

Ron Garthwaite, owner of Claravale Farm, watches over the cows at his La Selva Beach dairy Sunday. Claravale also has a site near Green Valley Road that is the only dairy in Watsonville.

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# In the raw

*Dairying*  
Family-owned dairy keeps to its old-fashioned ways

By AMANDA SCHOENBERG  
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From the cow's udder at Claravale Farm in Watsonville to Santa Cruz health food stores can take as little as one hour.

Clearly, calling this milk fresh is an understatement.

Owner Ron Garthwaite operates the only dairy in Watsonville, and the only one he knows that produces raw, unprocessed milk in California. He works from two locations — a small farm on the grounds of the Monterey Bay Academy in La Selva Beach and his home property off Green Valley Road.

Dairying started as a hobby for Garthwaite, who began volunteering at Wilder Ranch in Santa Cruz to explore his interest in dairy his-

tory.

He left his work as a genetic researcher and in 1997 purchased the Claravale Farm in Los Gatos from dairyman Ken Peake, who had owned it since 1927.

In the face of a dying industry, Peake had kept his small dairy alive by selling off land in the high-priced area.

When Garthwaite purchased the failing dairy, he moved cows and equipment to Watsonville. He thought he would have to diversify quickly, but demand for unproc-

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— Ron Garthwaite, owner of Claravale Farms

essed milk was beyond his wildest expectations.

"Sales just took off and we haven't been able to keep with it," he said.

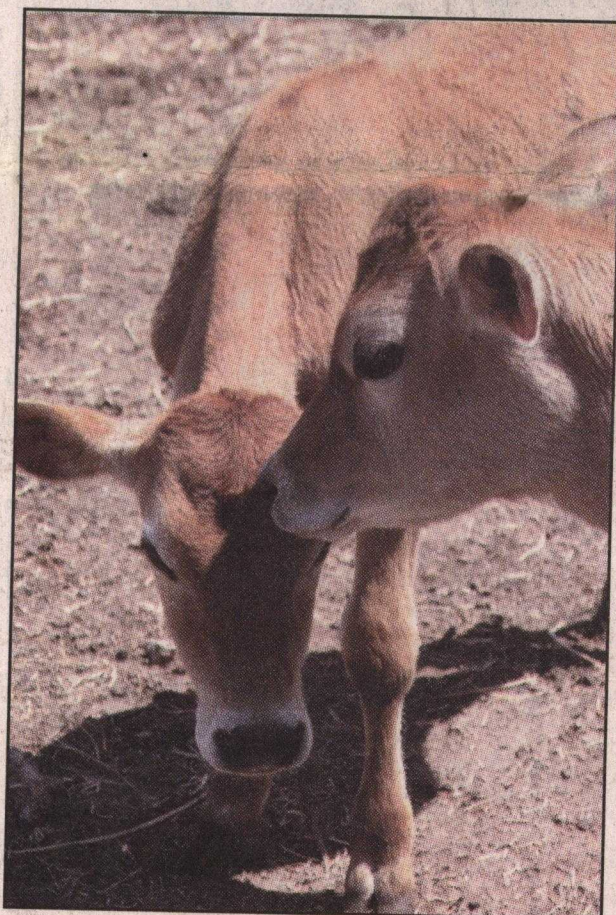
In fact, it is large dairies that keep him in business, he said during a Sunday visit to the small dairy, with less than 50 cows.

"The more they jerk around with milk, the better I do," he said.

Claravale customers include purists who want local, non-processed

Calves nuzzle each other at the Claravale Farm location near Green Valley Road in Watsonville on Sunday.

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# CLARAVALE

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food, old-timers who know the difference between farm milk and the processed supermarket variety and foreigners nostalgic for "real milk," Garthwaite said.

Milk is, well, milk at Claravale Farm. It is not pasteurized, homogenized or processed and no natural nutrients have been stripped from it, Garthwaite said.

He uses only Jersey cows, about half the size of Holsteins, which most dairies use to produce higher quantities of milk that is more watery.

On a recent visit, Garthwaite and wife Collette Cassidy petted friendly brown calves and a few goats near their home. At the Monterey Bay Academy site, cows roamed around a pen overlooking the Monterey Bay.

At the dairy, four cows were milked at each spot in the "milk-ing parlor." A pipe transported milk into a processing room, known here simply as the "milk room."

The major production difference between Claravale and larger dairies comes after milking. After milk is piped into a 300-gallon refrigeration tank and cooled, it is measured into bottles.

