

CONSIDER THE CARAMEL

BY NICOLE GALLAND



Goatherders of Martha's Vineyard: Your mission, should you choose to accept it: mix up a recipe to rival Fat Toad Farm's original Goat's Milk Caramel. Dairy lovers of Martha's Vineyard: Your mission, should you choose to accept it: sample caramel without downing an entire jar all at once. I was able to accomplish this, but it required spousal intervention. I opened the jar in our kitchen, with my husband standing beside me. We peered inside and slowly plunged a spoon down into the caramel confection. It offered weak resistance as I stirred, somewhere between chocolate sauce and melted fudge.

I tilted my face up and raised a spoonful of the caramel above my head, tipping it down toward my mouth. It took its sweet time rolling viscously down the spoon, and it seemed to me I stood there long enough for somebody to paint a portrait of me in this state of expectation. A moment later, the first drop of the goat's milk caramel

landed on the tip of my tongue, and I went weak at the knees.

Over the next quarter hour, I turned the kitchen upside down seeking the perfect complementary food for this unusual sweetness. Because goat's milk has an unfamiliar tang to it, the caramel is not too surgary, and features a subtle, savory un-

Tangy, gooey, coy. Fat Toad's Goat's Milk Caramel could be at its best, room temperature, straight from the jar. But it's good on apples too.

dertone. I needed to experiment.

Fat Toad Farm, a family-owned goat dairy in Vermont, makes this extraordinary stuff out of milk (from happy, pasture-fed goats) and organic sugar. Their suggested uses for it all lean toward sweet-on-sweets action: drizzle it on ice cream, they tell us, or use it as dip for fruit like strawberries, or stir it into warm beverages (the heat, I learned when trying this, accentuates its goatiness), or eat it by the spoonful. But I suspected there was a hidden array of tastes to be unveiled, which is what prompted my feverish delving into the pantry and refrigerator. It took

nearly half a jar, and several false starts, but here are the highlights of my intrepid Epicureanism.

Goat's Milk Caramel tastes amazing with strong, savory foods. Dubliner Cheese yields the most tantalizing treat, although onion-garlic rice crackers are also enticingly transformed. I realize that sounds a little kinky and will no doubt turn some folks off. But there is just enough tang in the caramel that it harmonizes with sharp cheeses and other piquant flavors.

Milder flavors—yogurt, pistachios, tea—work nicely as caramel-delivery-systems, but the sweetly yielding nature of the caramel is at its best when you pair it with a slightly domineering flavor.

The traditional Mexican name for this lusciousness is cajeta, and it's a goat's-milk equivalent of dulce de leche. It was invented for practical reasons in pre-Frigidaire days. Ranchers would combine milk and sugar over a low flame until it became something much greater than the sum of

its parts. This was done to preserve the extra milk—but ironically, the result is so seductive that once you open the jar, you may find there is precious little to preserve.

For more information on cajeta and Fat Toad Farm's other goodies, check out their website, fattoadfarm.com. You can buy from their online store, from various shops in the Boston area, or if you're in Vermont, directly from their farm stand at \$8.95 an 8 oz. jar. Comes in four variations: original, coffee bean, vanilla, and cinnamon. ©



PHOTOGRAPH: Sybil Teles

Look for Fat Toad's Caramel at Fiddlehead Farm. The 2 oz. size makes a perfect wedding party favor at \$4.75/jar and it comes in four variations: Original, Coffee Bean, Vanilla and Cinnamon.