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How to start a farm

Company: Amaltea
Location: Roccaverano, Italy
Founded: 2006
Number of employees: 3
Production: approximately 2,000 cheeses made each week
Retail price per 250g: €6

The world of finance lures new recruits and gets them to spend long hours crunching numbers in front of computer screens. But they only ever put together products that appear on paper or in a presentation. Others opt to build a career around making something tangible and even tasty.

For the 400-odd inhabitants of Roccaverano, a medieval town in Italy’s northwest, the turmoil of financial markets and Rome’s topsy-turvy politics seems a world away. Life revolves around the town’s piazza, which boasts a Renaissance church that’s more than 500 years old and a lone bar. It’s what prompted Daniela Saglietti and Giovanni Solerio (*pictured*), owners of Amaltea, to ditch their jobs in Turin to try their hand at farming. “It is a huge investment to get a farm up and running,” says Solerio. “People think it’s easier than it really is but you have to pour a lot in to get started.” That said, the personal benefits

can outweigh the financial cost of some businesses. “The air is clean, there’s no traffic and there’s the view,” says Saglietti, as she takes in the panorama of the foothills of the Langhe in northwestern Italy. There’s little time to enjoy the scenery as she’s interrupted by the sound of bleating goats.

The pair’s livelihood is their livestock, which provides milk to make robiola cheese. Made from unpasteurised goat’s milk the soft, snow-white Roccaverano variety is protected by DOP status: a labelling system similar to that used for champagne that guarantees a regional food’s authenticity and method of preparation.

Twice a day, the 160-strong herd must be milked. The goats themselves are a hefty investment, costing more than €200 each. However, each goat can produce about 600 litres of milk per annum for up to eight years.

For all its romance, farming is as much an investment of time as money. Most days, Solerio spends three hours gently moving the herd so that it can graze on grass nurtured by sea breezes; leaves of wild chestnut and oak round off the goats’ diet. But even after 14-hour days on the farm he has no regrets about swapping the city for the country. “We wanted a life that’s more authentic, rooted in something real.” — (M)

