

ALASKA GROWN

Farmer Profile



Ansley's Soap is "Far Above Rubies"

ESTER—Years ago, when Jennifer Ansley encountered goats at the Tanana Valley State Fair she was so smitten that she declared to her husband, "That's what I want; they are so beautiful."

Her husband failed to see the beauty, but Ansley achieved her dream and now has 11 goats and a thriving goat milk bath product business, Far Above Rubies.

Her goats are Toggenburgs, one of the oldest and purest breeds from the Swiss Alps and the first breed to be registered in the U.S. Some are crossed with Saanen but all are Swiss breeds. The large goats do very well in the cold and are good milk producers, Ansley said. "I love my goats; they are very personable and have

lots of character. They are very intelligent."

The goats follow her to the school bus stop when it's time to meet her children. "They keep me in sight and stay right with me," she said.

Showing off the goats in their barn, Ansley gushes, "Aren't they cute?" Indeed they are, but a lot of work too. They must be milked twice a day and fed. Their feet have to be trimmed and sometimes they need help giving birth. Going against their reputation for eating old shoes and such, they are picky eaters, munching on hay, dairy grain ration and a salt mineral mix.

Ansley learned to milk by trial and error. The first book she bought, "Cheesemaking Made Easy" was not helpful. "We joked it should be called 'Cheesemaking made Practically Impossible,' " she said.

After finding more helpful literature, Ansley began making chevre, feta, ricotta, colby and cheddar cheese for her family's consumption. For the past nine years Ansley has also made and sold an array of soap and lotions at the Tanana Valley Farmers' Market. She learned the basics and then created her own recipes. "It's a lot of work but it's a lot of fun," she said. "I wouldn't have thought I'd be making soap but it's a great business."

The products are sold online and at Alaska Feed, Cold Spot Feed, Arctic Travelers, the Alaska Bowl Co., Chena Hot Springs Resort and the Ornamentary and the Bag Ladies shop in Pioneer Park seasonally.

This story was written by Nancy Tarnai for the University of Alaska Fairbanks. It has been edited and abridged by Rachel Kenley and re-printed with permission.



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Please contact Amy Pettit with questions or comments.

907-761-3864

amy.pettit@alaska.gov