



Love of Work Keeps It All in the Family

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By Diane Urbani de la Paz

DUNGENESS - No milking until you're big and strong enough to attach the machines to the udders, Jeff Brown told his daughter Sarah.

Sarah was 6 when her parents, Jeff and Debbie, moved to Dungeness to build a dairy.

And for four years the farmer's daughter could only follow Dad around.

Then she turned 10 and tall, and started her career.

Today the Brown family's farm, the Dungeness Valley Creamery, produces about 280 gallons a day of raw, or unpasteurized, milk.

The rich stuff sells at premium prices in stores from Sunny Farms in Carlsborg to Whole Foods in Bellevue.

The Browns started with one product, whole milk, nearly two years ago. Now "we're thinking about doing cream and skim," Sarah said last week.

What the family is not thinking about: selling the 32 acres of pasture that stretch out like a green blanket under the Olympics.

That's thanks, in large part, to the fact that Sarah is an unusual offspring. She wants to stay and farm.

"It's hard work. It's all the time. And it's not a lot of money. But it's our life," said Sarah, now 26.

She studied animal science at Washington State University in Pullman. Then she returned home to work with her parents and her sister Kayla.

Sarah works in the creamery shop across from the family home at 1915 Towne Road, selling milk - and some lavender products from other Sequim farmers - to curious tourists and devoted locals.

"Some people haven't been able to drink milk since forever, and they can drink ours," she said.

"We take turns doing everything: milking, feeding calves, bottling, working in the store," Sarah said.

"And I take in all the e-mail," which is loaded with orders and questions about raw milk.

Last year the Dungeness Valley Creamery became unusual in another way.

The Brown family entered into an agreement that will preserve the farm forever; no developer can purchase and subdivide it.

Clallam County established what's called a conservation easement, but little county money was spent in the process.

The agreement was funded by a \$349,849 grant from the state Recreation and Conservation Office, plus \$230,000 from the nonprofit Friends of the Fields and \$107,575 from the North Olympic Land Trust.

Sarah, meantime, doesn't focus on such figures.

"I really enjoy the farming lifestyle and being in the country," she said.

"To me there are a lot more important things than money, like loving what you do."