

## Fact Sheet on Abbott Farms Herd Shares

### **What is a herd share?**

It is illegal in the State of Michigan to sell raw milk or even pasteurized milk from a non-Grade A dairy. However, it is legal for anyone to drink milk from their own dairy animals. We understand that not everyone has the time or facilities to keep their own dairy goats, and so our herd share program allows customers to purchase a share of our herd, and thus receive the milk produced by “their” goats. We feed, house, and milk the animals, and you pay us for producing your milk.

### **How do you raise your dairy goats?**

We have a healthy, closed herd of ten or twelve LaMancha, Nubian, and LaMancha-Nubian crossed goats. They live in a well-ventilated barn with access to an outdoor exercise area. We feed our goats mainly on locally produced hay, with supplemental grain (also locally produced) for the milking does which is fed during milking time. The goats also have free-choice access to kelp and mineral supplements. The hay is mostly organically raised but the grain is conventional; however, we do not give our animals prophylactic antibiotics, growth hormones, or any artificial supplements. Our herd is very healthy and we have not had mastitis for over ten years. In the rare instances when one of our does is sick, we may use antibiotics or other drugs for treatment, but we observe posted milk withdrawal times and will not sell milk or make dairy products from an animal on treatment. We do not pasture our goats because our piece of property is swampy and not suitable for pasture; we believe that our animals are healthier and have less issues with parasites by eating hay. We treat our animals gently and humanely and they are sleek, happy, and very friendly. Some of them are pets as much as they are working animals.

### **Do you allow visitors to see your milking operation?**

We invite anyone considering purchasing our dairy shares to come to the farm and see the goats and our husbandry practices for themselves before committing to the share; we have nothing to hide. We usually milk our goats at 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m., but please call or email us to let us know if you are coming so that we can make sure we are available when you show up.

### **How do you handle your milk?**

We wash the udders of our goats, discard the first stripping of milk from each teat, and milk by hand into clean stainless steel pails. We strain the milk through a filter to remove hair, hay, and other impurities and then cool it in the refrigerator. We thoroughly wash the buckets after each milking and let them air-dry to avoid picking up bacteria from a towel. Our family drinks our own milk raw and therefore we make sure that our production practices are very clean.

### **Do you pasteurize your milk?**

Because we keep our milk clean and our animals are healthy, we do not believe that there is any reason to pasteurize our milk. We drink it raw and the milk in the herd shares will be raw as well. Shareholders are of course welcome to pasteurize the milk at home if they are concerned, but most of the dangers of raw milk are due to sick animals or unsanitary production practices that we are able to avoid on our

small farm. Pasteurization became necessary when the dairy industry grew so large that consumers had no idea where their milk was coming from. Back in the days when milk cans sat by the road waiting for the milkman to pick them up, dead rats were sometimes found in milk from the farm, and tuberculosis was common in cattle, pasteurization became mandatory to protect consumers. One medical doctor in 1941 wrote, "Pasteurization is not even necessary if milk has been produced under absolutely sanitary conditions." We believe that there is no danger in raw milk from healthy animals that is produced in a clean setting; in fact, raw milk contains many beneficial bacteria that help prevent the growth of pathogens.

### **How much milk will I get in a herd share?**

Most customers get a gallon a week, but some get two or even three. We do offer half gallon shares to those who do not want a whole gallon a week. The state of Michigan determined in a 2013 ruling that they will not get involved in the details of herd shares. This means that we simply need a signed and dated contract between us, and you can buy your milk by the gallon. We do not charge a buy in fee. Currently we are charging \$10 a gallon for our milk. We arrived at this cost based on the cost of feed, hay, our labor, and any vet bills we may incur. We may need to adjust the amount of milk a customer gets based on availability, especially in the winter months.

### **What day of the week is the pickup?**

Because milk production is constant throughout the week, it would be ideal for us to stagger our herd share customers throughout the week to even out demand. Each shareholder will select their preferred pick-up day and give us a 2-hour time slot when they can come and get their milk. Pickups will be Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. and must be arranged in advance. We do not sell milk or other farm products on Sundays. If herd shareholders are also participating in our vegetable CSA, they can arrange to pick up both their milk and their vegetables at the same time.

### **How long will the season last?**

Peak milk production is from April to September; during this time we will be able to supply the maximum amount of milk to our shareholders. Once the goats breed in the fall, milk production will decline to an annual low in January and February. Unlike many other dairy farms, we only breed half our does each fall and "milk through" the other half, so we always have some milk even in the middle of the winter. We will give our shareholders the option of either getting a reduced share over the winter or taking several months off. Milk production increases dramatically when the goats "kid" (have their babies) in March or April, but much of that milk goes back to the babies for the first month or so after a doe freshens. By the end of April we will once again have a huge surplus of milk for the herd shares.

### **What containers does the milk come in?**

We distribute our milk in half-gallon glass canning jars with metal lids. We offer these for sale for \$3 a jar. You are also welcomed to bring your own containers. We do not offer disposable containers. Please bring your jars back clean for refilling to have the best product. It is best to clean jars with regular dish soap, let them air dry and leave the tops off. Strongly perfumed soap will taint the taste of the milk, especially if the lid has been kept on the jar. If you are fermenting milk, it is advisable to use glass, plastic containers will absorb the odor of fermented milk. Glass is not recommended for freezing milk. It will often shatter when the liquid expands as it freezes.