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Strange Sweetfellows

How LaLoo's ice cream can help clean our waterways

By Gianna De Persiis Vona

When I was a kid, I was terrorized by a neighbor down the hill who would force me to drink goat's milk. While I have grown to love goat cheese, goat milk is something I still associate with eccentric neighbors wielding mason jars and dominating attitudes. So when I was approached by a person in my local grocery store offering free samples of LaLoo's goat's milk ice cream, I felt a qualm similar to the one I felt so long ago when the erstwhile neighbor forced her mason jar upon me, claiming as she did so, "It's good for you." Turning my cart the other direction, I politely declined.

Created by Laura Howard in Petaluma and now sold nationally, LaLoo's goat's milk ice cream claims to be good for you, too. As good as ice cream can possibly be, which means, sure, it's still ice cream, it still has sugar in it, but it carries all the benefits of goat milk: easier to digest, lower in fat, higher in B-vitamins and calcium. Howard and I meet in one of the small barns she has renovated to serve as an office for LaLoo's, located on her five-acre farm in Petaluma. Outside, LaLoo's eight family goats roam about, interspersed with a horse or two, some chickens and a scrappy little dog, while inside, Howard and her two assistants are busy with the plethora of tasks that come with a small-time operation gone big.

I am here partially because I never did accept that free taste in the store, and partly because I want to find out more about LaLoo's partnership with the Waterkeeper Alliance. LaLoo's is releasing 25,000 pints of vanilla ice cream, specially marked with the Waterkeeper Alliance logo, this summer. Twenty-five percent of the proceeds from these containers will go directly to the Alliance, and its top three keeper programs in New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco. The Alliance helps protect waterways through education, grassroots mobilization and litigation, ensuring that polluters are held responsible and forced, if necessary, to change their ways.

Howard became engaged in the cleanliness of our waterways via a circuitous route. What began as a simple trade between her and a goat farmer in Maine—a little of LaLoo's ice cream for some fresh Maine goat milk yogurt—turned into a new mission with the development of Clean Farm = Clean Water, a nonprofit that Howard is in the process of creating with the Waterkeeper Alliance. Howard has a keen sense of taste, evident in the delicate nuances of her 25 different flavored pints. What she noticed in her Maine yogurt would quite likely have passed over the nonconnoisseur's palate undetected. To Howard, however, the taste was extra special, and she wanted to know why. What she learned was that her cohort in Maine was feeding her goats seaweed, which is rich in the fatty acid DHA.

In an attempt to keep it fresh and local, Howard decided to experiment with feeding her own goats seaweed from the Tomales Bay. What she discovered, however, was gravely disappointing. Apparently, there is no kelp in the Tomales Bay, or at least none to speak of. The bay is so polluted, largely from farm runoff, that its eco-system is in turmoil. Sea otters are dying off, which has allowed for proliferation of sea urchins, which then eat all of the kelp.

What began as a quest for flavor has blossomed into an all-out campaign. What Howard hopes to achieve with Clean Farms = Clean Water is nothing less than keeping the art of goat farming what it is today: small, family-owned and -operated, and free of the industrialization that has overtaken so much of the dairy cow industry. Industrial factory farms provide one of the greatest sources of water pollution in the country. With ice cream this good (and it is good—when I got home I tried one spoonful and then voraciously ate half the pint), it's possible to visualize a future with goats crammed into warehouses, abused and neglected so consumers can get their goat's milk ice cream fix.

As I leave LaLoo's farm, my pint of free Strawberry Darling goat's milk ice cream beside me, I try not to think about the possibility of little factory-farmed goats bleating among thousands of other bleating little goats. Instead, I think of members of the Waterkeeper Alliance racing about in their motorboats as they patrol the seas, and protect us, essentially, from ourselves. If a pint of LaLoo's vanilla ice cream will help them fuel their boat, I see no reason not to get busy. While I may not be able to pilot a boat, at the very least I can always eat ice cream.

For more information about Waterkeeper Alliance go to www.waterkeeper.org. For more information on Clean Farm = Clean Water, go to [<http://www.cleanfarmcleanwater.org/>] www.cleanfarmcleanwater.org.

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