A Small Farm, A Premium Product, A Large Market

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For Bonnie (Cowell) Hoffmann, the choice to raise goats was a good fit – in more ways than one.

When Hoffmann (’90 dairy science and public service and administration in agriculture) found herself looking for a way to support her children as a single mother of four in 2004, she discovered her situation was well suited for goat production.

“We selected meat goats because they require smaller tracts of land and my children and I could physically handle them,” she says. “The initial investment for meat goats is not as large. We started with 25 acres. It was a way we could be in the livestock industry on a small farm.”

Having grown up on a dairy and crop farm in northeast Iowa, Hoffmann has unexpectedly found her niche raising Boer goats – the primary meat goat breed. She says the heavy muscled animals put on meat easily and are “the Angus of goats.” Her operation, near Bellevue, Iowa, consists of 45 does, 60 young stock and three billies, some of which are owned by her teenaged son, Grant Lapke.

She, Grant and several other Midwestern meat goat farmers formed a cooperative, now known as Heartland Pride, to market their product. They are partnering with Blackwing Meats to sell their goat meat, called chevon, online and through farmers markets, co-ops, restaurants and major grocery stores.

“When we started, our target market was the ethnic community. But since the meat is more readily available, people are learning more about it as a premium meat and we discovered there is potential to market to all of America,” Hoffmann says.

The mild-flavored chevon is a great choice of protein for those who are health-conscious according to Hoffmann. She says chevon is low in fat, calories, saturated fat and cholesterol.

Now remarried, Hoffmann’s husband Randy works full time and has a small cattle herd. They are finding ways to wed their two livestock operations.

“We help each other. He helps with moving bales, kidding, fencing and I help him calve. We are working to get our fencing in place to graze our goats behind our cattle,” she says. “Goats prefer broadleaves and cattle are grazers. They’ll help clean up brush the cattle leave behind. And they should help decrease each other’s worm populations.”

In addition to responsibilities on the farm and her work with Direct Contact Ag Inc. as a part-time recruiter, Hoffmann helps educate and inform others of niche businesses.

She also enjoys being involved in the activities of her children Grant (16), Madison (13), Brooke (12) and Will (8) Lapke. Hoffmann says they all help with the chores, enjoy showing goats and assist with promoting chevon.

Hoffmann formed a cooperative with other Midwest goat producers and they sell their chevon through Blackwing Meats online, in grocery stores and at farmers markets.

Alumna Bonnie Hoffmann has found a large market for her small livestock operation near Bellevue, Iowa.

“STORIES ONLINE EXTRA:
Visit Bonnie Hoffmann’s farm online and watch an interview with her at www.ag.iastate.edu/stories.