



Mary Wilson with 300-pound Bubba, who is trained as a cart goat.

Get Your Goat Knowledge

Fifth annual Goat Academy offers information from experts

By Jeanie Senior

Mary Wilson says when she bought her first goats 15 years ago, she didn't want milk goats.

"We're kind of lazy, and you have to milk them every day," she jokes.

Instead, she decided on Kikos—a hardy New Zealand breed raised for meat.

"Meat goats were just coming into the country, and there was no information out there," Mary says. "It was a big struggle trying to get anything but dairy goat information. Conformation, genetics—you kind of had to learn from scratch. It would have been nice to have somebody who was a mentor."

That struggle led to creating the Goat

Academy—an all-day seminar in Klickitat County that offers information to folks interested in owning a goat, as well as to goat owners who want to expand their knowledge.

This year's Goat Academy, in its fifth year, is Saturday, May 16, at 910 Pine Forest Road in Goldendale.

The curriculum reflects the various reasons people raise goats. Besides meat and dairy production, people raise goats for their fiber, use them as pack animals and cart-pullers and to clear brush.

There is a class on goat basics, another on how to milk a goat and deal with the milk, and another on choosing the right goat.

"We get a few newcomers every year—first-time owners who are exploring possibilities, those who haven't decided what kind of goats they want, or some who have 20 acres and wonder what they

can do with it,” Mary says. “I think people just like goats. They’re easier to handle, less damaging to your land and there are a lot of things you can do with them.

“It’s not like having a beef out there that everybody’s afraid of. You can take a goat to the vet in the back of a station wagon. You don’t need a trailer.”

Besides Kikos, Angoras and Golden Guernseys, area herds include Boers, Nubians and Alpine dairy goats.

Mary’s goats include Bubba, a 9-year-old cream-colored wether (gelding) who weighs about 300 pounds. He is trained to pull a cart. On flat ground, he can pull his weight.

Teachers at this year’s academy include Bev Baehm of Goldendale, who raises Angora goats and offers hands-on instruction in shearing, preparing a fleece, carding and spinning the fiber.

Longtime packer Curtis King will discuss how to select and train a pack goat and how to choose the right equipment. He also will lead a trip around the property.

Donna Smith of Toledo, Washington, who has a grazing-for-hire business, will talk about its perils and pitfalls.

Other sessions will focus on artificial insemination, farm record keeping, and dealing with parasites and other maladies.

Columbia Basin Goat Guild sponsors the event, which usually attracts around 75 people.

“We’ve had people come from as far away as Montana,” says Mary, president of the guild, which has members in Klickitat, Wasco and Hood River counties.

The fee—\$35 for individuals and \$50 for families—includes breakfast and lunch, which include several goat meat dishes.

Proceeds from the academy are used for small grants to support local producers, “which gives everybody a bit of a boost,” Mary says.

Mary sells goat meat through Home Grown Cow, a national online farmers’ market. She also has taken livestock to the auction in Toppenish.

Mary describes the meat as similar to venison, but milder.

“It’s not as gamy,” she says. “It’s really tasty.”

As the number of area goat owners increases, so do related businesses. Martha Horal runs Marlee’s Grade A Goat Dairy east of Goldendale. JB’s Angoras & More sells Angora goats and mohair



Sandy Ayers, left, and Jim Lobdel, right, chat with a visitor at the Goat Academy. Sandy raises Angora goats; Jim raises dairy goats and does pack and cart as well.

Photo by Mary Wilson

knitted goods.

Another goat dairy farm is starting in the Centerville area, and Mary is establishing a dairy herd at her Half Creek Farm in Bickelton using a breed called Golden Guernseys.

“It’s a real challenge trying to get it going,” Mary says of a commercial goat milk dairy. “The government regulations for a raw milk dairy are staggering.”

On the other hand, a pasteurizer costs about \$15,000—well out of the range of most small farmers.

“It’s kind of a challenge if you want to make a dairy work,” Mary says.

Still, she is interested in making soft goat cheese, inspired by a cheese-making conference she attended in Idaho. Cheese making means having at least a dozen good milk goats because it takes a gallon of milk to make a pound of cheese.

“Maybe next year,” Mary says. ■

For more information about Goat Academy and to register, go to the events and newsletters section of the Columbia Basin Goat Guild website at www.columbiabasingoatguild.org.