

Farmstead Cheesemaking and Diversified Farming in Central Illinois



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Co-Owners, Prairie Fruits Farm, LLC

Our Farm in Champaign IL



Creating “terroir” in Illinois

- Seasonal, pasture based dairying
- Using our farm’s natural resources in our cheeses- fruits, flowers, tree leaves
- Raw milk cheeses contain native flora of milk
- Fresh tree and berry fruit!



How we got started: Advice from mentor Anne Topham, Fantome Farm, WI: “get some goats”



June 2004:

3 Nubian does
and 1 buck (all
yearlings) arrive
at Prairie Fruits
Farm

Our organic fruit orchard



What did we want to be?

- Small dairy/creamery – 40 goats max
- Serve the local market
- Organic cheese?
- Grow fruits organically and sell to local markets, u-pick
- Living wage for 1-2 full-time workers
- Educate public
- Help new farmers get experience

What have we become?

- Milking 70 goats, buying sheep milk for cheese
- Market locally, Chicago, Midwest; 1 in MA, 1 in NY: retail, wholesale, distributor
- Organic land, not animals
- 13 acres of hay and pasture (22 total)
- Organic fruit and some vegetables; preserves, fresh sales, meals, u-pick, sorbettos
- Approx. 5 full-time workers, income > \$25,000/year

What have we become (cont'd)?

- Restaurant:
 - Dinners on the Farm: 500+ different guests per year
 - Breakfasts on the Farm: about 250 guests per week for 6 weeks
- Gelato and sorbettos
- Tour destination
- Education of visitors
- Six of worker “alums” farming at some level

Sustainability - Economic

- Net profit by fourth year
- Sufficient net income for a family
- Employ 11 + employees, fulltime and part time
- “Living ” wage (+food!)
- New entrepreneurs



Sustainability – Environmental

- All land treated organically
- All manure and kitchen/processing byproducts composted and spread on land
- Water recycling begun
- 20 acres annual cropland converted to perennials
- Alternative energy?



Sustainability - Social

- Dinners and breakfasts build community
- Education through meals, tours, projects
- Informal farmer training
- Animal Welfare Approved herd
- Donate to community causes



Joys of Being First Farmstead Cheese Plant in IL

- Unique enterprise
- Showcases what Central IL has to offer
- Hard work translates to products we are proud of
- Sky's the limit on our creativity
- Tremendous community and regional support



