



got milk?

THE RAW DEAL

by Judi Burton

Pasteurized, homogenized, skim, Vitamin D, Grade A milk. What a mouthful. I have been drinking milk with this label, or variations of it, since I was a toddler. It all sounded so safe and nourishing. But, to be honest, I had absolutely no idea what it meant. I just took it for granted that it was good for me. I bought the big words and cuddly cow packaging and went on with my shopping experience like many in this country—until I met Sallie Bellamy, 24-year-old goat farm entrepreneur, who recently started Copacetic Farm, which is next to her father Sam Bellamy's organic farm, Indigo Run Farms, in Little River. She just received her raw goat milk licensing from the state of South Carolina and is ready to go. Even though her farm is located near the border of North Carolina, it is illegal to sell raw milk of any kind there. I recently had the opportunity to meet with Sallie to find out more about her farm and what this raw goat milk ruckus is about.

The dirt driveway jostled my little car a bit as I made my way up to the goat farm. Sallie met me half way up the driveway, just before I was about to run over a very deep pothole. I got out of my car, we shook hands, and she ushered me the rest of the way on foot. We trekked up to the outbuilding that housed about a dozen goats. Some were white and some were brown, but none of them was bearing scary horns, which made me feel a little safer. A large Golden Retriever barked noisily at us as we approached; however, Sallie assured me the dog was just doing his job

by protecting his flock. The goats seemed happy to see us as they climbed the fence for a better view. Many of them greeted us affectionately, and one mischievous goat named Nim attempted to have my shirt for a light snack. Sallie told me that five of the goats were expecting babies. She pointed to several large-bellied bleaters and continued: "We will separate them immediately so the kids won't be skittish or wild. Plus, the mothers won't want to give us milk if they have kids to give it to. We bottle feed them with their mothers' milk." Sallie told me she wasn't planning on keeping all of them and was looking for someone equipped to take young goats.

She brought three goats into the milking room so that I could see the process. There were several elevated stands, which the goats hopped up on. Sallie shoved buckets of feed in front of them, and they ate away happily as we went into another room, which was spotless. She washed her hands and pulled out a huge stainless steel contraption and started assembling it. She stuck hoses in it, and by the time she was done, it looked like scuba gear for an octopus. "This is to eliminate the opportunity for hair or dust to get into the milk." Sallie lugged it backed into the goat room and placed it beside them. Unfortunately, I did not get a milking show, because it was the wrong time of day and the goats would be confused and upset if she attempted it.

I sat on a concrete step and we chatted a while about the process. She showed me another stainless steel cup with



a filter and explained that before she hooks them up, she squirts a bit into the filter to see if everything looks good and clean. "It also cleans out the milk canal for the official milking." Then, she sanitizes the teat with a wipey. She takes the hoses with the suction cups on the end and connects them to the goats. The machine sucks out the milk and deposits it in the bottom of the contraption.

"Right now, the weather is cold and the days are short so I can only get about 2 gallons a day, but when it warms up I should be making about 6 gallons," Sallie said. Because North Carolina doesn't allow the sale of raw milk, Sallie said she is in no hurry to raise hundreds of goats and make millions of dollars. "I want to get it right and take my time."

After the milk is "pulled" by the milker into the sanitary milk canister, she takes it to the processing room where she immediately pours the milk into half-gallon jugs. They go directly into the refrigerator to await delivery. The milk is sold fresh at Bay Naturals Healthy Market & Kitchen, in Myrtle Beach, and New Life Natural Foods, in North Myrtle Beach.

So now that I was made aware of the process, I was a little confused as to why people are so scared of goat milk, much less raw goat milk. It all seemed so clean and

thorough and the goats are obviously loved. I ran my hand down Nim's back and marveled at her soft fur. "So, why are people so adamantly against raw goat milk?" I asked.

"It's how people treat the milk," Sallie replied. "The pasteurized milk has been brought up to a very high temperature quickly and left at that temperature for a while, then brought back down to a very cold temperature quickly. The nutrients, enzymes and proteins have been cooked out of the milk. Raw milk is alive and temperature sensitive. A parent can't fill a sippy cup with raw milk and let the baby drink from it all day, it would spoil more quickly."

