purchase milk from other farms, so our supply isn't limited. Likewise, we've got a chance to create a brand while managing our own farms." Still, she's quick to share that starting a co-op has many challenges. "There were many legal hoops we didn't know existed. The key is working closely with your state and other dairies." She also recommends targeting products toward the ideal customer. "Producing a high-quality product starts at the farm level. There are tons of dairy products out there; many are cheaper, but consumers will support you if you offer high-quality, great-tasting products. Our customers love the chance to drink milk again and indulge in dairy products without risking an upset stomach."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Naturally Golden Family Farms, 214 Martin School Rd., Enon Valley, Penn. 16120 (Naturallygoldenfamilyfarms@gmail.com; www.naturallygoldenfamilyfarms.com).

On-Farm Store Has It All

Shady Grove Ranch of Jefferson, Texas, runs a "one-stop shop" with a mix of farm-grown, local and organic products. "My husband Matt and I were studying engineering at LeTourneau University when he became very ill with ulcerative colitis," says co-founder Jerica Cadman. "After years of struggle, we realized the answer wouldn't be found inside the medical establishment."

The family's solution was to dig into history. "We began learning about traditional foods—what our great-great-grandparents ate before the Industrial Revolution," she says. "Things like butter, lard, bone broth, fermented vegetables, additive-free unrefined starches, unrefined salt and sugar, raw milk, grass-fed meats and pasture-raised eggs. We sought them out, and Matt's body began to heal. The results were so convincing that we decided to switch careers and start raising these kinds of foods and make it easier for others to find them in one location."

Cadman explains that the decision to start a farm store was simple. "We knew a store would give us freedom compared to a farmers market. Here in Texas, a grocery store operates as a fully licensed retail food establishment. We can do a lot of value-added food processing like making soup and yogurt," Cadman says. "Even better, a



Cadman explains that the decision to start a farm store was simple. "We knew a store would give us more freedom than a farmers market."

physical location lets people see the operation before they buy. This lends credibility to our farm business and has brought a lot of new customers our way."

That's not to say the venture is without challenges. "Since we're both a farm and a family business, it can be hard to take time off," says Cadman. "Traveling is rare and requires tons of preparation." The farm also struggled initially with building up the capital to keep things fully stocked. "The photos of



"One big challenge is getting good product suppliers," says Hufford. "It's hard to find consistent sources of rough-sawn or hand-hewn wood."

They Repair And Preserve Midwest Barns

Peg & Pin, LLC, of Cutler, Ind., aims to save America's rural history one barn at a time. The company repairs and restores barns across Indiana, Ohio, Illinois and Kentucky.

Family farms were once abundant across America, but they're disappearing at unprecedented rates. "Here in Indiana, we're losing about 1,000 barns a month," says founder Mark Hufford. "Part of the mission of Peg & Pin is carrying those stories forward."

The company has been focused on family from the start. "The kids wanted to grow our family business," says Hufford. "We have a real passion for agricultural history, so restoring barns felt like a good use of our trade skills."

The majority of Peg & Pin's customer base is over 60 and looking to preserve a family barn for future generations. Others want to transform barns into shops or event spaces or put them back to practical use on their properties.

They receive about three to five calls a week regarding restoration projects or taking barns down. The company is careful about what demo projects it accepts, as the mission remains to save and preserve barns whenever possible. "My role is the estimator, meaning that I get to meet the barn owners and learn their stories," says Hufford. "And I love these stories; every barn has one. Recently, I was touring, and the owner showed me where he perfected his three-point shot growing up. We want to help families preserve these kinds of stories."

The LLC remains a family business with an additional 10 to 15 employees. There are

typically three crews at a time. Two take on big projects (usually four to six weeks each), while the third does minor repairs that take a few days. The lead time for larger projects is currently 45 to 60 days, while small projects can be scheduled within 30 days.

"One big challenge is getting good product suppliers," says Hufford. "It's hard to find consistent sources of rough-sawn or hand-hewn wood." There's also difficulty in reaching the right customers. "We're constantly working on publicity. A lot of our primary customer base isn't online, but my daughter's been managing our social media and connecting us with people forty and under. This age group is also growing increasingly interested in preserving old barns."

At publication, the company is setting up a furniture business featuring pieces made from reclaimed wood. "Each piece will come with documentation," Hufford says. "It's a way to give people memories of barns they've grown up with. They'll be able to keep a piece of them forever."

Looking forward, Hufford hopes to continue cultivating interest in preserving historic farm buildings. "Agriculture is the greatest commodity in Indiana. It's our heritage. Sometimes, we forget where we come from in this fast-moving world."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Peg & Pin Repair and Restoration, 2015 E 500 S, Cutler, Ind. 46920 (ph 765-414-9352; mark.hufford@pegandpin.com; www.pegandpin.com).

our shelves when we first opened are a little sad compared to today. But slow and steady wins the race."

The store's main products are pasture-raised chicken, pork, eggs, turkey and grass-fed beef, all raised onsite. They also supplement with products from local and organic suppliers, including produce, organic fruits, pantry items like locally roasted coffee, unbleached organic flour, fermented veggies, natural grass-fed dairy products and more. New products are added monthly, and the farm staff is happy to share specifics when asked. "We dabbled in shipping around the beginning of the pandemic but found that even now, it's not a good fit for us," says Cadman. "We much prefer to do business face-to-face."

Now, several years into the venture, Cadman has advice for other farms looking to expand into a storefront. "Grow slowly and work hard to control expenses, both day-to-day and capital expenditures," she explains. "Our best advertising has been a good email onboarding series, plus regular communication of interesting farm happenings and purchase opportunities.

Email is a super low-cost marketing tool, but it's very powerful. Keep your emails brief but genuine."

Likewise, she believes one of the most important principles is understanding who you're selling to. "Don't try to compete on price. Your target customers have already decided not to buy the cheapest product, so don't undercut your cost of production or paying your labor to try to win bargain-hunters." Instead, she suggests investing in customers looking for quality and authenticity. "Make those your goals, as well as fabulous communication and customer service, and you'll have lifelong customers who'll tell all their friends about you."

The Shady Grove Ranch store serves East Texas and the Shreveport region. Visit the farm store info page for the most up-to-date hours and purchase information.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Shady Grove Ranch, 559 Shady Grove Rd., Jefferson, Texas 75657 (sales@shadygroveranch.net; www.shadygroveranch.net).