

# VERMONT SHEEP & GOAT

## ON THE RIGHT TRACK

*VSGA board moves forward with new projects*



### From the president:

Karl Ross, Ross Knoll Farm, East Wallingford, VT

On our farm this is the probably the calmest time of the year. The breeding is done, the hay is in the barn, the fall festivals and most other fleece sale opportunities are nearly done, processing the apples and the garden produce is nearly done (of course, on our farm "nearly done" is usually as good as it gets!), and we haven't moved to holiday mode. There are jars of pickles, pickled cabbage, horseradish, basil, parsley, and sage; a freezer-full of lamb, chutney, applesauce and blueberries; and a cellar loaded with turnips, carrots and winter squash. Even with the squirrels eating the corn, the failure of most of the apple and potato crop and usual tomato short falls, we have been blessed with a great, and floodless, growing season. And, with the children away at school or away at

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Young farmer and Fat Toad Farm employee shares her experience working with dairy goats.

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Shepherd and fiber artist invites WWOOFers to her farm and reaps the benefits of hard workers and good friends.

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From the editor: Mary Lake gives the latest on meat cutting at the Royal Butcher.

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**ANNUAL MEETING** and Meat-Up in Middlebury. Show your support, share ideas and stories, enjoy a hearty lunch and helpful workshops. Don't miss this!

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The Vermont Sheep & Goat Association Newsletter is edited by Mary Lake ([mary.m.lake@gmail.com](mailto:mary.m.lake@gmail.com), (802) 338-2250), and is a venue for sharing stories, images and reports related to sheep and goats. If you enjoy writing, reporting or photography and have content of your own or are looking for an assignment, contact Mary. Send submissions, comments or questions to the e-mail above.

The VSGA is looking for board members. The board meets regularly to discuss organization matters ranging from annual meetings to wool pools to grants for workshops and education. If you are interested in learning more about becoming a board member, contact VSGA president Karl Ross at (802) 259-3390 or [kandk\\_ross@yahoo.com](mailto:kandk_ross@yahoo.com).

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their jobs, we do have some time and a needed period of relative relaxation.

For VSGA, with the 24<sup>th</sup> edition of the fabulous Sheep and Wool Festival behind us, it's time to do a little reflection on the past year and start planning the activities for 2013.

Wintertime was spent arranging the new Web site and getting organized for its use. Then, we had some great learning opportunities – parasite and skirting workshops in the spring, wool clip improvement in August and the always excellent workshops at the Sheep & Wool Festival. The wool pool in late June was certainly a highlight for me since I had never been to one – seeing the variety of wool, wool storage and transportation devices and people was great fun.

So, now it's time to think about 2013. Plans include: another wool pool in late spring; a shearing school in April or May; the Sheep & Wool Festival on September 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>; and the annual meeting and information sessions the first weekend in November. These are pretty firm, but beyond that we are hoping to get in other educational sessions. The wool clip workshop was really interesting. At the parasite workshop I probably found out about more things



that I was doing flat-out wrong than at any time since college physics.

It is difficult to plan these events, however without two things from you, the membership. The board would like to know what kinds of events and information you would like to see in the future. What areas of sheep and goat breeding, shepherding and marketing would you like to see discussed and/or exhibited at VSGA events? Second, the board needs volunteers to help coordinate these events. Mary Lake did a wonderful job with the wool pool and Jim McRae did great with the Wool Clip workshop. Barb Tonnissen, Jane Woodhouse, Kat Smith

and the rest of the Sheep & Wool Festival folks continue to work wonders in Tunbridge. But we need others to step forward to coordinate our events. Going to the same folks again and again is a sure way to stagnate. Sheep and goat activity in Vermont is greater than it's been in years and we need to keep the momentum going – so please, get involved!

*To learn more, come to our annual meeting in Middlebury on November 4. See Page 4 for details.*

**Above:** Volunteers Dave Martin and Tut Doane unload bags of wool at the wool pool at Vermont Technical College on June 29. Photos by Mary Lake.