I wondered if that was the only reason. There is a great deal of controversy regarding raw milk vs. treated milk, both for cow and goat milk. It seems that large industrialized farms want to pasteurize everything to reduce liability and improve safety even, if it reduces the quality of the product, and small farms want to offer the special raw product in demand that takes special handling and care. Is cleanliness at the core of the issue? Is it the treatment of its animals? Would it be more cost effective to just sterilize the milk, rather than make sure the goats or cows were clean and healthy? Furthermore, wouldn't it be easy to eliminate your

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small dairy competition by characterizing their raw product unsafe?

And why drink goat milk when cow milk is available? If a child has allergies, doctors suggest switching to goat milk, because it rarely causes allergic reactions, is close in composition to human mother's milk, and is more easily digested. Goats are hardy animals, rarely getting sick, and are not picky eaters. They are smaller than cows and easier for some to handle.

I let the thought pass for the moment so that I could try the infamous raw goat milk. It looked like regular white whole cow milk in the big yellow mug that was passed to me. I smelled it and couldn't sense any musky odor or goat essence that I had heard about from others. Sallie and her mother and father watched me as I put it to my lips and tentatively took a tiny sip. This was my first time, after all. Then I took another, just to make sure. Yep, it tasted just like regular whole cow's milk, with a bit of sweetness to it. I asked Sallie where the muskiness was. "I carefully monitor what they eat so that it doesn't have that flavor." She smiled with the rest of her family as I gulped the rest of the milk down greedily. It was creamy, sweet goodness.

After I left, I decided to research a little further about why raw milk has received such a raw deal. It turns out that 89 percent of cowherds across America are reported to have a tumor-causing bug called bovine leukemia virus (BLV), according to the USDA. However, the World Organization for Animal Health stated: "Several studies have been carried

out in an attempt to determine whether BLV causes disease in humans, especially through the consumption of milk from infected cows. There is, however, no conclusive evidence of transmission, and it is now generally thought that BLV is not a hazard to humans." I looked for any conclusive evidence from the USDA and found none in my research.

Sallie directed me to the website *RealMilk.com*. It was full of information regarding how raw milk has "extensive built-in safety mechanisms and numerous components to create a healthy immune system." The site, however, did warn that raw milk should only be ingested if the milk that is produced is intended to be sold and used as raw milk. The website was adamant that raw milk that is produced for the purpose of being pasteurized should never be drank raw, nor should any raw skim milk for that matter. This only strengthened my theory that huge corporate dairy farms might not be as responsible when it comes to cleanliness and sanitation as the small dairy farms that produce raw milk. As of today, raw milk sales are illegal in 11 states and the District of Co-



lumbia. The Real Milk Campaign is working on getting it legalized as a consumer choice again as it was before, in all 50 states.

As I think back to my pleasant visit to Copacetic Farm, it agonizes me that the large commercial dairy associations and lobbies would vilify such a small, well-kept dairy. The place was so clean, I didn't even think twice when I sat down on the concrete floor.

It seems to me that this raw milk idea is not so new. George Washington didn't drink pasteurized skim milk, that's for sure! In fact, most illnesses like cancer, heart disease and allergies that are common today were pretty rare back then. It seems more likely that large corporate dairies produce so much milk that it's hard to make sure all of the cows are clean, healthy and sanitary. They're

cows—it's kind of hard. But goat farms seem to have it easier. They are often smaller and are not pressed to produce millions of gallons a day. Their goats are free to frolic and climb and eat dandelions in the sun. I guess it comes down to the often-explored issue: Buy local, or gamble on what you get from the big guys from who knows where.

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Copacetic Farm operates with sustainably based management practices, using no pharmaceutical hormones or antibiotics, and is committed to a natural product. Milk is available at Bay Naturals Healthy Market & Kitchen, in Myrtle Beach, at 7611 North Kings Hwy, and New Life Natural Foods, in North Myrtle Beach, at 556 Hwy 17 N. For more info, contact Sallie Bellamy at 843-957-8741. For more info on raw milk, visit WestonAPrice.org and see the Bay Naturals ad, back page.

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