

New niche: A2 milk from Guernseys gains popularity

By DIANNA TROYER
For the Capital Press

Two dairies, in eastern and northern Idaho, are filling a niche market with Guernsey cow milk that has an easily digestible protein not found in most commercially sold milk.

Most milk has a combination of proteins, A1 and A2, while the Guernsey milk has only A2 protein and has become increasingly popular with consumers who suspect they are lactose intolerant.

David Spencer, a dairy farmer in Montevideo 50 miles northwest of Idaho Falls, feared his wife, Michelle, was allergic to milk because her stomach ached after she drank it. When she tried A2 milk, her pains disappeared.

"A dairyman's wife just can't be lactose intolerant," said Spencer, laughing.

His wife's experience compelled him to shift the family dairy's focus to registered Guernsey cows about two years ago because the breed produces milk with only A2 protein.

At their 20-acre family business, Paradise Grove A2 Dairy, they raise their six children, ages 3 to 15, on the Guernsey milk.

Michelle, 36, completed her first Boston Marathon in April, relying on A2 milk during training.

"For athletes, milk is such a great recovery food, so I'm glad to be able to drink it again," she said.

Paradise Grove's raw milk, sold in returnable glass bottles, is non-homogenized and unpasteurized and meets specifications of the Idaho State Department of Agriculture.

The dairy's 50 cows are milked twice daily, and 800 gallons of the A2 milk is bottled and sold or made into cheese.

"We might be expand-



Courtesy of David Spencer

David and Michelle Spencer raise their children on milk from their Guernsey cows.

ing because people like it so much," said Spencer. "On our Facebook page, people comment about how good they feel when they drink it."

With a strong economy, "consumers are willing and able to spend a little more money on healthy food, too," he said.

Paradise Grove's raw milk retails for about \$6 per gallon. It is sold at Broulim's grocery stores in the region, Kesler's Market in Blackfoot, Wealth of Health in Idaho Falls, Nature's Nook and Woods Garden in Rexburg, Nel's Bi-Lo Market in Pocatello, and Victor Valley Market.

Manwaring Cheese in Rigby uses the dairy's milk to make cheese. It also sells raw A2 milk.

In northern Idaho near Sagle, response to Guernsey milk from Pleasant Meadow Creamery has been robust enough for owner Paul Herndon and his family to expand their small dairy.

"We broke ground on a new milking parlor in May and will build a much larger cow barn in 2019," said Herndon, 50, a certified public accountant who

started the dairy with his wife, Debra, 53, in 2013.

"We wanted to provide wholesome, 100 percent grass-fed raw Guernsey A2 milk as God intended milk to be," said Herndon. "We're pretty small right now, but we have loyal customers and such positive feedback that we're optimistic about the future."

The dairy's cows graze about six months on grass pastures.

"We farm 60 acres of our own land and lease another 60 acres," said Herndon.

When the cows begin grazing on spring grass in May and June, they produce about 300 pounds of milk per day.

"We sell by the half gallon, so that's almost 70 half gallons daily," Herndon said. "We have quite a few heifers aging up. We plan to milk 14 cows in the spring of 2019 and will grow to about 25 milking as a maximum size, probably by late 2020."

The unpasteurized, non-homogenized milk is bottled in glass containers and distributed at Pilgrim's Market in Coeur d'Alene and at Winter Ridge Natural Foods in Sandpoint.

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