# Goat dairy intern becomes an intuitive goatherd

By Katie Sullivan  
Fat Toad Farm, Brookfield, VT

*Along with working at Fat Toad Farm, Katie shepherds her own sheep just next door at Sheep and Pickle Farm.*

I wasn't sure about the goats at first. My earliest experience of goats involved a visit to a petting zoo farm where twenty-five cents bought you a small paper bag of grain. Dad and I went into the goat pen. You know what comes next when the story involves a barnyard full of goats trained to pounce at the first rustle of brown paper.

Fast forward twenty years, and I have quit a human services job before I hit serious burnout. I am starting my first day as an intern at Fat Toad Farm, a Vermont goat dairy specializing in goat's milk caramel and fresh chevre. It is a cold morning in early March. Far from my memory of the goat-mugging my father barely survived, the girls were dozing peacefully, obese with pregnancy.

Fat Toad Farm knows how to get an intern hooked. Within days, the peaceful dozing and cud-chewing turns into restless labor as goat after goat pushes up one, two or three damp little kids. The brisk maternal licking and the brisk intern toweling effectively encourages bonding for moms and interns alike. I felt



grateful for the unique friendliness that goats alone exhibit among livestock. Instead of chasing struggling goats around the barn, they all but come to use for assistance.

All of that bonding in March primed me for the long hours of production that goes into our caramel and cheese products. I loved the goats enough to climb high hills in summer where they were grazing our neighbors' land to keep it open and in active agriculture. It kept me buoyant as I described for the hundredth time how our milking parlor worked to tourists, some of whom could no longer understand the cycles of birth, milk, grazing, fall, slaughter and life that their ancestors surely knew intuitively.

Meanwhile, I watched my baby goats grow from tender bunnies-on-stilts to swift and naughty little doelings. In the fall, they bred and this spring I welcomed another generation onto the farm in my new capacity as an employee. The only time I recall the petting zoo incident is when I pour grain from the bulk bin for the milk room, delivered via the barnyard. You can picture what happens in a barnyard full of goats trained to the swish of grain pouring from a bulk bin.

*Photo submitted by Fat Toad Farm*

From the editor:

## Where did the summer go?

By Mary Lake

My summer was spent in the cutting room at the Royal Butcher in Braintree, Vt. It is a 40°F room, with white plastic walls, fluorescent lights and stainless steel tables holding large white cutting boards. Sounds pretty boring, right?

It wasn't. It feels like maybe just two or so weeks ago that I moved from Waitsfield to Brookfield to be closer to my new home and family: The Royal Butcher. But, that was May. And, now, six months later, I feel completely embedded in the Royal Butcher team of skilled workers, who feel to me more like brothers, a few uncles, a couple aunts and one generous and humble father.

From 7 a.m. to about 3 p.m., I bustled about that cutting room five days a week ripping, pulling, cutting, slicing, lifting and sorting various forms and cuts of meat. No bikini lines for me this summer - not even a farmer's tan - just very toned arms and a strong appetite for steaks.

When I think of the thousands and thousands of pounds of meat that passed through my hands each week, my jaw drops a little and my eyes widen.

A lot of beautiful animals were processed, and a lot of top quality Vermont meat was sent to markets, farmstands, restaurants, weddings and homes. A lot of people were fed really great food this summer.

And, I was happy to play a small part of it.

Most of the meat I cut in the past six months was beef, though the intention of this intensive meat-cutting summer was to learn how to cut lamb, chevon and pork in preparation for the opening of the Royal Butcher's second kill floor, cutting room and cooling capacity for small animals.

The meat cutter I apprenticed with assured me that if I could cut beef, moving on to lamb, chevon and pork would be a breeze. He was right. Not only does cutting those smaller animals seem easy, it is enjoyable and I feel I have the space and confidence to focus on my technique, style and quality. I am loving meat cutting and looking forward to a career of it and endless learning about livestock, grass and cuisine.

