

## ACS 2011 Post-Conference Essay – Seana Doughty

I would like to express my immense gratitude to the ACS for awarding me a cheesemaker scholarship, enabling me to travel to Montreal for the 2011 annual conference. Following is my account of my experiences at the conference.

I was able to arrive one day early and take the tour of the eastern townships. Not only did I enjoy the beauty of this portion of Quebec, but I got to know several of my tour mates by the end of the day, including another sheep milk producer. I was also able to spend time with some cheese acquaintances that I had not seen since the previous ACS meeting, a nice surprise indeed.

The seminars and workshops were yet again an excellent learning experience. I took many pages of notes and was thrilled to have the opportunity to learn more about everything from North America's first AOC policy in Quebec, to how different types of rennet affect milk coagulation. In these sessions and especially during the breaks in between, I also got to network with fellow cheesemakers, which is always extremely valuable.

Another incredibly useful opportunity was the room set up by Fromagex, it was like a little Home Depot for cheesemakers – a Cheesemaker Depot - I was in heaven! I have never before been able to view so many different types of cheese molds, racks, vessels and more, all in one room, up close and personal where I could touch and hold items and get a feel for what is available. I was able to talk directly with the Fromagex reps and describe my anticipated needs as we grow. I have already received a quote for them for some items that will surely increase the efficiency of our cheese production, a very important consideration for small-scale producers.

For the first time since starting my own cheese business, I was able to have a table at the Meet the Cheesemaker event. This was quite beneficial as it provided the opportunity to introduce my cheese to many industry members who had never heard of my company. I was also greatly encouraged to meet cheese professionals who had heard of my company but now had the opportunity to taste my cheeses for the first time. It was a pleasure to talk about the types of cheeses I produce and to see and hear the level of interest. I was able to connect with a couple of new distributors who may bring our cheese into their lineup, and I met several retailers who are intent on featuring our cheeses.

I took advantage of the Scholars-in-Residence opportunity to get important and very helpful feedback on a couple of cheeses. This included the amazing opportunity of seeing my cheese rinds under a microscope! Not only did I see what was happening on the rind of my cheeses on a microscopic level, but I got to see the same activity on several other cheesemakers' rinds as well. This was one of my favorite experiences, a truly unique learning experience. I hope this can be available every year.

I greatly enjoyed the ACS Town Hall meeting and business lunch. Since I serve on the Board of Directors of my state cheese guild, I regard these events as very important to the cheese community. It was quite valuable to hear from cheesemakers from all over North America and gain insight into the various issues concerning cheesemakers and other industry professionals. I also appreciated the overview of the various activities of the ACS and hearing about how the Board is working hard to address members' needs.

The Festival of Cheese was also a very worthy learning experience as I made a point to sample nearly all of the ribbon-winning cheese types that are similar to what I produce. I also sampled the cheese types that I intend to produce in the near future. Being able to taste the winning cheeses side-by-side was very helpful.

I am honored and grateful to have been a 2011 Cheesemaker Scholarship recipient! Thank you!