



Mossy Oaks Nurturing Rare Breeds, Embracing Diversity

INTRODUCTION

Mossy Oaks is a thriving venture nestled in the picturesque landscape of the Shropshire Hills. This case study looks at the diversity, challenges, abundance, heritage, and biodiversity associated with this unique farm, focusing on its rare breed of Golden Guernsey goats. These goats are classified as an 'At Risk' breed by the RBST watchlist and the most recent census has only approximately 1900 breeding females registered.

BACKGROUND

Oli and Danni, are an amazing couple who aim to be self-sufficient, living off the land they look after and providing local communities with high quality, ethical and sustainable food.

"We collectively have 12 years experience working with rare, native breed livestock and have a good background in conservation grazing and land management for wildlife after previously working for The Wildlife Trusts. With Danni working with the largest herd of Belted Galloway Cattle used for conservation grazing, and with Oli working on the land management team and hedgerow restoration project."

The farm prides itself on its commitment to sustainable and eco-friendly practices in the food production process. From the conservation grazing of goats to clear overgrown areas to the use of eco-friendly building materials, Mossy Oaks ensures that every step aligns with their vision of being a regenerative and responsible business. This approach not only contributes to the health of the land but also resonates with the growing demand for ethically produced food.

BENEFITS

Mossy Oaks takes pride in being home to their strong herd and play a vital role in preserving and promoting this heritage breed. These goats, known for their hardiness and adaptability, can withstand the rigors of year-round outdoor living. Despite the limited population, Mossy Oaks boasts a substantial herd of 21 registered females, representing a significant portion of the breed. The farm's commitment to sustaining and growing this population is a testament to their dedication to preserving biodiversity and heritage in agriculture. Mossy Oaks also has saddleback pigs and chickens (rescue) which are integral to the farm's ethos of sustainability, conservation, and regenerative land management.



AT A GLANCE

Mossy Oaks is not only dedicated to preserving this rare Golden Guernsey breed but is also carving a niche in artisanal cheese production. The farm, having faced delays in constructing a dedicated facility, successfully commenced cheese production in the summer. Despite initial challenges, Mossy Oaks exhibited resilience, creating a limited but highly sought-after supply of artisanal goat cheese. The limited batches of artisanal cheese quickly sold out within two weeks of hitting the market.



MOSSY OAKS

A nature led smallholding based at Brook Vessons Farm on the edge of the Shropshire Hills
AONB

Brook Vessons Farm, Pontesbury,
Shropshire
mossy.oaks@outlook.com

CHALLENGES FOR SMALL HOLDERS & TENANTED FARMERS

We were talking about some of the challenges faced at Mossy Oaks, especially in the changing landscape of subsidies and funding. The need for policy changes and financial support to facilitate the transition towards sustainable and holistic farming practices. As tenanted farmers, there are limited grants available and as a small holding, obtaining any funding or grants can prove almost impossible.

Weather-related issues, such as snow and wind can also be challenging. Luckily the herd are very hardy with most having been reared on site.

Despite these setbacks, Danni & Oli adapt well to these challenges, the hardiness of the goats, the way the animals are reared with conservation and land regeneration in mind, underscore the farm's adaptability, lead to successful food production and contribute to the farm's overall sustainability, biodiversity and resilience in adapting to climate change.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATION

One of the areas Mossy Oaks would like to explore is animal education programs. With backgrounds in animal education, they would love to share their knowledge with the younger generation. They will be completing their CVAS training in the near future and hope to host school group visits and other educational initiatives to raise awareness about sustainable farming practices and the importance of knowing where food comes from.

PAY IT FORWARD

It has always been part of the Mossy Oaks mission to provide nutritious, sustainable food to all in their community, not just those who can afford it.

They are working closely with Rea Valley Food Bank on a new Pay It Forward scheme. When you buy produce from Mossy Oaks, you have the option of adding a donation to your order which will go directly to the food bank in the form of some of their produce. The donation can be for any amount, and there's no pressure to donate at all. From the sales in the run up to Christmas, Danni & Oli were able to donate around £250 of produce to the foodbank.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF SHROPSHIRE FOOD

- “Our vision for the future of Shropshire's food economy:
- Producers can work together to provide a 'supermarket' type shop for local consumers which is available through an online platform.
 - Sustainable/nature led/high welfare farming practices passed on to future generations through education
 - Education around how food choices by consumers can influence the local food economy and wider environment/climate change issues
 - A good network of local producers that can share knowledge and skills with each other
 - Support for sustainable food practices to allow producers to make their produce affordable for all people “

CONSERVATION

Mossy Oaks collaborates with the Wildlife Trust, housing a group of Billys involved in a virtual electric fencing project. The boys are part of a conservation grazing initiative, where their movements are guided by a virtual fence created through an app, allowing the goats to graze and clear specific areas, otherwise unmanageable, effectively. The collaboration with the Wildlife Trust highlights Mossy Oaks' dedication to sustainable and innovative farming practices.

The farm has ambitious plans for the woodland, the introduction of the pigs for regeneration purposes, will play a crucial role in preparing the land for new growth, promoting natural regeneration, and enhancing biodiversity. An approach to farming that goes beyond goat rearing and cheese production.

