

Milk does a business good, even without cows



Courtesy of Amy Turnbull, Stephen Hueffed
Amy Turnbull and Stephen Hueffed, owners of Willapa Hills Creamery, make cheese and host events on their farm near Chehalis, Wash.

By **SUZANNE FRARY**
For the Capital Press

CHEHALIS, Wash. — A Lewis County couple who make cheese and host events have adjusted to farming on property that doesn't have water rights.

Amy Turnbull and Stephen Hueffed got into the dairy business in 2005 when they acquired 146 acres on the Chehalis River about 20 miles west of Interstate 5.

"I knew the farm didn't have water rights, but I underestimated the implications of that. It was one of about 100 things I should've known," Hueffed said.

"We didn't know anything about anything," Turnbull added. "We had steep learning curves at every front."

Turnbull and Hueffed have made a place for themselves in southwest Washington's dairy

industry by building a business that doesn't depend on milking cows.

The couple, neither of whom had a farming background, grew up in Kitsap and King counties. A Napa Valley vacation touring vineyards gave them the idea to buy a farm.

They found property through a listing in the Capital Press and purchased it with a plan to make cheese and build a tasting room. Hueffed said they wanted to try farming while they were young.

"We asked ourselves, 'Do we want to wait until retirement when we have no energy?' In the end, our decision was family driven," he said.

The first of the couple's three children was about a year old when the family moved to Lewis County.

Turnbull and Hueffed completed a short course in cheesemaking at Washington

State University. They built a creamery on the ground floor of their barn in 2008. More recently, they remodeled the barn's second floor to host weddings, concerts and dances.

Turnbull makes cheese two to three days a week using milk from neighboring dairies. Other days she and several employees package the cheese.

She uses cow and sheep milk, a combination that allows her to blend flavors and distinguish her cheese from others on the market. Consistent milk quality is one reason the farm buys from nearby dairies.

"When dairies cut corners on feed, you can tell in the flavor of the cheese," Hueffed said.

Turnbull's fresh cream cheese, their biggest seller, and aged alpine-style cheese are sold under the Willapa Hills label in grocery stores such as Fred Meyer and Whole Foods

in several Western states.

The cheese business has grown over the years and is the farm's main moneymaker. While Turnbull heads up the creamery, Hueffed is working on the couple's longtime goal of building a tasting room for local cheese, wine and food. The plans have been delayed by building codes.

His goal is to move the creamery out of the barn within the year. Once that happens, the barn will be dedicated to events and visitors.

Hueffed has ambitions to expand activities at the farm, possibly offering classes, retreats and music festivals.

He also wants to increase his herd of 27 Lowline Angus cattle, develop the property's forest and build a bridge across the Chehalis River, which runs through the farm.

"He's a man of many dreams," Turnbull said.

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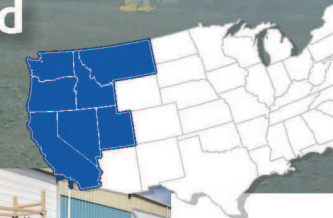


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