

Mooooove over cows, the goats are coming!



A house full of happy kids: Melissa Lewis with Mason, 2, Paddy, 4, and one of the 50 goats she is raising for milk production in her venture, Buddy Goat.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #8F9F59;"] G
[/dropcap]iven Allansford is deep in cow country, **Melissa Lewis** is somewhat of a black sheep by using her 20-acre Allansford property to breed and milk goats.

Melissa, who grew up on a dairy farm near Mortlake and is a qualified animal nutritionist, has spent the past 18 months building up a herd of about 50 goats with a mix of Toggenburg (brown and white in colour), Saanens (all white) and British Alpine (black and white) that are all known for their high levels of milk production.

And it is the raw goat's milk – and byproducts including cheese, yoghurt and icecream – that Melissa is most interested

in developing through her **Buddy Goat** brand, rather than the more conventional path of using the milk to create soaps and cosmetics.

Despite there reportedly being 19 goats on board the First Fleet in 1788, Australia has never really embraced the idea of enjoying a chilled glass of fresh goat's milk in the morning.

"It's funny, but the thought of drinking goat's milk puts a lot of people off and they are far more comfortable with goat's cheese, yet there are so many health benefits to goat's milk," Melissa explains.



Melissa Lewis with the former cow dairy that last September was converted to suit the much smaller goats.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #8F9F59;"] M
[/dropcap]elissa experienced these benefits first hand when her first son, Paddy, 4, developed asthma several years ago and she changed his diet from cow's to goat's milk. The asthma attacks stopped.

"We forget that goat's milk is actually consumed more than any

other milk around the world. It is easier to digest and a lot of people who can't handle cow's milk can drink goat's milk," Melissa says.

She tells the story of one man who was intolerant to cows milk but tried her goats milk and, for the first time in many years, was able to eat a bowl of breakfast cereal with milk. Another woman uses Melissa's raw goat's milk to bathe her young daughter who suffers severe eczema.

Most of Melissa's raw goat's milk is sold by a distributor into Melbourne and Geelong where there is a big demand among particularly the Greek and Italian communities for goat's milk with which to make cheese.



Paddy takes an udderly different view of where milk comes from, having been raised on goat's milk.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #8F9F59;"] D
[/dropcap]ue to stringent food regulations, Melissa is currently only permitted to sell her products marked for

“cosmetic use only” and “not for human consumption”, but how customers choose to use the milk is ultimately their decision.

Having spent the past couple of years proving there is a growing market for goat’s milk, Melissa is planning to move into the next stage of commercial production.

Last September she and her husband Darcy, a fencing contractor, converted a cow dairy into a goat milking dairy where her girls line up each day – or twice a day when the milk production is high. They also plan to transform part of a large shed on their property into a commercial kitchen.

It is a significant investment, with a pasteuriser costing around \$25,000 alone.

For Melissa, however, it is all about diversification. Apart from her own property, Melissa and her sister **Nicole Ritchie** run a 200-acre farm at Mortlake, across the road from their parent’s 1000-acre property where the sisters also agist cattle.

Two young sons and another baby on the way have also made life a little busier for Melissa, but she still has plenty of energy and enthusiasm for her new venture.

“It’s about trying new things, seeing where they go and diversifying, because you can’t survive off farming alone any more.”

[box type="bio"] For more information on Buddy Goat, you can contact Melissa at goatsmilk@live.com.au or find her on Facebook [here](#). [/box]



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Udderly beautiful



Issy, the founding goat of Make Mine Milk.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"]A [dropcap] **RATHER GORGEOUS** looking goat called Isabelle is the silent partner behind the skin creams, soaps and lip balms of Make Mine Milk.

Make Mine Milk, based in Colac, grew from challenging circumstances several years ago, when sisters Donna Manders and Marlene Holohan were searching for gentle skin products that could be used by their terminally ill mother.

"It seemed that everything we bought had a bad reaction, because of the chemicals and additives in many commercial products," Donna said.

"Once we started to read labels and ask questions, we began to wonder why you would put some of these things on your body."

At about the same time, Donna decided to leave her highly paid, full-time public service job for a complete treechange and the sisters, together with their families, moved to western Victoria.

This is when Isabelle, a British Alpine, came into their lives after Donna spotted her in terrible condition at the saleyards and demanded she be allowed to take her home.

“I had no idea about goats at all but that is really where it all began,” Donna said.



[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"]T[/dropcap]he combination of Issy and the search for skin products came together, with Donna and Marlene deciding to make their *own* soaps and creams using Issy's goat's milk. There was just one catch: they had no idea how to do it.

“We aren't industrial chemists, that's for sure, but we spent a lot of time on Google, a lot of time asking other people questions and a lot of time making mistakes through trial and error,” Donna said with a laugh.

After months of experimentation – and testing on humans – they cracked a winning formula that is based on each product being made up of at least 50 per cent goat's milk and using only ascorbic acid as a preservative.

Not long before their mother's death, the pair decided to go public with their products and held a small market stall at the Birregurra Festival in 2010. Their wholesome, ethical approach to production struck a chord and they have been part of a western district market circuit ever since.

"Our motto is 'we grow it, we milk it, we make it' and that pretty much sums up our philosophy," Donna said.



The soap test: does it hold together in the shower?
Yes!

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"]W[/dropcap]hile the goat herd had expanded considerably in recent years, from a single goat to 23, Make Mine Milk is mindful of staying small.

"We only take orders that match our resources because, to me, there is a fine line between expansion and exploitation," Donna said.

There are plans, however, to introduce a milking sheep to the herd. One wonders what Issy will think of that...

For more information on products, please visit the Make Mine

Milk [website](#).

[box type="download"] Make Mine Milk will be at the Birregurra Festival on October 12-13. [/box]