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Off the Menu: Great Goat Delights

—By Karen Leland

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Laura Howard, founder of Laloo's, and friend

When my friend Steven told me a few years ago that goat farming was going to be really big, I laughed. "You're crazy," I said. "Why would anyone care about goat farming?" Crazy indeed.

By now, the explosion in artisan goat cheeses is old hat, but last month my husband came home with a gourmet goat's milk ice cream. Now, I'm a big fan of goat cheese but goat-inspired desserts? No thank you. Oh, how I would eat those words — a whole carton of them.

Laloo's (pronounced Lay-Looz) goat's milk ice cream is one of the most unusual I have ever tasted: it is premium without being pretentious. Even the look of the packaging — a country quilt-like pattern — tells me it does not take itself too seriously. If you are worried about the "goaty" taste that can be so appealing in a cheese, but unpleasant in an ice cream, relax, this is every bit as sweet and delicious as any artisan ice cream available.

As ice cream goes, Laloo's is not only delightfully good, but also reasonably good for you. Goat's milk is low in lactose and an excellent substitute for those who can't tolerate milk. Even if you can eat dairy, Laloo's contains almost half the calories of most premium ice cream and is lower in fat.

Laura Howard, the founder of the company, embodies the American success story. For 15 years she had an enviable career in advertising and film, but a business trip to Tuscany in 2000 took her in a different direction. Tuscany opened Howard's eyes to the world of "Slow Food."

"From gelato bars to pizza parlors, I couldn't escape conversations about food and life," says Howard. "The idea is to preserve tradition and quality in the cultivation, preparation, and consumption, of food. 'Slow Food' equals culinary pleasure. I knew that food was going to play a prominent role in my next chapter."

Serendipitously, Howard — a huge fan of Ben & Jerry's ice cream — went on a dairy-free diet around the same time, and needed to find a way to satisfy her cravings. The result was the creation of an all goat's milk ice cream: In 2004, Laloo's was born. Today, you can find it at grocery and specialty food stores from Hawaii to New York.

Laloo's
GOAT'S MILK ICE CREAM COMPANY

Located in Petaluma, Laloo's uses all natural ingredients from local sources. Handmade in small batches and slow cooked, this award-winning ice cream comes in seven flavors including Chocolate Cabernet, Strawberry Darling, and Pumpkin Spice. I had no choice but to feed the hunger of my journalistic appetite and taste them all. Here are my favorites:

Deep Chocolate, which I fell deeply in love with, is made from 77 percent pure Scharf-ferberger cacao. The dark, intense chocolate taste starts at the tongue and then stages an invasion into the entire mouth. Not overly sweet, the flavor goes beyond rich to complex with its subtle tangy undertones.

The Black Mission Fig is down to earth and crunchy with pieces of figs throughout. It combines the dense honey-dripped flavor of a dried fig with the sweet and slightly astringent taste of a fresh apple.

Molasses Tspycake lives up to its name. The first time I tasted it, childhood memories of licking brown sugar off of the spoon my mother was using to make molasses sugar cookies floated to mind. With just a hint of cinnamon this flavor is crisp, comforting and homey.

Finally, no taste-testing of an ice cream would be complete without the requisite basic. Vanilla Snowflake seduces you with a creaminess that's intense but not heavy. It smells and tastes as if a fresh vanilla bean was opened up and poured right into the container.

One note: Although I really wanted to like it — because the name sounds so intriguing — I didn't care for the Chocolate Cabernet. I found the wine swirls throughout a bit gooey and distracting.

Hitting the stores this summer is a new line of goat's milk frozen yogurt. Initial flavors will include Brownie and Clyde. I, for one, am polishing my silver spoon already.

Goat Products By the Bay

With our abundance of small farms and artisan manufacturers, the San Francisco Bay Area is home to a variety of gourmet goat products. Two other goat milk treat producers in the area are:

Andante Dairy of Santa Rosa, which sells its cheeses every Saturday from 9am to 3pm at the San Francisco Ferry Plaza Farmer's Market. One of the dairy's most interesting offerings is Figo, a combination of cow and goat milk cheeses. Other ingredients include Sauvignon Blanc and fresh figs.

Redwood Hill Farms makes a luscious European-style goat milk yogurt. All the flavors from Vanilla to Cranberry-Orange are sweetened with natural fruit juice concentrate. The products are available at Bay Area natural food stores and the Berkeley Farmers' Market Saturdays from 10am to 3pm.