

I would first like to wholeheartedly thank everyone at ACS and ACEF for granting me the opportunity to experience the American Cheese Society's annual conference. As a fresh cheesemaker, right out of mould so to speak, it was an experience that will keep aiding me as I journey on through the world of artisan cheese. I feel as though I've been inoculated with incredible knowledge and ideas that will keep feeding me as my cheesemaking career grows. Here is an account of my experience:

### WEDNESDAY, JULY 29TH

I arrived at ACS in Providence feeling a bit frazzled after an incredibly busy morning taking care of last minute details before I left our farmstead creamery for 4 days and then driving 5 hours from Maine to Providence. But as I walked into the *New Member/First Time Attendee Reception*, a little shy and overwhelmed, I was met with a warmer welcome than I ever could have imagined. I was immediately swept up into the enthusiastic, kind, and welcoming community that is ACS. I knew then that it was going to be an incredible 4 days and I settled into engaging conversations on this subject that we all share a strong passion for, cheese.

### THURSDAY, JULY 30TH

The next day I found myself rested, eager to meet more people, and soak in as much information as I possibly could. The day was kicked off with what I thought was a truly motivational speaker talking about his strategy to success. His message of supporting and cheering on those around you and working everyday towards being the kind of person you want to be was a great way to set the stage for the conference; positive and supportive. *Wooden Boards: Part One* was the first session I attended and I was so glad I did! A lot of questions I had come with were answered, I was given practical ideas that I'll be implementing in our creamery, and there was fascinating research presented on microbes, aging on wood, and wood safety. One of the highlights for the first full day of cheese camp was *Meet The Cheesemaker*. I had a fantastic time talking with other cheesemakers and even better, seeing them in action at their booths. I learned a lot by simply observing. I really enjoyed each unique display and it was wonderful to see the pride that each cheesemaker takes in their cheese. By the end my taste buds were completely maxed out with amazing flavors and I couldn't help but imagine myself at this event possibly presenting our cheese sometime in the future. Perhaps someday.

The socializing and networking carried on into the evening at the opening reception sponsored by the Vermont Cheese Council. There was a beautiful spread of Vermont cheeses although to be honest, I felt as though I could not eat another piece after *Meet the Cheesemaker* just a couple hours before. Of course that still didn't stop me from trying a couple delectable samples. I spent the time chatting with old friends and meeting new ones. It's always incredibly rejuvenating to connect with other cheesemakers and especially farmstead cheesemakers. We each spend a lot of time isolated in our own creameries navigating each failure and success on our own and it can, at times, be discouraging and overwhelming. But to be given the chance to talk with other folks who are in the same situation always leaves me feeling re-inspired and excited to keep going. It reminds me that I don't have to figure everything out on my own and there is an incredible, and accessible, wealth of knowledge out there to rely on. Attending the conference showed me just how strong the cheese

community is. The collective knowledge of everyone at ACS is such a gift to a young cheesemaker like myself. I left the party that night feeling supported and fired up!

#### **FRIDAY, JULY 31ST**

After breakfast I checked in at the volunteer desk and headed downstairs to cheese central where I spent the next 5 hours cutting and wrapping endless wheels of cheese that had been judged and were now bound for the cheese sale on Sunday morning. I was paired up with a well-seasoned cheesemonger and we were working with a fun and lively crew. Our task was to take a trolley laden with wheels of cheese from the refrigerated truck to the cutting/wrapping station where we then cut and wrapped them into reasonable sizes for the cheese sale. By pure luck my partner and I grabbed a trolley filled cheeses that were by far the most exciting to me. I got to see, smell, handle, (and taste) wheel after wheel of a variety of beautiful, natural-rinded hard cheeses and aged goudas. I was definitely in heaven. Volunteering was highly recommended to me and I completely understand why. Not only is it really nice to have a break from the intellectual conversations and sessions to do something productive with your hands, it's a great chance to work alongside other cheese professionals; not to mention it's a ton of fun.

After attending another informative session in the afternoon, *The Science Of Artisan Cheese*, it was finally time for the moment everyone had been waiting for, the Awards Ceremony. The excitement in the air was almost tangible as everyone filed into the auditorium and found seats next to their friends and colleagues. What followed felt like an ACS version of The Oscars. I thoroughly enjoyed it. I sat with 10 other cheesemakers from my home state, Maine, and cheered on as creameries from across North America were awarded with prizes for their hard work and dedication. I was especially proud of the cheesemakers from our little state who collectively took home 10 awards this year.

#### **SATURDAY, AUGUST 1ST**

Saturday I spent attending 3 sessions which were some of the most useful I had been to yet. *From Pure Physics To Art: Understanding Affinage, Checking Out The Competition, and Economics of Cheesemaking*. Each session was pertinent to where I am in my cheesemaking career and I took home a lot of information that will benefit our cheese operation immensely. The day was finished out with the Festival of Cheese. I enjoyed wandering from table to table tasting cheeses alongside experts and hearing them describe the complexity of what we were tasting. The Festival of Cheese is a truly mind-blowing experience. Never in my life have I seen so much cheese on display and available for sampling in one place.

#### **SUNDAY, AUGUST 2ND**

By Sunday morning I was headed home, my head and notebook filled with new ideas and knowledge and a bag stuffed to the gills with cheese from the cheese sale. In conclusion, I feel incredibly lucky to have attended ACS this year and receiving one of the scholarships made it all possible. As I said before it is such a gift to a young cheesemaker, like myself, to experience ACS and be enveloped into the folds of the community. The friendships and connections I made at the conference are simply invaluable. The most important thing I took home from my experience is that there is an amazing support system out there cheering me on as I develop as a cheesemaker. This, I think, will make all the difference moving forward. Thank you.