

Vermont Farmer Profiles



by Spring 2019 Public Communication Capstone students at the University of Vermont



Profile: Does Leap Farm

crafting cheese and sausage through pasture managed alpine goats

After graduating from the University of Vermont, Kristan Doolan and George Van Vlaanderen went on to graduate school at the University of Maine to study agriculture. While they did not have much background in farming, they were interested in the lifestyle and knew it was something they wanted to pursue. For almost 20 years now, on a 155 acre farm in Bakersfield, Vermont, Does Leap Farm has produced and sold goat cheese and sausage to Vermont markets as well as to the New York and New Jersey areas.

For the last three years, drought has affected their hay yields making it difficult to get certified organic hay. These drought conditions have made hay more expensive and scarce. As a small farm, they had to adapt to this vulnerability; turning pasture lands into hay land and purchasing alfalfa pellets for feed. Excess heat has been an issue for their 55 French alpine goats. Pastures have to be well planned, including moving the goats between the 4-5 acre paddocks during the day to ensure the goats do not overheat. Does Leap relies on their draft horses to put up hay, and the farm has also had to adapt to their horses needs with the heat.

When starting their farm, some resources Kristan and George found helpful were the Vermont Grass Farmers Association and Northeast Organic Farming Association. Does Leap found that as a small farm these organizations focused on grass problems with livestock and grazing. Kristan states that, “when we first started out we went to conferences all the time, Grass Farmers has a great conference as does NOFA, and that was a great place to fill your bucket and get inspired.”



It's finding that window (of opportunity) that are suitable for us is tricky... there was a window last year that was perfect and we just couldn't go out there, we tried going out there with the horses and they only lasted a hour and a half. It was just too hot. It was one of the first times we had to forgo a period that would have been good for hay making but the animals just couldn't go out and pull the machinery around.

- Kristan Doolan, Does Leap Farm