



Cricket Hill

Family finds home, farm and mountain hideaway

By Judith M. Saul

Ten years ago my husband Henry and I moved to our log-home, mountain hideaway in North Carolina. We named it Cricket Hill because of the nightly serenade by the crickets. We were not thinking of a farm, only a quiet, peaceful place to live and work. At first we located our business (computer services and electronic repairs) about seven miles away on a major highway, but in 2000, we relocated it to a building on our five acres to simplify our life and to enjoy more completely our evolving farm.

We had come to the mountain with ducks, dogs and cats. We bought two Alpine dairy goats in 1997 to clear land for a horse and to provide us with milk. Until our move here, we had never heard of dairy goats. What a wonderful surprise they were! Turn out we'll never get the horse because we fell in love with Faith and Hope—our dairy girls. Both of us are city-born and bred and had never owned livestock. I had lived on a small farm on Long Island when I was young and only knew how to grow vegetables and fruit; this was a grand adventure by comparison. Henry and our grandson, Austin, built a small shelter and fenced in a small paddock. Faith and Hope grew; in January of 1998 we bred Hope, who delivered two beautiful bucks the following June. In the interim, Henry had added another stall and a milkroom to the shelter and added another paddock (we now have four).

Not knowing how to sell bucks, we gave those two away after eight weeks. I started learning how to make yogurt and cheese, and in the fall we bred Faith. That became our cycle: Breed one goat a year and have two to milk since the other one's lactation keeps right on going. Now I make 10 kinds of cheese, yogurt, butter, ice cream and also milk paint! We sold the kids each year until 2003 when we kept a doe, Lovelight, to be a replacement for the older ones someday. This spring we kept one of Lovelight's does, Sugar Plum, which we have recently bred. That will give us two young does to breed and milk in the future. Faith and Hope will remain to grace our paddocks as they age. This isn't particularly profitable, but they have earned it.

In 2003, we also added a small mixed-breed chicken flock. We started with Plymouth Rocks and Red Stars and this past April added three Rhode Island Reds. Our chicken house has windows on the south and is warmed in the winter by the sun. In the summer the trees provide shade and it stays cool. Our chickens are excellent producers even through the winter. However, entertainment is their real purpose as they free-range about the farm.

Buildings became our continuing project as, in addition to the barn, chicken house and office/shop, we added yet another addition of two stalls, hallway and hay area to the barn, a hay shelter, woodshop and greenhouse. The woodshop adds to our income as Henry makes his rustic furniture there and the solar greenhouse enables us to grow cabbage and lettuce all winter.

This lovely piece of land has two streams, woods and pastures, but no level areas, so we grow vegetables, fruits and flowers in raised beds made from felled tree trunks. When a trunk rots, we place a new one right on top. The slopes that are cleared are also terraced with logs. The goats and chickens have enriched the soil with their manure and nothing is ever wasted. The farm barely breaks even each year, but our good health and beautiful environment give us more profit than we ever imagined. We have been truly blessed!

Judith Saul's Reader Resume first ran in the March/April 2007 issue of Hobby Farms. Subscribe today!