

Agri-tourism potential embraced by city hall

By JUDIE STEVENS
STAFF REPORTER

After decades of assuming that Kelowna's farmland would eventually become houses, it's more generally acknowledged now that agriculture is a permanent part of the city, figures planning director Ron Mattiussi.

Despite that, there are still complaints from residents living near farmland, particularly more intensively farmed land.

For instance, Carmelis Goat Cheese Artisan, which operates on five acres in the upper Mission, was built on agriculturally-zoned property. But that was a surprise to some of the neighbours, who immediately called city hall to complain.

Mattiussi remembers getting calls in 2003, just as the new goat cheese dairy began operations, a month or so before it burned to the ground in the Okanagan Mountain Park fire.

However, it complied with all regulations, and was within the correct zoning, notes co-owner Ofri Barmour.

She was taking a group of politicians and bureaucrats on a tour of her cheese-making operation Thursday as part of the second annual agricultural advisory committees of the regional district and city, and the agriculture ministry.

Coun. Barrie Clark said those who called him to complain apparently purchased their agricultural acreages in the area of Rimrock Road,



Ron Mattiussi

"never dreaming there might actually be farming in the area," he said.

The Barmours raise about 115 goats on their property, milk them twice a day and make 20 different cheeses which they age in a special in-ground cellar until they're ready for tasting and selling.

They re-built after the fire, and began selling cheeses again about a year ago.

Interest has been high, says Barmour, with visitors coming to the tasting room every day, even though summer hasn't yet arrived.

And that, notes Richard Bullock, chairman of the Farm Industry Review Board, and a Kelowna orchardist, may be the next issue to raise the ire of neighbours.

Even tour buses have begun twisting their way up to Carmelis with visitors eager to purchase some cheese to accompany the wines they've tasted nearby—which is part of the reason the family brought their skills from Israel to Kelowna.

Although Mattiussi says this operation occurred about the time Kelowna was wrestling with its agricultural zoning, trying to define intensive from more general rural farm operations for the purposes of deciding such needs as buffer zones.

Using "animal units" for an intensity rating was one possibility council considered, where a chicken might be one and a cow might be five, for instance.

However, the issues now are more likely to be use of Agricultural Land Reserve land for industrial purposes, or commercial, or the change in use from orchard to pig farming, says Mattiussi.

Both Bullock and regional agriculture advisory committee chairwoman Sandra Kochan commented after the tour that the Barmours' agri-business is just the type of value-added operation that's needed in Kelowna.

"It works with other value-added operations in the valley such as wineries and cuisine tourism," said Kochan.

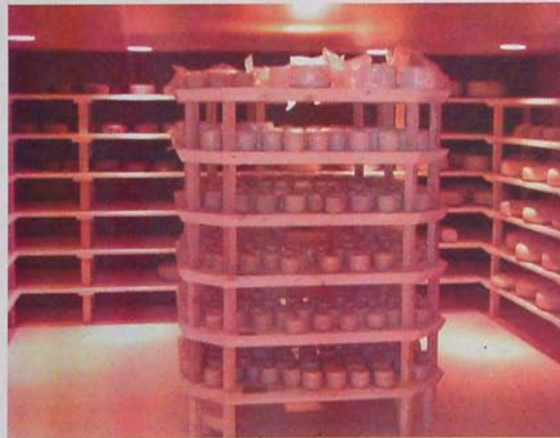
"That place is going to generate a lot of economic activity for this community," noted Bullock.

In fact, he sees a terrific future for this valley's agriculture industry, and agri-tourism.

"We're sitting on something we really have to look after," he said.

"Nowhere in the world can you pass through scenery like we have today, with that lake in the background."

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Darcie Hossack/eVentLife photo
The cheese cellar is made up of shelves of ripening goat cheese.

eVentLife wine Happy goats make happy cheese

"We know how the cheese should be," says Ofri Barmour, proprietor of Carmelis Goat Cheese Artisan. "We can't sell them before they are ready."

I am enjoying the later part of the unique Friday afternoon that is jointly hosted by CedarCreek Estate Winery Chef Geoffrey Couper, and the Carmelis husband and wife team Ofri, and Ofri Barmour. The beginning of the afternoon included a tour of the facility at Carmelis. I was able to catch the scheduled 3 p.m. goat milking process which was fascinating unto itself. One hundred happy goats, yes, I mean it when I say happy, clamored into the milking area. Apparently they happily do this twice a day. It is important that the goats are happy as it impacts the quality of milk, which later impacts the cheese product. I can attest to the fact that these goats lead a fine life.

