

SMALLHOLDING PROFILE: MOOREND MOISTURISERS

Helen Babbs meets the Norfolk smallholder who turns her goats' milk into a popular range of luxurious moisturisers, soaps and more.



Audrey and Zoe



Dalston and Brisco, the two rehomed donkeys

When Zoe Mitchell was a teenager, her mum bought her two dairy goats in place of her outgrown pony. "I loved them," Zoe reminisces fondly. "I learned to milk them by hand and everything." But circumstances changed, and the goats had to move on. "They lived out their days on my grandparents' farm. But I still liked goats, so in 2003, when my husband Bo and I moved to a house in Stibbard, in Norfolk, with a bit of land, straight away I said to him 'Can we get some goats now?'"

STARTING WITH SOAP

Two British Alpine goats accordingly arrived, and produced so much milk that by 2004, Zoe was having to throw some away. "My husband started getting a bit bothered at this waste, with the cost of the goat feed," she recalls. "At the same time, I went on a two-day 'potions making' course with my sister-in-law as a birthday present, making hand cream, lip balm and such. At the end, I went up to the chemist teaching the course, and asked about using goats' milk. She said she hadn't any experience, but gave me a few recipes to try."

Back in her own kitchen, Zoe began experimenting. "I made moisturiser and soap, and as it worked out quite well, I gave it to family and friends as gifts. They loved it, and kept telling me 'You should be selling this.'" Encouraged, Zoe set up 'Moorend Moisturisers' and started selling at Farmer's Markets and local craft shows in 2018.



The soaps are made in goat-shaped molds

A HAPPY HERD

Six years later, both the goats and the business are thriving. Along with the descendants of the first two British Alpines, Zoe has added Toggenburgs, a Saanen doe, and several Boer goats for meat. "I love my Alpines, but I like to show the goats, too, and the Toggenburgs are better blood lines for this. We have 17 adult does now, plus the new kids being born this spring. I mate them every other year, and the kidding season is in March," she explains. "I tend to keep the girls, while the boys are either sold as wethers for pets, or go for meat at six months."

As they are pedigree stock, all the

goats have names, which they know. "They will come running when I call," says Zoe, "especially if I have a feed bucket." It's easy to see the goats know too that they're well loved, as they mill around waiting for their turn at a pat and a rub behind the ears. "They have a very definite pecking order in the herd," Zoe observes. "I have to feed and milk them in the right order or there's chaos!"

In 2021, two re-homed donkeys from The Donkey Sanctuary joined the smallholding as well. "I didn't want horses again, as I wouldn't ride them now," says Zoe, "but we just wanted something else to compliment the goats."

These two had bad time in the past and now we can give them a future"

PASTURES NEW

To make space for all the herd, in 2020 Zoe, husband and their two dogs moved to a larger smallholding eight miles away, outside Bale. "It's part of the farm which was my father-in-law's," she explains. "When he retired aged 90, it was decided to divide the farm up among the family. We kept the farmyard, with its traditional barns, and eight acres of pasture for the goats."

Although all the barns needed renovating, the goat barn took priority over the house conversion! "My husband adapted a barn for them in the first week, then a then smaller barn to make the "kitchen" for the Moorend Moisturiser business," Zoe describes. "The house was finally finished this February, so it was quite a relief to move in!"



For special occasions, Zoe also makes up gift packs



The eye-catching goat logo

Inside the goat barn, all is immaculately kept, with clean metal hurdles and pannier hay racks, and lots of comfy straw on the floors. Outside, the goats have old pig arks with straw for field shelters, as well as access back to the barn in poor weather. "They don't mind a bit of snow," Zoe notes, "and a windy day gets everybody excited." There's also an amazing "goat climbing frame", made up of two trampolines, an old cable drum, several crates and connecting planks. "The trampolines were given to us by some friends whose children had outgrown them, and it just evolved from there," says Zoe. "The goats love it – they'll climb, play or lie down and sunbathe."

MILKING TIME

At either end of their days on the pasture, the goats are milked. "I feed them and then milk at 7am, before they all go out on the field, and then again at 7pm, when they come inside for the night," says Zoe. "When it's just a few girls in milk, I do them by hand, but

when they're all in milk, I use a milking machine. A good nanny can produce 12 pints a day!" Some of this goes to feed the kids, who are either run with their mums or moved onto bottle feeding for the show goats, while the rest of the milk supplies Zoe's soaps. "Three quarters of a pint makes a batch of soap or hand-cream," she explains.

OFF TO MARKET

Once the goat chores are done for the morning, Zoe gets down to work with the milk. "I make hand-cream, soap, shampoo bars and lip balm, all with goats' milk, which is very good for moisturising dry or problem skin," she describes. "They're based purely on natural ingredients, particularly the emulsifiers. In commercial creams, these are often harsh chemicals, but I only use emulsifiers from coconut oil, lactic and steric acid, so it's all natural." The creams go into labelled jars, each featuring the smiling face of a British Alpine goat – the Moorend Moisturiser logo – while the soaps and

shampoo bars are made in goat-shaped moulds! For holidays and occasions such as Mother's Day, Zoe's work bench is also filled with cellophane wrap and curling ribbon, as she makes up gift bundles.

"During the pandemic, we couldn't go to markets, so sales were only online, but I still managed to sell enough each month to cover my overheads," says Zoe with relief. "Now things are open again, we're going to events all over Norfolk, especially along the north coast with all the tourists, and a few in Suffolk. I absolutely love it, and it's good to see our customers again." On show weekends, husband Bo helps out with manning the stall, or looking after things at home. "We have two adult children who pitch in for big events, too," Zoe adds.

GOATS AT LARGE

Although they don't go to the markets, the goats sometimes get to go "on holiday" too. "I'm part of the Norfolk & District Goat Club, who have classes at three or four shows a year," Zoe explains. "I've shown at the Norfolk, the Suffolk, and the Hadleigh. The goats seem to quite enjoy it! I sometimes get invited to take two or three goats to a local school fete, which is good PR but can be quite a lot of hassle. When the new kids are born, I'll also take a couple of them into our local primary schools, so the children can pet them and get to learn a little bit about livestock."

However, both the goats and Zoe are happiest to be at home. "I'm a farmer's daughter, so the best thing is just being outdoors in the countryside," she says firmly. "I wake up in the mornings and hear the goats calling for their breakfasts" – and what more can a smallholder want?

www.moorendmoisturisers.co.uk



Part of the herd