

Jannei Goat Dairy



ALTHOUGH MIXING their names to form their company identity, Janette and Neil Watson take pride in making some of region's purest produce.



Neil and Janette Watson, in the tiny sales area at Jannei. Neil finds the refrigerated cabinet an ideal aging environment for some of his matured cheeses.

WE'RE LATE. It's a grey rainy day in November as we head west along the Great Western Highway past Lithgow heading for Jannei Goat Dairy at Lidsdale. However all is well when we do eventually arrive at Jannei, as Neil and Janette Watson are too busy packing up their cheeses for the following day's Pymont Growers Market in Sydney to be concerned about our late arrival.

The Watsons started their cheese making here in 1995 when Neil decided he wanted a change from teaching agricultural science at a school in Portland. When looking for an alternative income, it's not surprising that Neil would be thinking milk. He grew up on a dairy farm in that wonderful, rain-blessed dairying country around Wauchope on the NSW central coast.

Initially they intended to sell their fresh goat milk into the Sydney market but found this was not profitable in the volumes they could produce. So Janette supported Neil's experiments with cheese making.

He started with hard cheeses in 1996, but soon found that what his customers in Sydney really wanted was fresh curd. Just about the only goat curd available in Sydney at the time was coming from Gabriel Kervella in Western Australia. So local chefs and retailers were delighted to have a truly local product. From this base product, Neil has added many award winning cheeses such as their *Bent Back Chevre*, *Buche noir* and *Chevrotin*.

Cheese making takes place six days a week and while Neil is busy with the curd, Janette uses her background in advertising and design to market their cheeses to an ever-increasing number of customers.

Jannei milks around eighty goats (mostly Saanen) from a herd of one hundred producing about 130kg of cheese a week. Ninety percent of this is delivered weekly into the Sydney market where Simon Johnson is the main distributor.

Diet for the goats is very important to Neil who goes to great lengths to ensure that every goat in the herd is in peak condition, thus ensuring the highest quality milk for cheese making.

In June 2007 Neil had major heart surgery. During his hospitalisation and subsequent recovery Janette took responsibility for all aspects of the business, including the cheese making. So now they often work together in the cheese making room. The weekly trips Janette makes to the Growers Markets she says are hard work. With the long travel time, some days are barely profitable. Janette says she looks past the sales and considers it important to be there, as it is their only regular marketing exercise.

If you would like to visit the dairy for a tasting or purchases of their cheese, phone first to check that either Neil or Janette are available. Blessed are the cheese makers. **RF** Russell Smith

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fresh curd