

Photo provided by Laura Hunter

Three on-farm processors share their Christmas recipes and traditions

Progressive Dairy Editor **Emma Ohirko**

Laura Hunter and her family celebrate Christmas morning by giving their staff the day off and working side-by-side as a family to complete the day's chores.

Many of life's most memorable meals are served over the Christmas season. Often, these Christmas meals feature recipes that have been passed down from family members or friends, but every so often a new dish is welcomed into the holiday rotation, creating new traditions and fond memories to get us excited for the holiday festivities to come

around again. To help inspire new Christmas traditions and to provide another recipe for your family's Christmas spread, *Progressive Dairy* editor Emma Ohirko spoke with three on-farm processors and asked them to share their Christmas traditions and holiday recipes. Here is what they had to say.

Laura Hunter
Blackwell Dairy
Kamloops, British Columbia
Fourth-generation dairy farmer Laura Hunter began working on her family's dairy in 2006, following the birth of her second child. After spending time in the hospitality industry, a job vacancy pulled her back into the family business. "It

was an opportunity for me to come and work on the farm and live in an environment where my kids could experience the lifestyle I had growing up and that I had loved," Hunter says. In 1983, following the closure of a nearby dairy processing plant that left farmers in the area with few resources

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to sustain themselves, Hunter's father, Ted Blackwell, was prompted to open his own processing plant. The plant stood until 2017, when a devastating fire broke out and burnt the plant to the ground. Over the next two years, the farm rebuilt its processing facility, reopening in 2019 with Hunter at the helm.

Now that she has settled into her role on the farm, Hunter says she and her family have established some Christmas traditions. Before celebrations begin, Hunter, along with her husband and their children, start Christmas morning by working

together, allowing Blackwell Dairy staff the opportunity to spend Christmas day with their own families. Before eating breakfast and opening presents, the family works side-by-side to complete the day's chores, and Hunter says the tradition has become something they look forward to every year.

Blackwell Dairy also helps get the Christmas season in swing by producing and selling eggnog every year in early December. Hunter says their eggnog has become a local staple, with demand arriving sooner and sooner each year.



Photo by Sara Hiltz.

Ran-Cher Acres Quark Cheesecake

Cheryl and Sara Hiltz
Ran-Cher Acres
Aylesford, Nova Scotia

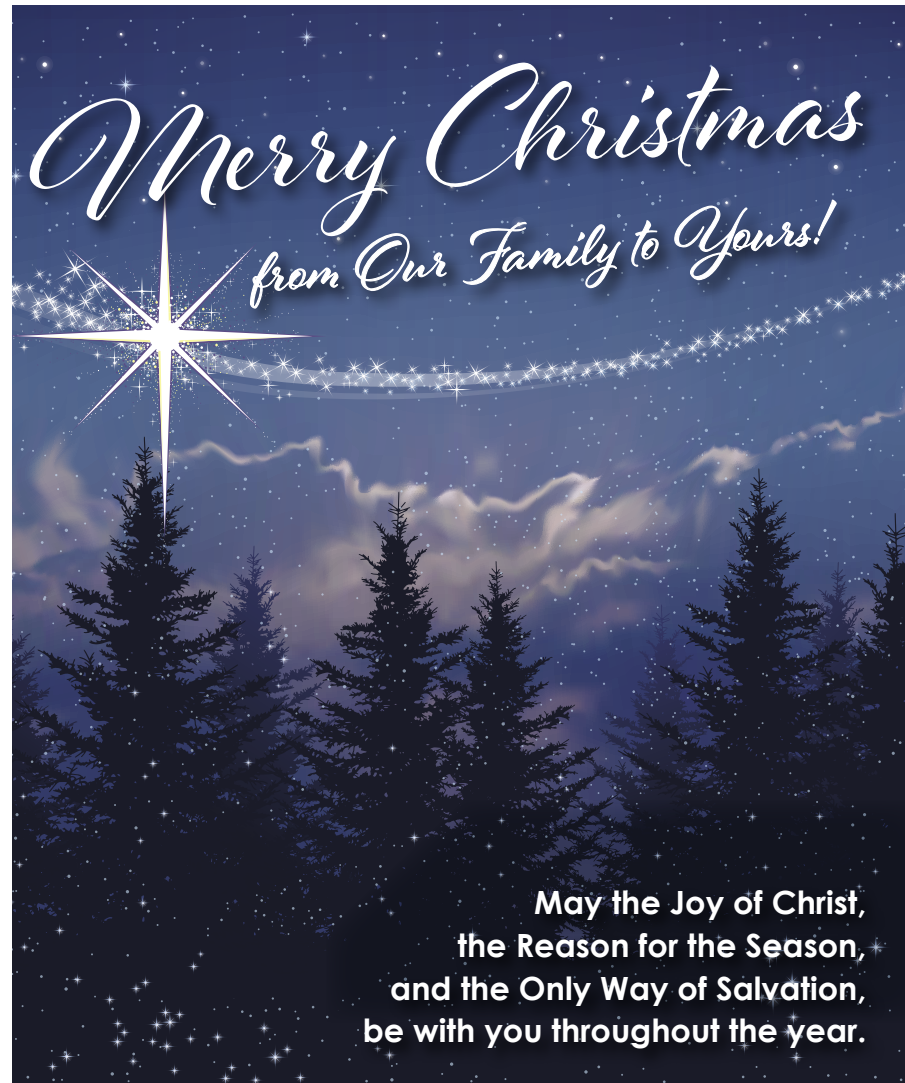
For the Hiltz family, their initiation into the dairy industry was rather unconventional. Following an attack on their lone goat by their farm dogs, a fruitless attempt to nurse a disowned foal, bad-tasting milk and various animal health issues, they persevered and found success with Saanen dairy goats.

