

Andrew Torrens
ACS Essay

After having spent 3½ years both making and selling cheese at many establishments around the United States, it was a thrill to finally attend the American Cheese Society (ACS) annual conference for the first time. Having been lucky enough to have cheese-related jobs and experiences in Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Indiana and New York, I have a wide range of friends and business connections in the cheese community, some of whom I rarely get to see. By attending the ACS annual conference I was able to both reconnect with prior connections that I already had established in the industry and also make new and valuable relationship with producers, retailers, distributors and cheesemaking suppliers. With these connections I was able to brainstorm, discuss and troubleshoot various concerns that I am experiencing in producing and marketing cheese, and help others who are experiencing problems that I had insight into. With the density and diversity of knowledge present at the ACS conference in Madison, no question seemed to go unanswered. Gathering the best minds in the industry seems crucial to continuing market growth and quality improvement that is needed under the growing pressure being exerted by the FDA over sanitation issues. Being part of the conference allowed me to quickly get up to speed on the issues that our industry is currently facing such as ACS's debate on whether to hire a lobbyist, Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) and the ongoing debate between the idea of ownership when discussing the complex relationship between affineurs and cheesemakers. Having attended the conference, I feel that I have been instantly caught up on these urgent and relevant topics and will be able to serve as a messenger to convey this information to other people in the cheese industry who didn't have the luxury to attend the conference.

It also can't be overlooked the impact that the educational classes had on my experience at ACS's Madison conference. Attending DJ D'Amico's *Food Safety & Artisan Cheesemaking* class in addition to the *Food Safety Modernization Act & Striving for A Successful FDA Inspection* has given me pages and pages of notes on areas to look into improving Beecher's sanitation program. Other classes such *The Art & Science of Washed-Rind Cheeses* will be extremely helpful as we put the last changes into our new washed-rind cheese Flatiron and *A Cheese That Goes, "Squeak"* provided valuable information on how to better market, sell, store and produce cheese curds. The conference's talks therefore gave me valuable information on how to produce quality cheese, produce it safely and market it effectively. All of this information/experiences and much more will be crucial in both my coming year's work as a cheesemaker and sanitation coordinator at Beecher's Handmade Cheese and any future career goals I may have in the American artisan cheese movement.