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From the seed to the cheese - Fox Hill Cheese House is one of a kind in Nova Scotia

A palette of beautiful flavors, textures, and sights greet visitors to the Fox Hill Cheese House, a part of the sixth-generation Fox Hill Farm overlooking the Minas Basin and Cape Blomidon on the outskirts of Port Williams, Kings County.

After five generations of traditional dairy farming, the latest generation of the Rand family - Rick Rand and his wife Jeanita - decided the time was right to plant the seeds of a new venture. In 2004, the farm's cheesemaking business was launched. The decision was based partly on the needs of a changing economy, but more on the desire for a challenge.

"We were at a point where we either had to expand our herd or diversify," says Rick. "But more than that, it's something I've always wanted to do." And when a South Shore cheesemaker decided to retire his business, an opportunity was born. The cheesemaker was hired as a consultant to teach Rick the art of cheesemaking firsthand.

"I was provided the hands-on experience," says Rick. "You can read all you want, but it's like playing an instrument. You have to do it and you have to practice." A week-long course at the University of Guelph also helped hone his basic knowledge.

The business is unique not only to Kings County, but to Nova Scotia. "We're the only cheesemakers in the province who produce cheese from the seed to the grass, from the grass to the cow, to the milk, to the cheese and then to the consumer!" says Rick.

Though Fox Hill Cheese House is less than a year old, it is already receiving a large quota of visitors. At its grand opening last July, the new Kings County business had a rousing kick-off with over 700 people attending.

Those visiting the farm are treated, not only to a spectacular view, but to samples of cheese flavors exclusive to Fox Hill Cheese House. "We have several cheeses that are unique to us, like Fenugreek Havarti, Garlic and Chive Gouda, and Cranberry Cheddar," says Jeanita. "Also, we are the only cheesemakers in the province making Havarti, the low-fat Quark, and fresh curds."

In its short history, the Fox Hill Cheese House has achieved both provincial and federal licensing. The latter, though not easy to attain, keeps the door open for expansion to other markets and indicates the business has met rigorous guidelines.

The Rands market directly to consumers. They display at the larger farm markets here and in Halifax, and recently at HRM's large food exhibition. As cheese is the perfect complement to wine, Fox Hill cheeses are promoted locally at Kings County wineries, and in several restaurants. Because the cheeses are very healthy and made from scratch, they are also featured in a local health food store. To return the favor, Kings County wines and other products are displayed in the farm's store.

"The other businesses here in Kings County are as excited about our business as we are," says Jeanita. "There is such tremendous support!"

Now that Fox Hill Cheese House is open daily for the season, tours are provided by appointment. A wide variety of groups have already taken advantage. "People want to know what the process is all about," says Jeanita.

As the business nears its first anniversary, Rick and Jeanita continue to plan new ways to please their customers. "The enthusiasm you see when people try your product is what makes it all worthwhile," concludes Rick.



Rick and Jeanita Rand display a block of their freshly made cheese.



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