As the farm began to acquire purebred stock and get their footing in the industry, a woman in their community approached them with an offer to help Ran-Cher Acres begin processing their goat milk into dairy products. The woman suffered from Crohn's disease and needed access to cultured goat milk for herself and her clients who also suffered from the disease. To serve

her customer base, the Hiltzes slowly grew their operation, opening sales to local markets, culminating with the opening of their cheesemaking facility in 1987. Since then, owners Randy and Cheryl Hiltz have left their off-farm jobs and expanded their milking herd to roughly 100 does, selling their breeding stock across Canada and internationally to places like Trinidad and Tobago, and Saint-Pierre and Miquelon. Cheryl says they have also enjoyed a large uptick in cheese sales since the start of the pandemic.

Every year at the end of the Christmas season, locals near Ran-Cher Acres have begun somewhat of a tradition of hauling their Christmas trees out to the farm. Cheryl says the goats love to eat the discarded trees, and the idea has become so popular in their

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community that a nearby town has even started to arrange for its trees to be brought to the farm by the truckload.

Cheryl and Randy's daughter Sara Hiltz shares the family's quark cheesecake recipe – a modified recipe passed onto them by a former farmhand visiting from Germany.

Quark cheesecake

Cheesecake

4 cups Ran-Cher Acres quark cheese
1 cup granulated sugar
1/2 cup butter, softened
4 eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 tablespoon baking powder
1 package vanilla pudding mix powder

Crumb bottom

1 cup graham cracker crumbs
1/2 cup flour
2 tablespoons granulated sugar
1/4 to 1/2 cup butter, melted

Method

- 1 Preheat oven to 400°F. Grease 9-inch springform cake pan, set aside.
- 2 To prepare the crumb bottom, combine all ingredients together in a bowl. Start with 1/4 cup melted butter and add up to 4 more tablespoons until crumb is desired consistency.
- 3 Press crumb into springform pan and put it into the oven to blind bake for 10 minutes.
- 4 While the crumb is in the oven, prepare the cheese filling. Cream together quark cheese, butter, sugar and eggs until smooth.
- 5 Add vanilla, baking powder and pudding mix and mix until combined.
- 6 Pour the cheese filling into the par-baked crumb and return to the oven for 10 minutes.
- 7 After 10 minutes, reduce oven heat to 300°F and bake one hour, or until the cake has set.
- 8 Let cake cool on the counter and then place it in the fridge. The cake is best served the following day.

Note: Recipe can be modified to taste. Sara recommends the following flavour adjustments:

- Add lemon juice to cheese filling and garnish with lemon zest for a fresh citrus take.
- Swap the vanilla pudding mix for a chocolate mix and top finished cake with chocolate ganache or syrup.
- Or try it with butterscotch pudding mix or a seasonal fruit topping.

Ellen Biemond

Upper Canada Creamery
Iroquois, Ontario

For the Biemond family, adding dairy processing to their business plan was a long time coming. Their farm, which runs under the name New Care Farms, was started by Josh Biemond's parents in 1981 after they immigrated to Canada from the Netherlands.

In 1989, the farm became an organic dairy. "We've kind of been ahead of the trend the whole time," says Ellen Biemond, Josh's wife. After Ellen and Josh took over the dairy's operations in 2011, they were looking for ways to add value to

their business and take their organic dairy to the "next level." Looking to achieve the family's long-held dream of expanding, Ellen and Josh opened Upper Canada Creamery in 2015. Ellen says opening the creamery has provided them with the opportunity to produce and sell the recipes Josh's mom had spent years developing, as the family has long practiced processing their leftover milk into cheese and yogurt for their own consumption.

In addition to their tradition of processing their milk into dairy products, the Biemond family celebrates the holiday season by taking a break. "Because choosing

to farm is a lifestyle choice, as a tradition for our family, we take the two weeks around Christmas and we shut everything down that we possibly can and do the bare minimum [on the farm]. For us, the tradition is spending quality family time together and getting that break," says Ellen. During those two weeks off, the creamery shuts down and all staff are given the time off.

In 2020, Upper Canada Creamery began a new tradition of producing eggnog. They launched their "old school," made-from-scratch eggnog to great success.

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Ellen says the creamery sold over 7,500 litres of eggnog in five weeks.

Ellen shares her recipe for white chocolate candy cane frozen yogurt. She credits the recipe for its simplicity and flavour. Ellen recommends pairing it with a latte through the Christmas season.

White chocolate candy cane frozen yogurt

- 1/4 cup chopped white chocolate
- 2 crushed candy canes
- 1/4 cup raw organic cane sugar
- 1 cup Biemond full-fat organic probiotic yogurt
- 1 tablespoon Biemond organic full-fat milk
- 1 large egg yolk
- Pinch guar gum (This is optional and helps to reduce the hardness of the finished product.)

Method

1 Mix the sugar, yogurt, milk and egg yolk in a medium pot over medium-high heat, mixing constantly until the temperature reaches 85°C.

2 Remove the base from heat and allow to cool for a few minutes.

3 Add the pinch of guar gum and stir until thoroughly incorporated.

4 Chill the base in the fridge for 30 minutes.

5 Once chilled, transfer the base to an ice cream maker and add the candy canes and bits of white chocolate.

6 Churn following machine instructions. Freeze until set. Recipe yields 500 grams (1 pint) of frozen yogurt.

Latte

- 1 shot fresh espresso
- 300 mL (10 fluid ounces) steamed and frothed Biemond organic cream-top whole milk or Biemond eggnog

Method

1 Add espresso to your cup.

2 Steam and froth the milk or eggnog and slowly pour over the espresso.

3 Top with cinnamon, cocoa powder or enjoy on its own. 🐮