"Our processing is just putting it into a bottle," Garthwaite said with a smile. "This is real, honest milk."

Large dairies that dominate the industry use producer-driven techniques such as adding synthetic vitamins, cooking milk to make it last longer and homogenizing it to prevent cream from rising, Garthwaite said.

Garthwaite has been turning back the clock on the small dairy industry, which was thriving in Santa Cruz County at the turn of the century, he said.

By the 1960s, people became convinced that buying farm milk was "old-fashioned." Hundreds of small dairies shut down.

"Everybody wanted to be modern," Garthwaite said. "They didn't want local food anymore. That's when the small dairies started going out of business."

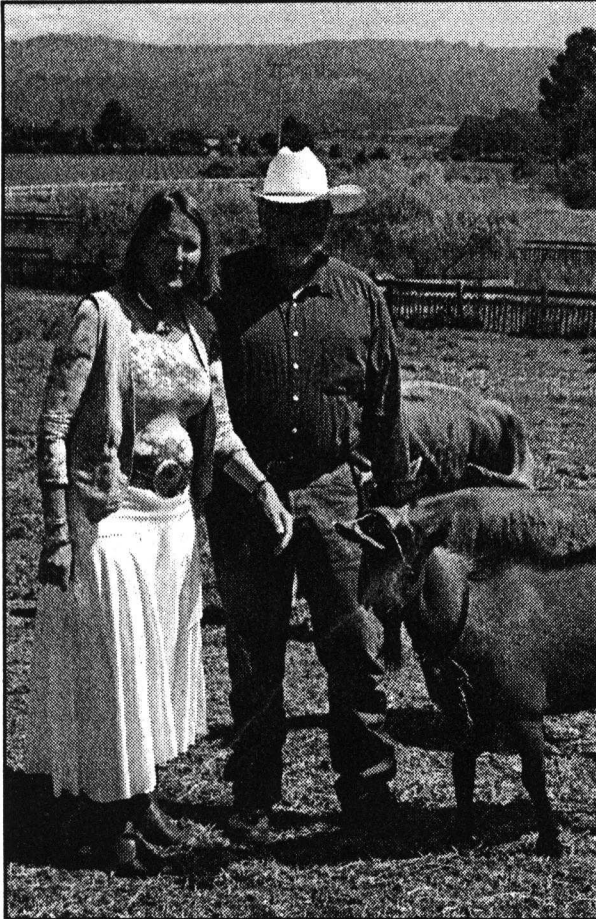
Garthwaite is intent on keeping his operation small and old-fashioned.

The bottling machine he uses is from the 1920s, while a cream separator is from the '40s.

"We avoid new technology like the plague," he said.

Eventually, he hopes to expand Claravale to a maximum of 50 cows at the La Selva location, and another 50 at the other property.

In the next year, Garthwaite hopes to open a cheese room on his home property. He is also con-



**Ron Garthwaite, owner of Claravale Farm, and his wife, Collette Cassidy, greet some of their goats and calves Sunday at their property off Green Valley Road.**

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sidering an ice cream line.

Cassidy, an acupuncturist in Santa Cruz, often touts to clients the benefits of unprocessed raw milk.

Last week she gave one client who suffered from rheumatoid arthritis a supply of unprocessed milk. Within two days, the client came back for more with rave reviews, Cassidy said.

"It's a really complete food," she said, adding that the raw milk has 11 fatty acids, many of which are removed during processing at larger dairies.

And the couple practices what they preach. Garthwaite drinks three quarts per day, while Cassidy drinks about two.

Although Claravale Farm uses no pesticides, no growth hormones and only organic feed, Garthwaite eschews the organic label.

"The more huge corporations get into organic, the more standards are compromised," Garthwaite said. "We don't want to be associated with huge dairies that produce lousy milk."

As a raw milk provider, the farm is required by the Department of Agriculture to have cleaner facilities than do larger dairies. It also uses environmentally friendly practices, such as creating compost from manure and using returnable glass bottles.

Claravale Farm milk is available in Santa Cruz at Whole Foods, New Leaf and Staff of Life and in Aptos at Aptos Natural Foods. No stores in Watsonville carry the milk, although it can be purchased directly from the farm.

For more information or to schedule group tours, call 722-7779 or 789-9525.



**"Dry cows" not currently being used for milk chow down on alfalfa hay Sunday at the Claravale Farm dairy in La Selva Beach.**

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