Jealousy hit me when I had a tour of the cheese cellar. (Who knew there was such a thing - now I want one). The tour concluded at an open air, hillside gazebo complete with a summer kitchen. Did I mention the spectacular lake view? Shortly after we sat down I was delighted to discover the wonderful birds-eye view I had of the chef at work, an outstanding view and did I mention the wine? Wines from CedarCreek and Greata Ranch were paired with each of the Chef's creations. Simply put, it personalized the Okanagan lifestyle and wine country hospitality.

Chef Jeffrey Couper began by demonstrating how to create a Citrus Herb pesto served on crostini and Carmelis Goat Cheese Yogurt. (I swiped the recipe, as it was so delicious and simple enough to make that even I should be able to do it.) The passion Chef Couper has for the Okanagan is prevalent when he talks about the ingredients for his dishes. The salad greens were picked that morning at a favourite producer of his, and I now know where I can buy the ultimate

tomato locally. The Barmours join in and a discussion of local agriculture follows in which everyone soon participates. In between chatting and savouring the offerings from the summer kitchen, we nibbled on the assortment of Carmelis cheeses placed about the table. I've done many a wine and food event in my life and must tell you, this was one I am adding to my top-10 list. Not only did I have a great time, I left inspired with a new appreciation for our Okanagan bounty. Tours run every Friday afternoon from 3 to 6 p.m. until October at Carmelis located at 170 Timberline Rd. in Kelowna. The cost is \$55 per person. To secure your spot, call 250-470-0341, or log on to www.carmelis-goatcheese.com.

Tip of the week: Holding the wine glass at the stem is both proper wine etiquette and the best way to prevent getting the bowl of the wine glass all icky sticky with finger prints. If you have one of those stemless wine glasses in front of you - well, you're etiquette free. Cheers!

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Dawn Antle

On the Vine

eVentLife day trippin' A day with the goats and cheeses

by Darcie Hossack

Drive to where Padosy turns into Lakeshore and begins to wind. Keep going, past wineries and blackened trees; Bertram park bristling from the 2003 firestorm. Turn onto Rimrock, then Timberline and follow it to its end.

This is Carmelis Goat Cheese Artisan. An Old World newcomer to Kelowna from Israel, and the best place in the valley to assemble a selection of cheeses, oils and hand-crafted crisps for Christmas and New Year's Eve. And, while there, have a look around.

"We arrived here in March of 2003," said Ofri Barmour who, together with her husband and their daughters, owns and operates Carmelis.

But before the Okanagan farm opened for business, Barmour described how, with their new barn nearly 85 percent constructed, the now-infamous Okanagan forest fire took every building standing. With the exception of their home.

"Thankfully, our milk vat hadn't been delivered yet," said Barmour of the stainless steel heart of the Carmelis production. The goats, however, had arrived at the Mission area farm just four days before, from Ontario.

"They were evacuated to an alpaca farm and then, when that too was evacuated, our goats were moved again to Old MacDonald's Farm." Family and livestock, both, became refugees as a difficult introduction to life in Canada.

When the smoke cleared, however, the farm was rebuilt and is now quickly becoming a local agri-tourism destination, introducing the Okanagan to the ancient art of crafting and appreciating goat cheese.

But the star attractions, besides the artisanal cheeses, include the 110 goats themselves. And on the day we visited, they were found hiding from the rain under the sheltering roofline and inside the barn.

Playful as curious children, the goats were precocious, head-butting and interested in the stranger with the camera. Barmour, affectionately calling them "her kiddies," laughed that the animals will climb a ladder to the roof if anyone is careless enough to leave one standing.

It's hard not to be enchanted with these creatures. Especially with the babies - the kids - which look like plush living dolls, but will soon grow up and contribute to the



Darcie Hossack/eVentLife photo
Carmelis Goat Cheese Artisan is home to 110 playful goats who provide milk that is later turned into goat cheese.

In the cheese shop, the last stop on the tour, Barmour assembled a board of cheeses for sampling. A yogurt cheese first, drizzled with olive oil and herbs, spread on crisps because, as Barmour astutely noted, "there are no real pitas to be found anywhere here."

An easy favourite is the Chevy Provence, tangy and scented with thyme, tarragon, rosemary and lavender.

From there, the cheeses became more pungent each by each, from a Camembert-style offering, to harder examples like Lior and Carmel, named for the daughters of the house. Then Vintage and Goat-Gonzola, which Barmour says are often too tangy for North American palates. "But it's important for people to become educated," she said, as we worked our way to sampling a finely-veined blue.

Carmelis, open through December, then again for the new season starting in March, is quickly becoming less and less of a local secret as more people visit and then tell everyone they know.

A delight for families and visitors, Carmelis offers something that is often missing in our busy lives.