

# Havens Delivers Down Home Delicious



by Nancy Jo Maples

"I scream. You scream. We all scream for ice cream," especially when it's from Havens Down Home Creamery. This place takes ice cream from the cow to the cone.

For Preston and Kristen Havens and their four children, farming is a family affair. Their venture began in 2011 hand-milking one cow because their daughter Presley was intolerant to store-bought milk. That Jersey produced three gallons a day, more than they could drink. They shared excess with neighbors soon realizing they needed more cows to meet the demand. They built a dairy barn with electric milkers and started milking commercially January 2016.

"We intended to start with seven cows, but bought 13. That's 30 gallons a day. Preston was afraid we wouldn't be able to sell that much. However, that hasn't been the case. Instead, our concern jumped to finding enough cows to feed people," Kristen said.

Today the Havens milk 32 cows producing 115 gallons a day. Their milk is slowly pasteurized at 145 degrees for 30 minutes, but is not homogenized. Homogenization permanently mixes fat content into the milk's body eliminating the cream line characteristic of fresh-from-the-farm milk. Keeping milk at its natural state allows it to be whole, packed with nutrients and more easily digested.

Their business started with and still markets cream line milk, chocolate milk, buttermilk, cheeses and packaged grass-fed beef onsite and at select stores. Yet their 2018 ice cream venture caused sales to soar. Their signature trailer picturing a happy cow can be spotted at festivals and roadside setups throughout southeast Mississippi. Often, you'll notice the customer line before the trailer as lines can be 40 people deep. "We've had people wait in line an hour or more," Kristen said.

Havens' ice cream originally offered five flavors — sweet cream (vanilla), peach, strawberry, chocolate and salted caramel with pecan pralines, their best seller. Today they carry 48 flavors and make 360 gallons a week. A consumer of Singing River Electric, the Havens plan to build a store and processing plant nearer

the road as their backyard gets congested during afternoon ice cream sales. They sell from their backyard, 121 Havens Dairy Road, 2 p.m. until 4 p.m. Sunday through Friday, March until October, and Thursday, Friday and Sunday in winter months. Follow their Facebook page, Havens Down Home Creamery, to find postings of set-ups in Gautier, Lucedale, Leakesville, Hurley and Tanner-Williams.

The children — Tanner, 16, Presley, 13, Ty, 8, and Paisley, 6 — are homeschooled each morning and pitch in for chores after lunch. Before school starts Kristen and Preston have already milked, dealt with managerial paperwork and cooked breakfast. After lunch everybody pitches in feeding calves and chickens, labeling milk products, herding cows, etc. The list of chores is endless, thus the need for their half dozen employees.

The Havens eat, breathe and drink dairy life, literally. Their milk barn sits 50 yards behind their home in George County's Brushy Creek Community. On any given day you'll not only

find calves roaming in the backyard, but also chickens, guineas, dogs and a cat named Danny.

Cows graze on seasonal grasses only eating grains during milking. None receive hormones, steroids or antibiotics. They're milked four at a time, twice a day at 5 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Milking takes an hour and a half. Most are Jersey or Jersey-Holstein personalized with names like Betty Lou and Lucy, a trait Preston learned from his grandfather, R.B. Havens, who himself milked for 52 years nearby. "This is Preston's dream," Kristen said. "He grew up following his grandfather's footsteps."

It may have been Preston's dream, but it has become Kristen's passion. She says it's taught their children more than she could have imagined. "It's not a job. It's a lifestyle," she said. "Would I do it again? Absolutely!"

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