

# People & Places

## Water buffalo milk makes unique mozzarella

By **JULIA HOLLISTER**  
For the Capital Press

TOMALES, Calif. — When Audrey Hitchcock and husband Craig Ramini were looking for new careers, making water buffalo mozzarella cheese was not on the list.

“Craig was in software and was good at what he did; but the job was just a paycheck and he wasn’t happy,” Hitchcock said. “He wanted to do something creative, contribute to society and to leave something for his family. Most of all, he wanted to enjoy his life.”

He decided five things were necessary for a happy career: “To be an entrepreneur, to work outdoors, to be unique, to work with animals and to work with food,” Hitchcock said.

An interest in cheese emerged from those criteria.

West Marin County is an artisan cheese making community, and there is a lot of support for dairies. But Hitchcock and Ramini had to decide what kind of cheese to make. Goat cheese was not unique and they were not thrilled by the thought of raising goats, sheep or cows.

Several weeks later, Hitchcock spoke with her brother, who lived in Italy for years and complained he could not get buffalo mozzarella in the U.S. That’s when the idea hit: Use water buffalo milk to make mozzarella cheese. Plus, they figured, water buffalo are as exotic an animal as they could hope to raise.

“We both fell in love with the idea and five months later,



Julia Hollister/For the Capital Press

Audrey Hitchcock raises water buffalo in Tomales, Calif., and makes buffalo mozzarella from their rich, high protein milk. Hers is one of the few such dairies in the nation.

in 2009, we bought the start of a herd,” she said.

After some research they had found two companies — one in Vermont and one in Southern California — that were closing their doors because both had too much overhead and too many animals.

“Craig had extensive conversations with the California firm and bought five animals that fortunately were pregnant,” she said.

They also began studying the businesses and compared failures and successes. They decided they

needed to start small, get to know the animals first and focus on the product instead of immediately ramping up the business.

Although Ramini went to Canada and Australian to learn cheesemaking he decided there was something in his recipe that wasn’t quite right. The New York Times published an article about the dairy, an Italian mozzarella cheesemaker saw it and invited Ramini to come to Italy and learn. That trip was a success and a unique recipe resulted. Some Italian cheesemakers

use buffalo milk to make mozzarella.

Handling the water buffalo can be a challenge.

“My animals can become docile like dogs if they are treated well, so I use a gentler route to milking,” Hitchcock said. “The water buffalo does not like to be rushed and if they come into the barn and they’re not happy I will have trouble getting the milk. So I provide a reward.”

Hitchcock and a helper reunite the calves with their mothers in the milking barn. The cows



**Western Innovator**  
**Audrey Hitchcock**  
Hometown: Tiburon, Calif.  
Education: University of Massachusetts and The School of Architecture in England  
Occupation: Cheesemaker, water buffalo rancher, home designer  
Quote: “I believe the cheese company is showing how important animals are to the planet, to society and to our children.”

are happy to get their calves back so they are relaxed and the milk flows.

Water buffalo milk is richer in protein, higher in butterfat and lower in cholesterol than cow’s milk.

“An assistant helps me to make cheese Tuesday and Friday,” she said. “I separate the curds from the whey and form the prepared curds into balls and sell the creamy cheese to markets and restaurants throughout the Bay Area.”

Sales are growing, she said. In January of this year, Ramini died of cancer, and now Hitchcock handles the 40-head dairy operation, the cheesemaking, the weekly tours and sales.

## Trying to bring a tiller back to life after a long winter

By **RYAN M. TAYLOR**  
For the Capital Press

**Cowboy Logic**  
Ryan Taylor



TOWNER, N.D. — As I write this, I’m surrounded by the strong scent of gasoline and carburetor cleaner, and enveloped in an aura of frustration. Anyone with a little intuition would correctly identify this malady as a small engine affliction.

I’m sure I’ve written about this before. Chainsaws, lawn mowers, generators — you name it. They’re enough to make you envy the exhausting, backbreaking days without power-anything.

Actually, once you’ve pulled the starting rope a hundred times, it probably would have been easier to do most of the jobs by hand.

### 100 pulls for nothing

The job at hand is one I usually enjoy, when things

are working. It’s tilling the garden. Turn the soil so we can plant the seeds and harvest the goodness. But I can’t turn the soil if our tiller won’t start.

The worst part is I just bought this tiller last year. I got tired of our undependable \$300 tiller so I went and bought an \$800 tiller. The label on the side said “high performance, easy start.” It worked fine last year. We probably ran the machine a whole 10 hours. I even stored it inside last winter.

I dumped out the old gas, put in fresh gas, and stared at that “easy start” decal every one of the 100 times I pulled the starting rope

before I came to the realization that my \$800 tiller wasn’t going to give me a dime’s worth of satisfaction.

I bought my first car for \$400 when I was 18 years old. It was a beater, an old American Motors Concord. Nobody would call it dependable, but it would at least start and run (for a while at least). Why can’t an \$800 garden tiller run as good as that \$400 car?

### Good old days

I remember my parents ordered their garden tiller from the Montgomery Ward catalog sometime in the late 1970s. They picked it up at the catalog store in Rugby, N.D., when it came in. It ran like a top. It stayed out in the garden covered with snow every winter and started ev-

ery spring without a hassle. I think we ran it for 20 years and gave it to a friend who ran it for another 10 years.

I’m not a mechanic but I have a basic understanding of how motors work, and I have a few wrenches, so I talked to a shop guy from the dealership and he told me a few things to try. The fuel pump was fine, and the motor runs when I pour a little gas directly down the throat of the carburetor under the air cleaner. I suppose I could run it that way, but it’s hard to operate the tiller while balancing a gas can and pouring it into the motor to keep it running.

