



Bob Smith stirs a vat of milk and cheese curds.

Staff photo by Jayati Ramakrishnan



Belinda Smith puts Swiss cheese curds into a mold at the Smith Tiny Farms Micro-creamery.

Staff photo by Jayati Ramakrishnan

MICRO-DAIRY REVELS IN SMALL-BATCH EXPERIMENTS

‘Huckleberry havarti’ not viable for large creamery

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
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In a small warehouse in their own back yard, Bob and Belinda Smith make almost every kind of cheese imaginable.

Though you may see the basics — farmstyle cheddar, colby, Swiss, blue cheese — the Smith Tiny Farms Microcreamery is more recognizable for its variations and specialty flavors.

“We can make cheeses that a large-scale company can’t,” said Bob, stirring a 60-gallon vat of milk. “There’s no way they’d invest even a day’s worth of milk into something like huckleberry havarti.”

The Smith Tiny Farms operation is largely self-contained. With five cows they milk twice a day, they currently make about 140 pounds of cheese a week, which they sell to small businesses around the region.

Though the couple had milk cows for many years, they began their business in late 2016. Bob was in the Navy for 20 years, and a teacher at Sandstone Middle School for 17, before retiring last year.

“When (Bob) was going to retire, we were going to have to do something,” Belinda said. “We’d made cheese at home in our kitchen, and taken it to our prayer group.”

“Either people are lying to us, or they like it,” Bob said.

They bought the equipment and built a facility, and now sell to businesses such as Neighbor Dudes Tap House, Echo Ridge Cellars, Space Age and Country Mercantile in Tri-Cities.

“This is as big as we ever want to be,” Bob said.

Though the process from milk to cheese takes about two days, the product must be aged for at least 60 days before it can be sold. The aging room sits at 53 degrees.

Bob said cheesemaking is all about time and temperature, and likened it to a science experiment.

“Every batch turns out a bit different,” he said.

In a pasture behind their house, the Smiths keep

five milking cows and, in a separate pasture, a bull.

The cows are Jerseys, which Belinda says they prefer to other breeds.

“They’re small, easy to deal with, they like you,” she said.

The Smiths’ cows are all affectionately named. Ginger and Mary Ann are named after Gilligan’s Island.

“We’ve moved on to Scooby-Doo,” said Bob. “There’s Daphne, and Velma if we get another one.”

In a greenhouse on the side of their property, the Smiths also maintain another operation — growing hydroponic plants.

“We’ve done this longer than our creamery,” Bob said. They grow heads of red romaine lettuce in long,

horizontal tubes that can hold dozens of plants, and tomatoes in individual pots with clay pebbles called hydroton.

They sell both the plants and their cheese products at the Hermiston Farmer’s Market.

Such a small dairy is uncommon with the costs and commitment of operating one, but the Smiths are happy with the results so far.

“Dairy is a lifestyle,” Bob said. “You have to decide this is something you want to do.”



Staff photo by Jayati Ramakrishnan

A steer and a dairy cow at Smith Tiny Farms Microcreamery.



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