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Cream of the Crop

Jordan couple makes farm-fresh yogurt with no artificial anything

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By Margaret McCormick
Food editor

Bruce and Meg Schader live and work in the country, but get more culture than city slickers.

Make that cultures. Cultures such as lactobacillus bulgaricus and streptococcus thermophilus two of the five live, active cultures that go into their farmstead yogurt, contributing to its tangy taste and digestibility.

"I know what to do with them," Bruce Schader says with a laugh. "I can't pronounce any of them."

The Schaders own and operate Wake Robin Farm, which takes its name from a bright red flower that grows wild on their land. They have been raising vegetables and cut flowers there, on Brutus Road in Jordan, since 1999.

Last year, the Schaders added eight Jersey cows and a small creamery. In October, the U.S. Department of Agriculture awarded them a grant, and they began making and marketing plain and vanilla-flavored whole-milk yogurt.

"This is the first year we won't be growing any vegetables," Meg Schader says. "We're focused on the dairy now."

They sure are. The Schaders, just the two of them, milk the cows, pasteurize the milk and process about 600 quarts of European-style, cream-on-top yogurt each week.

Containers are labeled by hand and delivered in person to a growing list of local stores.

They also set up shop and offer tastings each Saturday at the Regional Market in Syracuse, where Meg Schader says it's not unusual for them to hear: "I don't even like yogurt, but I like this."

"We take that as a compliment," she adds.

If you've never had fresh, all-natural yogurt before, you're in for a treat and some surprises. It's thinner than mass-market brands such as Dannon and Stonyfield Farm, which in terms of consistency seem more like pudding. Because the Wake Robin yogurts are made with unhomogenized whole milk, the cream rises

to the top, adding a thick, rich layer to sink your spoon into.

The vanilla yogurt is sweetened subtly with maple syrup (about 3 tablespoons per

container, Meg Schader says). It's all pure: no hormones, antibiotics, stabilizers or thickeners - no artificial ingredients, period. A 1-cup serving contains approximately 200 calories and 11 grams of fat.

Wendy Meyerson, owner of Natur-Tyme, a health-food store at 5898 Bridge St., East Syracuse, isn't much of a yogurt-eater herself but says her staff and customers like the taste of Wake Robin Farm yogurts and appreciate that they are from a local source.

"Yogurt is everywhere," Meyerson says. "This gives you a sense of freshness. The connection that it's local is really powerful for people."

For their customers and for her family, Meg Schader makes it her business to connect their yogurt to her cooking and baking.

She makes yogurt parfaits with fresh fruit and another local ingredient: granola from Mountain Rise Organics, in Naples. She drains the liquid from both plain and vanilla yogurt and makes yogurt cheeses to spread on crackers and breads. She makes spanakopita, smoothies, flaxseed banana bread with yogurt, blueberry yogurt pie - the list goes on.

Plain yogurt can be used as a substitute for milk, buttermilk and other liquids in baked goods and also can be used in bread making, she says.

"When you have it all the time, you figure out ways to use it," Schader says.

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