

Visitors flock to Thompson farm for down-home celebration

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It was the cold stuff that stole the spotlight Saturday at Fort Hill Farms' first Ice Cream, Blueberry and Bluegrass Bash.

The event celebrated the Thompson farm's anniversary of making ice cream, said Peter Orr, who owns the farm with his wife, Kristin. Orr hopes to make the event an annual celebration.

"The type of reception we're getting is fantastic," he said. "It's beyond expectation."

The enthusiasm at Saturday's celebration was similar to what the farm received when it started selling farm-made ice cream last summer, as part of The Farmer's Cow, a cooperative of six local dairy farms. A contest at Fort Hill Farms to name the first 10 flavors of its ice cream brought more than 3,000 entries, Orr said.

"We had an incredible reception in the marketplace. People truly enjoy a local product," he said.

And enjoy it they did. Lines for wagon rides around the farm were nearly as long as lines for the farm's ice cream. In each line, visitors ate free sample cups of the farm's new flavor, Red, White and Moo — vanilla with raspberries and blueberries — topped with farm blueberries and farm-made cream.

In the ice cream line, Putnam residents Jim Maguire and Sara Kosakowski tried to keep their children — 2-year-old Gabe and 9-year-old Mycala — occupied while they waited in the sun for some cold, creamy relief from the heat.

"It just seemed like a fun thing to do on a hot day," Maguire said. Two-year-old Olivia Hylton, visiting from California, licked whipped cream from the corners of her mouth as she sat on a bench next to the line with her aunt, Adrienne Smith, of West Hartford, and Nancy Smith, of Suffield. While the family agreed that the ice cream was delicious, Olivia said feeding the cow was her favorite part.

Alex Fleischman, Tom Hays Sr. and Tom Hays Jr., of Northborough, Mass., said they came for the music.

The Blackstone Valley Bluegrass band kept visitors entertained throughout the day.

Orr said he knows at least one member of the band, Dan Nowlan, who plays the guitar and mandolin as well as singing for the band, well. The two grew up nearby — so close that escaped cows from the Orrs' farm often ended up in Nowlan's yard.

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