



featured

Cody Country Bed and Biscuit owners

By Saige Albert

The Cody Country Bed and Biscuit might seem to be just an ordinary kennel for dogs and cats.

Animal-lover Leigh Dvarshkis (Da-var-sh-kiss) runs the 24 kennels and cat condos with the help of a full-time groomer. However, there is much more to the 6 acres than just cats and dogs – it's a combination of innovative strategies and experimental methods that occupy Leigh and Dick Dvarshkis' land on the outskirts of Cody.

Leigh manages the kennel, and Dick works away from home.

When they moved onto the land seven years ago, the couple had hopes of eventually producing much of their own food. They are also interested in possible new profitable enterprises. The family researches new ventures and then tests them on their small acreage to see if they are a good fit and can withstand the challenging Wyoming weather.

With the help of their 13-year-old son, Dane, Leigh

and Dick have been steadily moving forward. As they began talking about their plans for their acreage, Leigh stressed they want to add irrigation and ponds and organic matter to improve the soil.

Interest in Miniatures

When they started exploring different enterprises for their land, Leigh and Dick were particularly interested in miniature livestock and began looking into miniature cows bred primarily for personal meat production.

Leigh was adamant they did not want the cute, fuzzy miniature animals to serve as pets.

"Finding true, functional miniatures is hard," Leigh says. However, after much research, they found a carcass-oriented miniature Hereford.

The Dvarshkises heard about a number of benefits associated with investing in miniature Herefords. According to those promoting miniatures, more meat per acre can be produced, and cuts are only 6 to 7 percent smaller than traditional cattle.

The Dvarshkises say they are still sorting out the facts from the hype. They currently lease grazing for two miniature cattle from March through September, mainly to keep the irrigated grass and forbs under control and to explore options for future personal beef production.

To complement the cattle, the Dvarshkises also run six breeding sheep and a few club lambs. Sheep prefer to eat broadleaf plants while cattle prefer grass – so the two species don't compete for preferred food sources. The Dvarshkis' also supplement animal feed with hay primarily during winter and spring months.

Rotate Grazing to Maintain Grass

To manage grazing, the family split a single 4-acre pasture into smaller 500- to 600-square-foot lots using electric fence wire. Using rotational grazing practices, Leigh and Dick believe they are utilizing their property as efficiently as possible while also allowing the animals to improve the soil by adding organic matter.



Miniature Herefords are bred for their carcass value.

landowners

diversify production on their 6 acres



The Dvarshkis family owns and raises livestock and vegetables on 6 acres near Cody.

"When we first started, we overgrazed our pasture," Leigh recalls. "Weeds thrived, but not much else did well."

By keeping livestock off pasture this year until everything seeded out, they rejuvenated the grasses. Animals are rotated to the next pasture every six to seven days to discourage overgrazing. The Dvarshkises also irrigate the pasture using two ditches: one in the middle and one on the south edge of the pasture to promote growth of enough grass to support the animals.

Have Goats for Milk

The Dvarshkis' also have three dwarf Nigerian milk goats. The family plans to use milk from these animals as replacement milk for their sheep herd and for making goat cheese.

The milk goats are a relatively new addition and are something they are trying out. The Dvarshkises anticipate they will be a positive addition, saying, "We didn't want a gallon of milk each day that we couldn't use. The dwarf goats will produce smaller amounts, so we get only what we need."

The Dvarshkis family raises broilers, turkeys, and

laying hens for meat and egg production. The chickens and turkeys, along with ducks and geese, roam freely on the property and eat weeds as well as insects. While the rest of the Cody area was experiencing a problem with grasshoppers last year, Leigh notes, "We didn't even know about the grasshopper phenomenon."

At the same time, they don't use any herbicides or fertilizers. The chickens, ducks, and geese take care of pulling weeds in the yard and add organic matter to the soil. A flock of 10 geese also roams the property, primarily to keep back

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predators. The geese are not used as a food source, and there has not been a single loss to coyotes or foxes since adding the geese to their flocks.

Add High Tunnels This Year

Operations are not limited to livestock. Two high tunnel greenhouses were constructed last winter and this spring after gleaning ideas from others in the community. The first greenhouse was planted in April. The plants weathered cold conditions and snow without any problems. At the end of summer, 7-foot stalks of corn and abundant tomatoes are among the many plants prospering. Their second greenhouse was completed later but is filled with salad items such as herbs, lettuce, spinach, carrots, and radish.

"The beauty of that hoop house is it's directly out my patio door so I can pick it right before I serve it," notes Leigh.

One challenge the Dvarshkis' faced in building their greenhouses is resilience to the windy Cody weather. The high tunnels have fared well and have served to keep out wildlife such as deer and raccoons that could have been a detriment to their crops, they say.

Dick admits, "It's not as efficient as it could be yet, but we are experimenting

to see what works out and what doesn't."

They will be able to more efficiently utilize greenhouse space by identifying plants that flourish.

The family also plans to integrate a series of fruit trees but have had difficulty because of deer. The wildlife tends to destroy the trees, eating bark, young leaves, and fruit.

"We've had to get creative with our fruits and vegetables," Leigh says, as many of the plants they are trying are not traditionally grown in this area due to short growing seasons.

The high tunnel greenhouses provide a longer growing season, but Leigh and Dick are also willing to try new varieties of plants. They realize a few seasons of experimentation will help determine the best plants to grow.

Leigh and Dick have big plans and are looking forward to adding a pond and continuing to experiment with various plants and methods in the high tunnel greenhouses. The pond will serve as an additional water source for their animals and potential water for irrigation.

They also want to install an underground drip irrigation system to help conserve water. Existing irrigation systems would be utilized to develop this system.



High tunnel greenhouses extend the growing season and protect crops from wildlife.



The Dvarshkis family keeps three miniature Nigerian milk goats to provide replacement milk for lambs.

Saige Albert was the Park County University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service and 4-H summer intern. The Dvarshkises live outside of Cody and can be reached at the Cody Country Bed and Biscuit at (307) 587-1073.