

ACS conference follow-up

From scholarship recipient Tracy Kellner

This conference was such a treat to attend! I am so grateful for the opportunity the scholarship allowed. I returned to Chicago energized and ready to go for 4th quarter!

My husband & I have 2 shops – one location (Logan Square) features a precut cheese program; the 2nd location (Lincoln Square) has a cut-to-order program. We've wanted to expand our cheese program at Logan for years, but haven't had access to capital to do it. It is an expensive process and one that we haven't wanted to implement until we were financially ready to do so. One of the seminars I attended at the conference was on the topic of cut & wrap vs. cut-to-order. That was by far the best seminar for me at this event. I not only learned a lot of useful information, I got a lot of affirmation on some things we've been doing with our cheese program that I wasn't sure was the best route to take. A couple of light bulbs went off in that seminar, and my colleague Nicole and I spent the entire drive back to Chicago rattling off all the ideas we wanted to implement, discuss with the rest of the staff, and/or use to revise what we are currently doing and make it better.

Sometimes as a small business owner, it's hard not to feel like you are on an island...sure, there are many, many other businesses that have been helpful along the way with advice and guidance, but frankly, not all strategies fit well with every store, so the trial and error of trying to figure out what will work for your business can be overwhelming (and you also don't want to inundate the other business owners...that are also probably overwhelmed!). I left this conference feeling more secure and reassured about many things we've only been guessing at. The one thing I've learned in having a small business is that there is rarely a 'normal'...and there are many ways to do things, but the key is finding something you can execute within your means and execute well (that your customers will respond to).

I'm also very grateful to be part of such a cool community in small food. We, as they say, are 'fighting the good fight', trying to bring good, responsible food to our customers. And even that can be challenging, so to have access to so many others in the industry is such a blessing! I realize that working with food will always have its challenges, for so many reasons, but we are lucky to be in a membership that is so proactive and wants to be at the forefront of food safety.

And I should not forget to mention all the great cheese! I found several new cheeses to bring in this fall, including cheese from Green Dirt Farm, Meadowood Farms, Baetje Farms and Sequatchie Cove Creamery.

Thanks to the ACS staff, board of directors and conference sponsors for putting on such a great show. It was particularly thrilling to have this take place in a city that I've come to know and love, being so close here in Chicago. Well done, everyone!