

MN Agriculture - Sara Larson "Shows" Devotion To Her Goats

Day 10 of my 30 days of "All Things Minnesota Agriculture" is Sara Larson. Sara and her family own Country River Farm Boer Goats located in South Central Minnesota. They raise meat goats, specifically the Boer goat breed for their genetics. The goats are sold to 4-H and FFA members to show at fairs and open shows, as well as to other breeders who are looking to add superior genetics to their herd. But what you will take away from Sara's story is her genuine devotion and unwavering passion she has for her goats.

I personally have noticed an upsurge in show goats. In years past, there were very few goats at our local county fair. That has changed. A lot. There are now many goats at our county fair. And until meeting Sara and having her talk to me about her goats, I knew very, very little about goats. But one thing was apparent, Sara cares deeply for her animals.

Primarily, the Country River Farm Boer Goats provide show animals. They have competitive market wethers and market does that have done extremely well at shows around the state. This year a 4-H member who purchased a market doe from them won the Minnesota State Fair.

They also sell does (commercial, percentage, full blood and registered) that have genetics that can really add value to someone's herd. They take great pride in these animals. Finally, they also sell a few commercial animals that don't meet their breeding and showing standards and are raised for meat production.

Social Media Sites:

Website: www.countryriverfarm.com.

Facebook page : Country River Farm Boer Goats

How long have you farmed or been in business?

"This interest was first created from buying a couple of market goat wethers (male castrated goats) to show at the county fair. Our family started to enjoy this project and decided we would start breeding these animals and raise our own goats. We started raising Boer goats in 2006. We had a combination of dairy goats (Nubians) and Boer Goats. Our plan was to cross these dairy goats with our boer buck and get more fullblood goats to breed. We were up to around 35 goats. On January 1, 2009 we had a barn fire and lost all of our animals except for a young doe and a young buck. The doe, Zoey, is still on our farm today. Even when the fire trucks were in the yard our family

decided we would rebuild our herd and continue our dreams to be Boer Goat breeders. We went out and bought new does to begin again. We had our first kid (newborn goats) January 1, 2010. At the time we focused primarily on breeding for market animals. As my two sisters and I got older we also got interested in the Breeding Doe side of the Boer goat business and currently have both types of animals."

Where do you sell or provide services to? Who is your end consumer?

"We have two different 'consumers'. We sell the majority of our animals to 4-H and FFA members looking for either a show animal, like our wethers as well as a doe that they can breed from and grow their own herd. As the meat goat project continues to grow, we are selling the majority of our animals in the state of Minnesota with a few going into Iowa, Wisconsin and South Dakota.

The second consumer are animals we sell through Central Livestock in Zumbrota, MN as a meat goat. Goat meat, which is called chevon, is actually a very popular meat, especially in the Hispanic and Somali cultures. Chevon is the healthiest meat you can eat and is actually tied with the most consumed meat in the world with pork."

What makes your farm/business unique or special? What are you proud of?

"Hmm...What makes my farm unique? To me, what is unique is that our farm decided to rise through the ashes after our barn fire. My sisters and I have had the dream since we were younger to become well known livestock breeders. When we got into the goats we thought this was our chance to breed a champion. We took great pride in our animals, we would spend hours out in the barn with them. We loved them, cared for them and grew close to them. In the blink of an eye, that was gone. The animals, the barn everything we loved gone. At that point in time it would have been easy to say, well that was a good try. But we weren't going to let a fire let our dreams go up in smoke. We rebuilt and we reevaluated our goals with the meat goat project. We discussed as a family what we wanted to accomplish and how we were going to do that. Today, our family has the best winning record in the state. We have had much success at the Minnesota State Fair over the past three years. In 2012 our family won the Breeding Doe Show, in 2013 won the Market Wether Show and then this past year an animal that we bred and then purchased by a 4-H member won the Market Doe Show. Our family also prides ourselves that raising and selling meat goats isn't just about the sale but also about the learning experience for the youth and guiding them so they too can be successful. We spend a lot of time educating kids about selecting an animal, feeding a show animal, fitting your animal for a show, to us that means more than the sale."

What is one thing you wish consumers knew about what you do or your farm/business?

I want consumers to know that we as livestock farmers deeply care about our animals. The animals on our farm are our priority.

The day of the barn fire my dad went into the barn that was in flames in hopes to save some of our animals. Now this is not something I would advise anyone to do but my point is that we were willing to go into burning buildings and put our well-being at risk for our animals."

We have also pulled all nighters caring for animals, as we kid (this is what it is called with goats have their babies) in January and February so we need to make sure these new babies are warm and healthy. This last year on the coldest night of the year we had seven kids (the name for baby goats) born. We rotated who was up so someone could go out to the barn every hour and make sure they were comfortable and warm. Getting out of bed and putting on all your layers of winter clothes and walking to the barn in -30 wind chill at 2:30 AM isn't that inviting, but we do it because we care about our animals.

"I have also had kids that were born and they couldn't keep their body temperature up. The way to get them heated up is by putting them in a water bath. I stood next to the sink for two hours holding the head of a newborn goat to make sure they won't in take any water in their lungs or ears.

These examples are just a few ways that our animals mean the world to us and we will go above and beyond to make sure they are healthy, safe and happy and in return produce healthy, safe and wholesome products."

What is your favorite Minnesota location or a fun thing to do in Minnesota?

"The Minnesota State Fair is one of my favorite places. I look forward to it all year long. The state fair is a great place to connect with old friends and meet new ones. In the past I have spent 12 days straight at the Minnesota State Fair and loved every minute of it. The livestock portion of the fair is certainly my favorite place as I greatly enjoy watching shows, participating in the shows and going to the promotion booths like the Moo Booth and Oink Booth."

What is one ag-related place in Minnesota that others need to know about. What is one non-ag related place in Minnesota that others need to know about and why?

"An ag-related place that I think others need to know about would be FarmAmerica outside of Waseca, MN. They do a great job educating people about agriculture in the past and present. They have buildings from a barn, farm house, grainery and much more. They also have tours, tractors rides and other events like Farm Camp Minnesota happen there. If your interested go to www.FarmAmerica.org to learn more.

My non-ag place may be on the line....It is in a barn but isn't necessarily ag related. I like home

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décor and antiques. If you are like me a place I would suggest you check out is the [Prim Barn](#) in Lake City, Minnesota. They have so many wonderful things. Certainly worth your time and drive. The Prim Barn only is open during certain times of the year so make sure you check them out before heading over to SE MN."

Here are some additional pictures from Sara: