

Marketing/Management



TEAMWORK: Loth and her son, Tucker, at work cutting curd as they make another batch of cheese.



COOL PLACE: Charuth Loth is comfortable in the cheese-aging cave, which has a constant 55-degree-F temperature and 55% humidity.

cheeses under separate labels. Dittman began her enterprise by selling quark, a cheese commonly found in Europe. It has a texture that is softer than cream cheese but firmer than sour cream, with a pleasant yogurt taste. In addition to this unique cheese, Dittman also offers Camembert, a fresh mozzarella, nettle Gouda and mobier.

"When you are making cheese, you really want to make your own version," says Loth.

In 2004, Loth began marketing chevre,

a mild French goat cheese. Today, she makes two bloomy-rind chevres, two herb-blend chevres, a Greek delicacy cheese and a goat-milk Gouda.

Europeans historically have named their cheeses after the location and type of cheese they produce. The partners thus developed Farmstead First's most notable cheese, Lancaster Duet, which is made in Lancaster County and is a combination of 50% cow's milk and 50% goat's milk. Its flavor is similar to that of a hard Gouda.

Cheeses range in price from \$15 to \$20 per pound, which is more profitable than selling raw milk from their herds.

Most cheesemakers today want absolute consistency in flavor and texture because consumers expect a uniform product. Artisan cheeses vary in flavor and texture with each batch and as seasonal grasses mature. Since Farmstead First cheese is created from milk from their own herds, the partners have a lot more control over the process than when milk is pooled from many sources.

Dittman and Loth also have a unique connection with their customers. By avoiding the middleman, the pair is able to have a one-on-one relationship with patrons who are concerned with where their food comes from and how it is produced.

"I love what I do, because you really get to create something," says Loth. "You get to be a farmer, an artist and a scientist. It's the best of all worlds."

Thomas is a University of Nebraska-Lincoln ag journalism major.

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