

## Fleur de Fleurieu



**E**VERYTHING IN Denise Riches past seems to have predestined her for the craft of cheese making. For a start, her parents are Swiss. Then there's her farming background in New Zealand, her university degrees in microbiology and engineering and many years working in and consulting to the packaging and food industries. On a trip to Adelaide, she met her husband James Keirnan, and decided not to go back to New Zealand. It was the start of a new adventure.

After looking for small 'hobby farm' blocks, they found 100 acres near Victor Harbour. Denise says they had two alpacas at that stage,

**DENISE RICHES** wants people who don't like goats' milk cheese to try hers.

then added a small flock of angora goats for mohair production. They then moved more into the food side with some meat goats for the restaurant trade.

While wary of the long hours and hard work, in mid-2004 they purchased an existing goat dairy business on Bob and Carole Pennington's 'Flagstaff Hill' farm, and this is also where Denise has her cheese-making facilities. A move to a new facility with a roadside shop front is planned for 2008.

"As Hindmarsh Valley Dairy we produce a range of dairy products, including unpasteurised milk, which goes into the health food and organic market. I think we're the only state in Australia that lets us do that; for the cheese we have to pasteurise everything. We were making a range of yoghurts, cottage cheeses and other sorts of dairy products and about two years ago we started making traditional Swiss, French and Italian-style cheeses. All from goats 'milk produced on the property.'"

Denise contends that when most Australians hear 'goat cheese' they have a vision of a smelly old buck in the paddock. She explains: "Goat milk has very, very small fat molecules. It's naturally homogenized and the molecules break down almost immediately. So the gamey flavour that you get in a lot of milk, and very strong flavours, is actually the fat molecules breaking down. So our cheeses are made from that morning's milking.

"I want my cheeses quite clean on the palate, so you're getting the flavour of the moulds and things coming through as well as the natural flavour. It's farm-house cheese."

Her cheeses are finding a ready market. "I tend to release things to places that I know will think about it, or restaurants that I know will look after them. We've got about 40 outlets that stock and supply our various products, but with the cheeses it's more down to more gourmet-type places."

The lower regions of the Fleurieu Peninsula region have a long dairy tradition but the number of abandoned dairies tell a story of how tough times are. If the new producers like Denise can revive any of those small farms with value-added produce, no-one will mind if it's a goat or a cow in the paddocks.

Denise has a regular stall at the Willunga Farmers Market and there is a complete list of Hindmarsh Valley Dairy produce on [www.fleurieufood.com.au](http://www.fleurieufood.com.au) (where Denise is an active Board member.) For stockists call 08 8552 6704. **RF**

WRAPPED IN GOLD FOIL, THE FLEUR DE BLEU NAME IS A CHEESEMAKER'S JOKE. BLUE MOULD IS CALLED THE 'BLUE FLOWER' IN FRANCE.



Clockwise from top left. Denise's fetta served with pesto in a tasting plate from The Shingleback Cafe at McLarenvale Visitors Centre; baked zucchini flowers stuffed with fresh curd drizzled with olive oil; the Fleur de Bleu; 'Comisard' whole small goat cheese wrapped in Willunga's, Hamlet Meats pancetta, baked for 15 mins.; 'caprino fresco' fresh curd with coarse pepper and drizzled with local olive oil; the ivory centre of a beautifully runny goats' milk brie.