The 40°F room looks slightly less appealing as the mornings get colder. But I have ample layers of wool to keep my body warm and primed for a full fall and winter of meat processing.

I hope you'll visit me at the Royal Butcher and take a look at the progress we are making with the facility expansion.

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## Annual Meeting & Meat-Up Events

### Sunday, November 4

10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.  
Annual Meeting starts at  
12:30 p.m.

\$10 for members, \$35 for non-members, lunch included

Hannaford Career Center in  
Middlebury, VT  
51 Charles Avenue, about a  
half mile south of the town  
center off Route 7

The Annual Meeting is the best time to show your support for the VSGA and offer ideas for the coming year or just chat with fellow shepherds over great food. Last year, we matched the annual meeting with the Meat-Up event and received positive feedback on the meat producing and processing workshops. So, we are doing it again this year with a focus on sausage making and new processing initiatives and opportunities in Vermont.

Don't miss this event! These sorts of get-togethers are what the VSGA is all about: improving the sheep and goat community and markets and spreading the joy of raising such beautiful animals. See you there!

# WWOOFers at Grand View Farm bring working hands and friendship

By Kim Goodling, Vermont Grand View Farm, Washington, VT

Farms all across the globe welcome hundreds of volunteer workers year-round through an organization called WWOOF (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms). Willing workers are matched with host farms in an "exchange of education and culture." Volunteers, known as "WWOOFers", trade their labor for food, lodging, and education on host farms. WWOOF maintains a Web site, where host farms post profiles, describing their farm, location, and expectations. Workers use the Web site directory to contact hosts they are interested in working for. WWOOFers work 4-6 hours a day alongside of their hosts, becoming an integral part of the farm. In return, the host farm provides educational opportunities for the WWOOFers in sustainable farming practices.

For the past two years, our farm has welcomed WWOOFers during the summer months. At our farm, the WWOOFers stay in a tent and have access to a bathroom inside our house. They spend time with our family in both work and leisure. We provide food for them to prepare their own breakfast and lunch, and they join our family in our evening meal. They are expected to work for 6 hours a day, Tuesday through Saturday. Each WWOOFer must read and sign a contract with us, and provide work references and a photograph of themselves. In the contract, we clearly state our "house rules", duration of stay, and expectations. Once references are checked, dates are set for their arrival.

This past July, we had a married couple stay with us for three weeks. They contacted us because they were eager to learn about sheep and fiber, as well as our bed and breakfast business. Our first day with them,



we learned what skills they brought with them and what skills they were hoping to gain while on our farm. We learned that they came with some basic construction knowledge as well as experience with slip form masonry. The wife was an artist and also had marketing experience. All of these were skills, which would be useful to us.

Before they arrived, we had compiled a list of things that we wanted help with. Each morning, over breakfast, we would discuss the chores for the day and what needed to be done. They learned how to skirt fleeces, dye yarn with locally grown plants, maintain pastures, and monitor the health of our flock of Romney sheep. They also helped us design and build a portable chicken coop, as well as build a stone pizza oven in our garden. The wife also spent time painting a yarn sign, and working on some marketing brochures.

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The WWOOFers took full advantage of their time with us. Even when they were not working, they were constantly seeking more knowledge. In the evenings, they perused our bookshelf, borrowing books about greenhouses, raising pigs, constructing out buildings, and square foot gardening. I spent time with the wife in our fiber studio, teaching her how to weave and felt. At the end of each day, they would write journal entries, taking notes on their projects for the day.

During their three weeks with us, there was an exchange of knowledge and lasting friendships were formed. The WWOOFers lived and worked alongside of us, becoming a part of our family. They helped us accomplish more in three weeks' time than we could have accomplished in the entire summer. We look forward to watching them as they begin their own homestead in the future.



Visit [www.woofusa.org/About\\_WWOOFUSA](http://www.woofusa.org/About_WWOOFUSA) for more information about participating in the WWOOF program.

*Photos submitted by Vermont Grand View Farm*

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### Vermont Sheep & Goat Association

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