



“THERE’S NO UDDER WAY” by Nicole Whitaker – 2006-2007 Youth Rep

Throughout history, there have been many bizarre, eccentric myths and beliefs about goats. Oppian of Apamea, an ancient Syrian poet and early naturalist, asserted that goats breathe through their horns, while Roman scholar Varro Reatinus maintained that they breathe through their ears; Pliny the Elder, author and natural philosopher of present-day Italy, expressed the particular notion that these peculiar creatures are perpetually feverish. No matter what any of these ancient peoples understood about the anatomy of the dairy goat, they respected and valued the critical roles these mammals held in their everyday life. Goat skins were used for water and wine bottles and as parchment for writing. Goat hairs were woven into clothing and, most importantly, dairy goat provided food and milk. Unfortunately today, with the massive dairy industry reaching out to Americans through supermarkets and convenience stores at every corner, the charm of purchasing milk from a local dairy goat farmer has been lost. But the Maryland Dairy Goat Association rekindles that old-fashioned impression and has opened my eyes and heart to the many facets of agriculture.

My journey with dairy goats began with a lamb. (How odd!) I was accepted into the Lamb Grant Program the first year I was in 4-H. I named my market lamb Dirk, and my family and I went to the farm three times every week to walk him. When it came time to sell Dirk at the 4-H auction at the Baltimore County 4-H Fair, my mom and little sister were stricken with grief, and it didn't help that my father was the winning bidder on Dirk. (Because my mom refused to cook the lamb meat, Dirk was in our freezer for at least a year). My mom talked my dad into building a pen for some dairy goats (so we wouldn't have to sell them for meat!). We bought our first dairy goats from Mrs. Arlene Townsend. She was the adult leader for the Baltimore County Dairy Goat 4-H Club, so we started going to her 4-H meetings.

We were so thankful to become a part of the Dairy Goat 4-H club because we learned so much from the older 4-Hers about raising and showing our goats. The president that year was Courtney Swanson. She helped my little sister clip her goat for the county fair after my father almost completely shaved the goat bald (trying to help). A year later, when our goats kidded, she taught me how to milk them. It has been a few years since Courtney aged out of 4-H, and I have become the president of the Baltimore Country Dairy Goat 4-H Club. As President of my 4-H club, I have acquired strong leadership and interpersonal skills. Dealing with the diverse concerns of 4-Hers, parents, and leaders, I have become adept at operating with the proper mix of authority, diplomacy, and tact. I hope one that other 4-Hers will think of me as their Courtney Swanson.

Two new 4-Hers joined my club last year, and both were interested in dairy goats, but did not own any themselves. So I suggested they lease a dairy goat project. They leased from the same farmer, and I took them to the farm many times to teach them correct show ring procedure for dairy goats and how to fit them properly. I assisted them with the paperwork involved with their 4-H projects and educated them about dairy goat health and management.

As a dairy goat farmer, eventually you get tired of drinking goat milk all the time, so I have researched different goat milk products. Our favorite is ice cream! I have recipes for chocolate, vanilla, cookies n' cream, and cinnamon ice cream. For the past two years at the Baltimore County 4-H fair, I have won 1st place for my banana ice cream. I also make soap with goat milk. Since goat milk is so creamy, the soap is very smooth. I scent the soap with pure oil fragrances so all of the ingredients are natural. I believe using goats' milk to make different products is the most important part of my dairy goat project, so I have taught all the kids in my 4-H club how to make soap. It teaches the 4-Hers to be resourceful and creative.

I joined the Baltimore County Dairy Bowl Team about six years ago, before I started my dairy goat project. Since then, I have learned a lot about dairy animals! The knowledge I have acquired in Dairy Bowl has helped me tell people about my goats. I can tell them how goats are ruminants, and what that means (that they have four stomachs!) and about goat milk products. I make Dairy Goat Jeopardy games for the kids in my 4-H club so that they can learn about their goats, too! Another important experience for young dairy goat farmers is Dairy Goat Judging at the Maryland State Fair. I have been privileged to have attended this event for two years. I earned 4th place in 2004 and 1st place in 2005 within the senior division and learned so much. It is essential for young dairy goat farmers to understand how conformation of the dairy animal translates into milk production.

As a Baltimore County 4-H Fair Tour Guide for four years, I have seen all the 4-H projects being exhibited at the fair. As a tour guide, I try to share all that I know about the animals and indoor projects. I have a lot of experience to share with my dairy goats. It is amazing to see the different kinds of reactions people have to the goats. Some of the older visitors can tell you stories about the billy goat they played with growing up while other visitors don't even know the difference between a goat and a sheep.

I get the same reactions to my goats from people at the Helping Up Mission, a shelter in Baltimore City for homeless men. They have an overnight shelter where they provide basic needs to homeless men who stay at the shelter overnight and a rehabilitation program for drug addicts. In the rehabilitation program, men are not allowed to leave the shelter for a certain period of time while they go through the mission's program for drug addiction, and then the shelter helps them find a job while living at the mission, until they are assisted in finding permanent living arrangements after completing the rehabilitation program. When my church visits the mission, we help fix up the building and serve dinner to the men. The men call our church the "Goat Church" because my family and I bring our goats for the men and some of their children who come to see them. Most of the people at the mission have never seen goats before and others grew up living on farms with goats.

I also take my goats to Port Discovery, a children's museum in Baltimore City. We learned about Port Discovery through Pets On Wheels, an organization my goats are involved in. Since my first visit to Port Discovery with my goats, I have gotten my 4-H club included in volunteering at the museum many times each year. We let the visitors pet the goats while we try to inform them about the 4-H program and the dairy goats they're petting. We bring posters and pamphlets with 4-H and dairy goat information to Port Discovery and we've talked to many parents who would like to buy dairy goats as pets and 4-H project animals. My goats are also regular attendees of Gunpowder Baptist Church's Vacation Bible School Petting Zoo and Cromwell Valley Park's Fall Harvest Festival.

Through my dairy goat 4-H project, I have learned new ideas on subjects, speaking skills, and life lessons by actively involving myself in educational and community service programs. My dairy goat project is motivating because it has allowed me to take on various leadership positions and different volunteer opportunities, both independent and with my 4-H club. My dairy goat project has encouraged me to pursue further achievements in the dairy industry, explore new competitive events like Dairy Bowl and Dairy Goat Judging, and reach out to more 4-Hers. 4-H is a wonderful program and I intend to keep my dairy goats and continue to contribute to the 4-H program for years to come. The attentiveness and diligence of the supporters of MDGA have made the possibilities of the Maryland Dairy Goat Association endless and I hope to become a part of this great organization as the next Youth Representative.

The Roman goddess of agriculture, Ceres, was one of the most influential deities of Rome because she was one of only a few divinities active in the daily lives of average Romans. The Romans had a common expression, "fit for Ceres", which meant splendid. I would consider all of my lovely dairy goats "fit for Ceres" because my dairy goat project is udderly splendid!

Nicole Whitaker