

## SPECIAL FEATURE

# Bottari Family Creamery

**Specializing in artisan sheep's milk cheese and grass fed lamb in Lamoille**

By Jennifer Whiteley

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LAMOILLE – Josh and Tory Bottari of the Bottari Family Creamery in Lamoille, Nevada specialize in Farmstead Artisan unpasteurized sheep's milk cheese, naturally grass finished lamb, raw wool, and soap products. They began their adventure in 2003, when sheep dairies began their rise in popularity as hobby farms across the United States. Their goal is sustainability while embracing modern agriculture techniques to produce a quality product.

Bottari grew up in production livestock, working with his grandparents and family on their cattle ranch in Lamoille, and then went to college to be a music teacher. To help pay for college he worked at a specialty foods store where the owner took pride in supplying customers with the highest quality specialty foods available.

What started as a small variety of specialty cheeses evolved into a large case with over 300 cheese varieties when Bottari graduated from college. Bottari found his passion for artisanal sheep's milk cheeses while working at that store. After college Bottari decided "I want something sustainable. Something that will last 100 years. I had never made cheese, or owned sheep, but I decided I was just going to do it." Bottari Family Creamery was born.

The rich flavors of sheep's milk make it ideal for crafting wonderful cheeses. Sheep's milk is extremely high in fat and conjugated linoleic acid, compared to other milk producing species. There are a large amount of solids present in the milk which makes sheep's milk an excellent choice for



Josh Bottari and one of his bottle babies in the pasture. Most of the sheep at Bottari Family Creamery have names. They are very gregarious and friendly animals who yield about a half gallon of milk each day, which the Bottari Family Creamery makes into

making cheeses.

It produces higher yields of cheese compared to other milk producing species. Sheep's milk has a higher percentage of small fat globules than cow's milk, making it easier

to digest. Non-casein protein is twice that of cow or goat milk, which also enhances digestibility. Sheep's milk is naturally thick and is easily turned into cheese or yogurt. Cheese made from sheep's milk is creamier and ages



more mildly than cow or goat cheeses and has its own special flavor, texture, and aroma.

There are more than 50 different varieties of cheese, as well as types of yogurt, ice cream, and butter, all made from sheep's milk. Sheep dairies are an important economic enterprise in many European, Middle Eastern, and Mediterranean countries. With only about 100 sheep dairies in operation across the country, sheep dairies are in their infancy in the United States. Many of the dairies that started up in 2003 quickly ran out of business.

The Bottari Family Creamery is slowly growing and gaining popularity. What started as a barn and a handful of Dorset and Suffolk ewes has grown into a milking parlor, creamery, and aging room. Sheep breeds include the original Dorset and Suffolk, as well as Icelandic Crosses, Lacaune, East Friesian, and Awassi, breeds of sheep that do well on forage and have high milk production.

Bottari modeled his business plan after European sheep dairy models. Sheep graze native grasses much like cattle, free choice in the spring, summer, and fall months. The sheep are fed grass hay and alfalfa over the winter, until the grass begins to grow, and supplemented with mineral and grain while milking. "You need to be able to build your own fence, give your own shots, and shear



All photos by Jennifer Whiteley, Nevada Rancher  
At top, an Awassi cross bred ram watches over his ewes as they graze. Awassi sheep originate in the middle east and are known for the ability to adapt to harsh environments. They are one of the highest milking breeds for sheep and cross well on other milking breeds.

At left, a yearling ewe and her day-old ewe lamb in the nursery. Sheep give milk for about 150 days after giving birth. The milk is naturally thick and flavorful, making it perfect for creating cheese, yogurt and other dairy products.

your own sheep to make a living in the dairy industry." Says Bottari. Sheep have a lower input cost than cattle production, there is no fuel or horse costs. Bottari is able to graze pastures within minimal walking distance of the dairy.

Sheep are milked for about 150 days after they wean their lambs. Bottari's ewes give an average of  $\frac{1}{2}$  gallon of milk each day. Milk is frozen and stored until enough is accumulated for a batch of cheese.

Milk is heated and rennet is added. After curds are formed, they are cut with a knife and stirred to break into smaller pieces. The curds are then firmly packed into cheese molds, and the whey is drained away. After cheese is removed from the mold, it is rubbed with coarse salt and aged in a cellar or aging room. The cheese gets harder as it ages and the taste becomes stronger.

Lambs are weaned around 60 days of age. Bottari's don't castrate ram lambs. Some are sold for breeding stock by private treaty, and the remaining rams are sold for meat.

Bottari's feed rams out on pasture until ready to butcher and sell the meat locally through Facebook word of mouth, and area farmer's markets.

The Bottari Family Creamery sells the milk and meat produced by their ewes and have plans to eventually sell wool and sheep pelts as well. The opportunities available to sheep dairy producers is immeasurable. For more information about or to purchase cheese or lamb from the Bottari Family Creamery, they can be found on Facebook and Instagram. ♦



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*Above left, this new 100-gallon pot was installed in the creamery in January. It is used to heat the milk, and cook it until the curd is formed. Its generous size makes it ideal for thawing frozen milk as well as creating artisanal cheeses.*

*Above right, after ewes are loaded in the milking stanchions, the udders are cleaned, a milking machine is attached to their teats. It takes about 2 minutes to milk out a ewe, each ewe yields an average of  $\frac{1}{2}$  gallon of milk a day.*



*At left, cheese wheels ripening in the aging room. Ripening is responsible for the distinct flavor of the cheese. Ripening determines the features that define many different varieties of cheeses, such as taste, texture, and body.*

*Below, Cheese curds are placed into molds that are used to press the curds and form wheels of cheese. Weights are hung off the arm of the press to help remove excess whey from the cheese before being rubbed with salt and placing wheels in the aging room to ripen.*

