No ‘kidding’ around — Farm has ‘Big Picture’ on goats

BY GEORGETTE GOUEIA

In “So Big,” a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel about the sterile nature of greed, Edna Ferber identifies two kinds of people — wheat, those who express their creativity through nature; and emeralds, those who express it through the arts. But perhaps there is a third kind — those who bridge the two.

At Big Picture Farm, an 86-acre spread in Townshend, Vermont, Louisa Conrad and husband Lucas Farrell raise goats to make hard cheese, dark chocolate truffles and flavored caramels made from their milk. But the couple also has their artistic side. Lucas has an MFA in poetry from the University of Montana, while Louisa holds the same degree from the California Institute of the Arts. The daughter of Bedford-based painter Whit Conrad — who has a show at The Lionheart Gallery in Pound Ridge — Louisa also embroiders luxury tea towels that are sold at ABC Carpet & Home in Manhattan and online.

Big Picture Farm was the impetus for the road trip my sister Gina (wheat) and I (emeralds) took with Fausto, her ever-feisty Chihuahua mix, on a rainy, spring weekend when the trees, still filling in the variegated green and pastel landscape, had the feathery quality of American Impressionist paintings. We had first heard of Big Picture Farm last fall when we stayed at Four Columns — a serene inn owned by the Greenwich Hospitality Group — for a story that appeared in WAG’s December issue, but the timing was off for a farm visit. I could see my sister’s disappointment and was determined to make good on a promise that we would return to the inn in the spring to do a story on the farm, which I knew would also appeal to our equally animal-loving publisher, Dee DelBello.

The farm, made up of six cheery red buildings, lies midway up a high road that winds about Peak-ed Mountain. There Louisa and Lucas — with a full-time staff of seven and some part-timers — have a herd of about 40 milking goats, including Saanens, Alpines and floppy-eared Nubians. Our visit was some three weeks past kidding season, when some 50 to 60 babies were born — although Gina was thrilled to hold a newborn that had arrived in the world just hours before we visited. Kids have a five-month gestation. Louisa said. A buck visits — the farm keeps no males — around Nov. 12. And around April 12, offspring begin appearing.

About a half-dozen female kids are separated from their mothers to be bottle fed so that they are docile enough to be handled by the goat-herders, mostly young women. (Though goats have a gentle temperament, they would be too skittish otherwise, Louisa
Coyotes at bay. The goats return in the morning for

of Great Pyrenees, named Elvis and Josie, who keep

watched over by two Maremmas, the Italian version

the mountain once kidding season is over. They are

different than cows. “They’re like pets,” Louisa said.

Easier to break down, easier to digest. For

confections, it has a smoother, more velvety tex-

ture.” We can attest to that, having sampled some

luscious dark chocolate truffles as well as creamy,

dark chocolate-covered caramels — featuring cocoa

butter drawings of does with names like Junebug,

Manhattan, Eclipse, Fern and Cicada. (Familial lines

are named for children’s book heroines and artists:

Mathilda and Cy Twombly, anyone?)

That’s the other aspect of goat appeal — the human

factor. Though the males like to test themselves and

punch above their weight class by butting heads,

and Brattleboro Food Co-op. The goat milk is also

goes into a cheese vat where it is warmed, rennet is

added and the curds are separated from the whey,

which is fed to the farm’s three little pigs, the lat-
est addition to the menagerie. (There are also 30

chickens and a rascally tomcat named Thunder.)
The hard cheese ages four months and is sold

mainly locally to the Londonderry Farmer’s Market

near Pompeii (Greco-Roman art being my idea of

heaven). There my sister, more of a Modernist, en-

joyed seeing the nautical ladies’ room and mythic

men’s room by contemporary artists Ellen Driscoll

and Sally Skoglund respectively.

We came to help them make cheese, and they

said we could bring some goats;” Louisa recalled. She

and Lucas have owned Big Picture since 2012.

As we took our leave, my wheat sister — oh, the

irony, as she is gluten-free — congratulated me on

stepping, gingerly, out of my comfort zone. But my

sister had done the same for me. On our journey up

to Vermont, we stopped for savory soups and salads

at Haymarket Café in Northampton, Massachusetts,

where we also briefly toured the Smith College Mu-

seum of Art’s small but fine exhibit on Nero’s villas

(Scythian art being my idea of heaven). There my sister, more of a Modernist, en-

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men’s room by contemporary artists Ellen Driscoll

and Sally Skoglund respectively.

It was a perfect wheat and emeralds weekend. For more, visit bigpicturefarm.com.

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