

Local Food & Farming

Country Rubes provides eggs, honey, and more

By Carolyn Crane

At Country Rubes, the chickens seem happy. It could be the pastoral setting of the farm, set atop a hill near the Bear River in south Nevada County. Or it could be the loving attention of their caretakers, Janet and Mike Brisson. Each day the chickens migrate from their coop through an underground tunnel to a pasture, where they feed on grass all day. They are herded back into the tunnel each twilight by the shorthaired collie Caleb. When the pasture dries up, the chickens eat scraps from Country Rubes' hand-tilled organic vegetable garden. Organic grain is supplemental, not central, to their diet, Janet Brisson explains. That's why the hens' yolks are a dark, luscious yellow. Country Rubes delivers sixteen to twenty dozen eggs to BriarPatch each week.

Country Rubes was born in the mid-eighties out of the Brissons' passion to stay home with their children, Dusty and Joey. If they both were to stay home, self-sufficiency was key, so they began farming and living off their land, even making their own clothes. When the

boys left home in the mid-nineties, the couple had more food than they could eat, so they began selling it to BriarPatch.

Around that time, local bees began to be eradicated by insidious Varroa mites. The Brisson's garden suffered from a lack of pollination. This problem proved to be a back door for the Brissons to enter the world of beekeeping. Desperate to save the local bee population, even the most organic-minded beekeepers were driven to use Apistam, the mildest chemical that was effective. It was then that Mike invented a bottom board for beehives, a product that the couple manufactures and sells. Meanwhile, when the mites began building a resistance to Apistam, beekeepers such as Randy Oliver and the Brissons discovered that powdered sugar was an effective deterrent, and they no longer needed to rely on a chemical to keep the mites off their bees. The powdered sugar keeps the mites from attaching to the bees. When the mites fall, they go through the bottom screen and cannot get



These happy chickens migrate daily from this coop through an underground tunnel to feast in the Country Rubes pasture.

back to the bees. Thousands of mites end up dying, foiled, in the screen. While still managing their chickens and vegetables, the Brissons give talks on beekeeping and travel to share their bottom boards with other beekeepers.

In addition to their organic eggs, look for their shitake mushrooms, raspberries, onions, garlic, and summer veggies on the BriarPatch shelves. To learn more about Country Rubes, visit their website www.CountryRubes.com.

Carolyn Crane is a freelance writer living in North San Juan.

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