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## Georgia's newest cheesemaker operates in a more urban setting

By ELIZABETH LEE  
 The Atlanta Journal-Constitution  
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Under the flight path of the world's busiest airport, one of the world's oldest crafts takes shape in curds and whey.

Georgia's newest artisan cheesemaker, Mary Rigdon of Decimal Place Farm, turns out creamy chèvre, feta and tuma, a mozzarella-type cheese. Rigdon's dairy, supplied by a small herd of Saanen goats, received state certification earlier this month.



Elizabeth Lee/AJC  
 (ENLARGE)

Mary Rigdon (left) just received state certification as one of only three artisanal cheesemakers in Georgia.

For Rigdon, it's the culmination of 13 years of dreaming and working to meet the state's rigorous standards for dairies, printed in a book more than two inches thick.

She joins just two other licensed artisan cheesemakers in Georgia, including Sweet Grass Dairy, and is the only one in an urban setting.

"After all these years, it was a pretty big shock," Rigdon says. "I just had to contemplate it for a little while."

Now she's springing into action, adding marketer to her already crowded resume. Rigdon is juggling duties as a mother while running the dairy, trying to get chefs and stores interested in stocking the cheese while helping her children prepare for camping trips, supervising field trips to the farm and milking 23 goats twice a day.



Elizabeth Lee/AJC  
 (ENLARGE)

Rigdon turns out creamy chèvre, feta and tuma, a mozzarella-type cheese.

She has started selling the cheese on Thursdays at the East Atlanta Village Market, at \$5 for a half-pound. The feta and chèvre also are stocked at Alon's Bakery & Market in Morningside and Dunwoody, and at Rainbow Natural Foods near Emory University.

Rigdon makes the cheese on her and husband Ed's 18-acre Conley farm, tucked away at the back of a subdivision. They purchased the land 13 years ago, moving from a Grant Park house on a tenth of an acre. Decimal Place Farm is a nod to that house, where she lived when she first got interested in raising dairy goats.

Two part-time helpers assist Rigdon as she works with the smallest dairy equipment she could find, sourced secondhand from around the country over the years as she saved money, raised her daughter and son, and worked toward her dream.

The cheese is made in a small block building next to the barn, just a short walk from the Rigdons' home. Goats graze in pastures nearby, and except for the occasional roar of an airplane, there's little hint that the farm is just 10 miles from downtown Atlanta.

Most dairies operate on a much larger scale than Decimal Place Farm, which is why finding equipment was such a challenge. Rigdon doesn't want to get any bigger. On her farm, the number of goats is about right for grazing on the privet, honeysuckle and other edibles that grow abundantly.

Laura Perry of Virginia-Highland sampled the chèvre and tuma recently at the East Atlanta market.

"The goat cheese is so good, but the mozzarella is fantastic," Perry said.

She bought the tuma, planning to serve it on toast with tomatoes and perhaps some olive oil and basil.

Another connection for Rigdon, another step closer to a dream fulfilled.

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