

# PEOPLE

BY BETH GOULART

## GOAT CHEESE 101

May is going to be a crazy month for Chrissy Omo of CKC Farms in Blanco. Her spring-bearing goats—now more numerous than ever—will be producing high yields of milk in need of pasteurization and processing, her first pecorino will be ripe and ready for tending, and to top it all off, she'll face final exams. Not only is 19-year-old Omo the Big Cheese of operations on the farm, she's a full-time sophomore majoring in international business at Texas State University in San Marcos.

Last semester, she arose each morning at five o'clock to milk goats, then left the house by seven on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays to make an eight o'clock class. After school she worked on cheese—salting, scooping, packing. In the evening, there was even more milking, and every third day she pasteurized milk and started new cheese. Homework, a social life and sleep were mixed in there somehow, too. "It's a never-ending cycle," Omo says. "It just keeps going." Her only complaint is the Hill Country chill on some winter mornings.

Fortunately, Chrissy enjoys a full schedule. "We need to stay busy or else we're not happy," she says of herself and her mother, Adriana, a veteran entrepreneur and the business brains behind the goat cheese operation. Together, the Omo women hatched a plan to make goat cheese after a family trip to Italy three years ago. There, Chrissy's passion for food was ignited as the family explored the rich countryside, tasting local cheeses and wines along the way. Once back home, though, Chrissy scoured the Austin markets in search of the flavors she'd loved, but was never quite pleased.

To satisfy the yearning for those tastes of Italy, and bolstered by her parents' support, Chrissy decided to try her hand at goat cheese. The Omos bought 10 pregnant milk goats, and while they waited, Chrissy pored over books, searched the web and partici-



pated in a goat cheese-making workshop at Pure Luck Farm in Dripping Springs. Then came the kids and the milk started flowing, always with plenty left over after the babies had their share.

Today, the goats at CKC number 92, including 36 "mamas" each expecting at least one kid in May. Chrissy has become quite the pro at making, and eating, several types of cheese. Her favorite snack in the line-up is the baby Caprino—a small, Italian-style cheese she ages for just three weeks. It's soft-ripened like a Brie or Camembert, so it has a flavorful rind and a creamy, pungent interior. "You can eat it with any kind of wine, red or white," she explains, drawing on culinary insight that belies her age. "It coats the palate, it's nice and buttery and it tastes good on anything." She also makes chèvre, blue and ricotta cheeses, as well as a Greek-

style feta, marinated in extra-virgin olive oil, rosemary, chili peppers, garlic, black pepper and bay leaf for a savory, disarmingly smooth and creamy flavor—not at all like the crumbly version that too often tops Greek salads. She uses organic ingredients whenever possible and vegetarian-friendly rennet.

The buzz is spreading as the cheeses gain statewide notoriety. Several restaurants in the Houston area carry them, as do a handful of shops in Austin, including Spec's and Cissi's Market. Chef Rebecca Rather serves a cheese plate made exclusively of CKC cheeses at her Fredericksburg restaurant, Rebecca's Table. Straight from the source is an option as well—in 2006 the family built a sleek, customized cheese shop on the farm, complete with a public tasting room.

Even as business grows, Chrissy stays on track for graduation. She's not sure what to minor in—maybe marketing or food science—or what kind of job she'll eventually seek, but she knows she wants to try a new cheese soon. If all goes as planned, her first goat-milk Parmesan will be ready in 2010.

*CKC Farms, 17505 FM 32, Blanco. 830-833-5669.*