

## News

### North Carolina Research Campus, Kannapolis

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### **Local Farmer Awarded Funding from N.C. Value-Added Cost Share Program**

*Tobacco Farm Turned Goat Dairy, SleepyGoat Cheese Produces Flavored Chevre*

KANNAPOLIS, N.C. – SleepyGoat Farm, owned and operated by Jon Dorman and Della Williams in Pelham, N.C., received one of nine N.C. Value-Added Cost Share (NCVACS) awards. While they once shared a neurology practice, the husband and wife team of Dorman and Williams now share farm chores at SleepyGoat Farm, a goat dairy and cheese-making facility.

Licensed in 2004 as a farmstead cheese maker, they have been growing the business by slowly increasing production and developing new recipes. Two areas of future growth they would like to explore are expanding their facilities and seeking marketing expertise. The NCVACS award will help reduce the costs of applying for a USDA Value-Added Producer Grant (VAPG). The federal grant provides its recipients with supplemental funding for business growth and development.

NCVACS is administered by N.C. MarketReady, a program of N.C. Cooperative Extension located at the N.C. Research Campus in Kannapolis. Funded by the N.C. Tobacco Trust Fund Commission, the cost share program was launched in 2009 to encourage more North Carolina producers to apply for federal funding and to generate more competitive applications. SleepyGoat's award consists of a \$3,500 cost share for grant writing assistance for the VAPG-Planning grant and \$10,000 for USDA matching funds, contingent on receipt of the USDA grant.

Dorman and Williams purchased a 160-acre tobacco farm in 1989. Today, half of the farm is devoted to the goats and cheese making. Goat cheese is a value-added product because the raw milk from the goats is processed to make cheese. The cheese is processed in 32-gallon batches. Typically, one gallon of milk results in one pound of cheese. The cheese is formed into one-pound wheels and, when appropriately aged, cut into quarters and film-wrapped for sale.

SleepyGoat offers three types of cheese: soft, semi-soft and hard. Chevre, what most people refer to as goat cheese, is a soft cheese, similar in texture to cream cheese. They have developed nine flavors of chevre. The most popular selections are plain, garlic paprika and French herbs. Dorman reports that the chocolate chevre is most popular among the under-12 crowd. For the more mature palates seeking a sweeter chevre, honey-lavender and curry-membrillo (quince) are also available. Cassatt and mozzarella are the semi-soft cheeses. Among the eight hard cheeses are a one-year aged cheddar, Blue cheese and Cezanne, a deep-flavored raw milk cheese.

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A further processed product is their cheese balls, which are made with a simple hard cheese mixed with chevre and butter. The cheese ball is rolled in a mixture of fresh basil, garlic and sun-dried tomatoes for a savory product, or cranberries, hickory smoked almonds and candied ginger for a sweet cheese ball.

Williams has written a cookbook that includes uses and recipes for goat cheese in response to repeated inquiries from customers at the farmers market. SleepyGoat cheese is sold from the farm and within a 75-mile radius at five farmers markets and four retail establishments. They also supply one restaurant and are hoping to launch Internet sales this year. Williams says, "Marketing has been our weakest point. We need our cheese to be better known and to educate our local population." Ultimately, Dorman and Williams would like to have an activities center on the farm to host lectures, farm dinners and educational programs about sustainability. The federal funding could help them reach these goals.

In the meantime, SleepyGoat is nearing maximum production capacity with their Oberhasli herd. Currently they have 50 goats and 10 kids, of which 32 are potential milkers. Next year they expect to have 42 milkers. In addition to Dorman and Williams, SleepyGoat now employs one full-time and two part-time workers.

Cheese making is seasonal since the goats aren't milked when they are bred. However, cheese is available year-round since it is an aged product. This year, SleepyGoat plans to collaborate with a local winery to offer holiday boxes. The artwork they've chosen for their SleepyGoat labels lends itself to being transformed into a gift item. Given that cheese has a strong connection to France, Dorman and Williams enlisted the help of an artist friend to alter well known French Impressionist paintings by the likes of Degas and Picasso, essentially adding a goat head to all the people in the paintings. Following through with the concept, the names of their cheeses are derived from the artist of the painting featured on the label.

In addition to producing the cheese product, SleepyGoat also markets the farmstead experience through agritourism activities including school tours, monthly international dinners, cheese tastings and overnight farm stays. While they have laid the groundwork for their business, from production to marketing, they hope that additional funding through the USDA program will help launch their activities into a sustainable operation that is not dependent on off-farm income, currently contributed by Williams, who still practices medicine.

SleepyGoat Farm is open to the public from 2 to 5 p.m. on the second Sunday of each month, from May to August. For more information about SleepyGoat Farm and their cheeses, visit [www.sleepygoatfarm.com](http://www.sleepygoatfarm.com).

**N.C. MarketReady**, formerly known as the Program for Value-Added & Alternative Agriculture, is a program of N.C. Cooperative Extension, which is an educational outreach of N.C. State University and N.C. A&T State University. N.C. MarketReady's multidisciplinary team builds partnerships and educational resources to help North Carolina agriculture be more profitable. N.C. MarketReady is a partner of the Plants for Human Health Institute at the N.C. Research Campus in Kannapolis. Learn more at [www.ncmarketready.org](http://www.ncmarketready.org) or [www.ces.ncsu.edu](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu).

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