### Expensive diagnosis

So I took the bowl off the carburetor, I didn’t see any water or gremlins in it and I went to work with a “professional size” can of carburetor

cleaner. Clearly the only thing professional about this operation was the size of that can.

Like the straight shots of gas, the motor ran while I was spraying the carb cleaner into the outfit. Again, an unhandy, and expensive, way to till a garden. Rather than “professional size,” that would require the “absolutely fed up last resort” size can of carb cleaner.

The shop guy that I talked with said I might have to get a new carburetor. It only makes sense to replace a major part on an \$800 tiller motor after 10 whole hours of operation.

In the meantime, I’m going to grab a spade and a hand cultivator and start turning the dirt so we can plant a few vegetables. It would be a good way for me to rest up before I start pulling the rope on that motor again.

## New farm-based high school taking root in Utah city

By **KATHY STEPHENSON**  
The Salt Lake Tribune

WEST VALLEY CITY, Utah (AP) — To many people, the farm is a just a place to grow fresh vegetables, raise animals and tend a beehive or two.

But the creators of the new Roots Charter High School see the farm as a learning tool: a

way to teach students basic subjects like math, science and language arts as well as life skills such as hard work, accountability and “reaping what you sow.”

“The goal isn’t just to create farmers,” said 38-year-old Tyler Bastian, the founder and principal of Roots. “It’s to create kids who have the tools

they need to accomplish what they want in life.”

Rather than focusing on skill-and-drill lessons, students at Roots in grades 9-12 will tackle farm projects, work in teams and solve problems. And while some students eventually may choose to run a farm, their experiences also are designed to prepare them

for college and possible degrees in science and environmental studies, Bastian said.

Bastian and a board of directors have set up the school’s classroom space in a West Valley office park at 2250 S. 1300 West. But much of the learning will take place about one block south on a 5-acre plot that KSOP radio is letting the

school use, said Bastian.

While the start of the school year is still a few months away, Bastian, his staff and several future students already have been busy, clearing stones and preparing the soil for planting.

“The farm adds authenticity to what they learn,” he said. “They can see in the real world where those principles apply.”

## Calendar

### Wednesday, June 10

Oregon State University Extension Sherman Station Field Day, 7:30 a.m., Sherman County Extension, Moro, Ore., 541-565-3230. Twelve speakers are scheduled to talk on topics that include wheat diseases and screening for resistance, soil pH and maximizing yields, soil-borne pathogens and Clearfield wheat trials.

Frozen Assets: How we can and why we should save the world’s frozen water, 7-9 p.m. Spokane Valley Library, Spokane, Wash., 509-943-0705. In our valleys, we are facing water supply shortages that become increasingly frequent as the climate warms.

### Friday, June 12

Forestry Shortcourse, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. West Bonner Library, Priest River, Idaho, 208-446-1680. This 6-session program will help forest owners understand ecology, silviculture, wildlife and other topics.

### Saturday, June 13

Rickreall Gun Show, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Polk County Fair Grounds, Rickreall, Ore., 503-623-3048.

### Sunday, June 14

Rickreall Gun Show, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Polk County Fair Grounds, Rickreall, Ore., 503-623-3048.

### Monday, June 15

Purchasing and Owning Rural and Small Farm Property Workshop, 5:30-8:30 p.m. Southern Oregon Research and Extension Center,

Central Point, Ore., 541-776-7371. June 15, 22 and 29. Get the facts about wells, septic systems, zoning requirements and limitations, special assessments, water and soil needs, farm product marketing restrictions, water rights and more. Single attendance for all three classes, \$45. Bring spouse or partner for additional 50 cents. Register on line at <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/sorec/farms>. Topics: (June 15) Land & Legal Considerations; (June 22) Water, Soils, Wells, Septic Systems; (June 29) Find & Finance Rural and Small Farm Property. Alternate registration option and/or questions, call Paula, 541-776-7371, ext. 208.

### Friday, June 19

Forestry Shortcourse, 10 a.m.-1

p.m. West Bonner Library, Priest River, Idaho, 208-446-1680. This 6-session program will help forest owners understand ecology, silviculture, wildlife and other topics.

### Wednesday, June 24

Importance of Beneficial Insects on the Farm, 1-5 p.m., Southern Oregon Research and Extension Center, Central Point, Ore., 541-776-7371. Instructor: Gwendolyn Ellen, Integrated Plant Protection Center, Oregon State University. This class will cover the basics of agricultural biodiversity and how you can increase it. Also covered will be information on habitat and practices Northwest farmers use to keep beneficial insects (including native pollinators) on the farm. Class includes a tour

of flowering plants and beneficial insects on the farm if weather permits. Dress accordingly and bring hand lens or insect net if you like. Pre-registration is required at <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/sorec/farms>

### Friday, June 26

Forestry Shortcourse, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. West Bonner Library, Priest River, Idaho, 208-446-1680.

### Friday, July 3

Forestry Shortcourse, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. West Bonner Library, Priest River, Idaho, 208-446-1680.

### Friday, July 10

Forestry Shortcourse, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. West Bonner Library, Priest River, Idaho, 208-446-1680.

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### To Reach Us

Toll free ..... 800-882-6789  
Main line ..... 503-364-4431  
Fax ..... 503-370-4383  
Advertising Fax ..... 503-364-2692

### News Staff

**N. California**  
Tim Hearnden ..... 530-605-3072

**E Idaho**  
John O’Connell ..... 208-421-4347

**Idaho**  
Carol Ryan Dumas ..... 208-860-3898

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