

Baker's Dozen 2015 Summer Outing: Tour of DOUBLE 8 DAIRY: Buffalo Milk Gelato



Text and images by Jennie Schacht

On Monday May 11, a group of 30 Bakers Dozen members and guests ventured out to [Double 8 Dairy](#) in West Petaluma, where owner Andrew Zlot and his crew raise water buffalo. The animals' rich milk, it turns out, is perfect for gelato.



Andrew didn't start out with the intention of making gelato. Originally, he had the idea that importing buffalo mozzarella from Italy was somewhat of a paradox, as the fresh milk cheese is meant to be eaten shortly after production. Why not, he thought, satisfy the needs of the American market on this side of the pond?



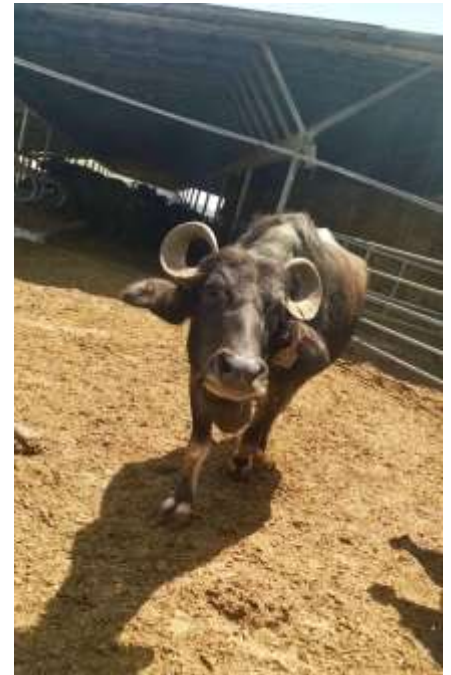
Finding water buffalo for his project was the first challenge. Turns out there aren't many of them in the U.S.; however, he was able to procure ten buffalo from Texas. That was enough to begin his herd, which he has continued to grow, thanks to the studly Alfonso (aka Fonzi).

With limited milk, Andrew soon discovered it was difficult to produce much cheese. Making mozzarella, it turns out, throws off a good deal of whey, with four pounds of milk producing only about a pound of cheese. Whey isn't worth much on the market.

After talking with a gelato maker, he realized that not only does gelato making use all the milk with no wasted whey—it actually increases the volume output due to overrun, the air churned into ice cream as it freezes. Gelato is typically leaner than premium-style ice cream, often made with milk only rather than part cream. With about ten percent milkfat (compared to about four percent for cow's milk), the water buffalo milk offered the opportunity to produce a luxuriously rich gelato with no cream or additional fat needed. In fact, the ice cream is made only with the milk, sugar, flavorings, and a few added ingredients to stabilize the product.

Despite these many benefits, Double 8's is, according to Zlot, the only water buffalo milk gelato produced in the U.S.

Fortified by a Fior di Latte (flower of milk) soft serve cone, we toured the farm, let calves suckle at our hands, scratched adults between the horns, and learned about buffalo farming and gelato production. These animals have a reputation for being ornery, but for the most part those we met were docile and friendly. (The Double 8 folks generously treated us to a second cone on our return from the tour.)





Melisa Schulze milks and manages the herd, and raises the babies. Curtis Fjelstul, who has a pasteurization certification, is the gelato master, processing the morning's milk into rich, creamy gelato the same afternoon. As they grow their herd, they may consider returning to cheese production, including mozzarella, burrata, and ricotta.

Double 8 Dairy's farmstead gelato is served in several restaurants around the Bay Area, and is sold in select markets. Here's where to find it:
<http://double8dairy.com/locations/>

The Fior di Latte we sampled straight from the soft serve machine has no added flavorings. Also for sale were chocolate, coffee, strawberry, hazelnut, and candy cap mushroom flavors.

The pint I brought home, then left in the freezer while traveling, retained its creamy, silky texture, a challenge for many ice cream makers.

Thanks to Janet Rikala Dalton for arranging our outing, and to Nancy Kux and others for coordinating.

