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Willy Street Co-op
Madison, WI
2013 ACS Conference
Post Conference Essay

In an Ongoing Dairy State of Mind

I expected to get a lot out of my first experience of the American Cheese Society's annual conference. For months and months, I speculated about the education I could absorb, be it about cheese, sanitation, or business practices. I definitely got a lot of new information about all of those things and more. I also couldn't wait to hob-nob with the big names and bright minds of the American cheese world. Did that too! Finding myself cutting cheese for the cheese sale, on a Wednesday night, shoulder to shoulder with Ricki Carroll and her family. They don't get much bigger than that! I was also so excited to see into the world of other cheesemongers and cheesemakers from beyond Wisconsin – to get a glimpse of the what they do and the how they do it.

I was also touched to my very core by the warmth and community that the ACS and its members are. I felt so at home amongst you all, and I want to thank you for having me and affording me this opportunity -those of you that played a part in that. The connections that I was so generously offered over the weekend will remain with me always. I look forward to the day when I can return the favor.

What I'm present to now, though, is that the biggest thing I got out of my participation in this conference was right under my nose the whole time. I got to fall in love with my work, all over again. I got to see the possibility that already exists right where I am, at the Willy Street Co-op, in Madison, Wisconsin. I got to see that the perfect partner and compatriot for my future endeavors was the guy I was already working with, Stuart Mammel, my esteemed counterpart at our original store on the east side of town. Whereas before, we were running two cheese departments at two stores, now I can confidently say that he and I are in total partnership in the stewardship of one unified operation. We both came away from the weekend with a burning desire to craft a future vision of our work that would truly be of service to our cooperative owners, our organization, our staff, and ourselves, but also that would be equally of service to the cheesemakers of our state, region, and country, and the industry at large that they represent.

So, to close, I would make one request. If you are reading this essay because, like I did, you are considering applying for a scholarship or registering yourself into the ACS Conference or becoming a member, please accept my humble advice.

Do it.