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ACS Student Scholarship Post-Conference Essay

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Educational, collaborative, and impressive are the first three words that come to my mind when I think about my experience at the American Cheese Society Conference held in Sacramento on July 30-August 1, 2014. I am honored and grateful to have been selected to receive the student scholarship, which allowed me to travel from my summer internship near Chicago to learn about one of the most rapidly expanding sectors of the food business: the cheese industry!

The American Cheese Society Conference was a fascinating opportunity to **learn** almost everything about cheese--including tastings, pairings, and even how to build a cheese cave! As an undergraduate student studying Food Science at UC Davis, I have been exposed to the concepts of fermentation and microbiology. With this background, my brain was an eight-pound sponge, soaking up and gaining an understanding of the vast complexity of the cheese industry. I attended a variety of sessions including "Do You Know GMO?", "California Cheese and Beer: Agricultural Originals", "The Make Process of Success", and "Cheese, Salami, and Microbes". During a Spider Plot session, I not only learned how to distinguish between an underripe and perfectly aged blue cheese, but also how to use spider plots to monitor quality along the ripening process. This conference was by far the most educational, relevant, and "cheese-centric" gathering that I have ever experienced. Each class was so informative and easy for me to understand. At each tasting event, I was bombarded with samples of so many varieties of delicious cheese. "Meet the Cheesemaker" was an overwhelming immersion into the cheese world, filled with tables of delicious cheeses, friendly faces, and answers to all of my rookie questions. The ACS Conference was not only an opportunity to learn and experience the cheese world, but also a great occasion for socializing and networking during the Pub Crawl and the Opening Reception, complete with photo booths, hors d'oeuvres, as we navigated between the pubs of downtown Sacramento. I feel that I learned the equivalent of a 2 unit course on cheese during the Conference and I am eager to share my experiences with the UC Davis Food Tech Club.



As a new member of the American Cheese Society, I felt welcomed and accepted by this **collaborative** culture of cheesemongers, cheesemakers, and cheese enthusiasts. The conference kicked off with a poolside First Time Attendee event featuring a plethora of interesting and delicious Sartori cheeses. I even sampled peppermint cheddar! During the next few days, I became acquainted with other ACS members as we waited in line for coffee, saw each other several times throughout the conference, and sat together during sessions. Members from all over our nation connect and reconnect at this conference and the energy is invigorating! This member-driven



organization organizes and recruits volunteers to cut thousands of pounds of cheese for the Judging Competition and Awards Ceremony. Along with dozens of other people, I waved my California Flag loudly and proudly each time my state received an award in the competition. Although I was one of the younger attendees, I never felt out of place because meeting people, making connections, and sharing ideas was so easy!

The American Cheese Society is a truly **impressive** society of cheesemakers, retailers, chefs, and cheese enthusiasts with the mission to promote and support American cheese. For anyone even remotely interested in cheese, this organization has all of the educational resources and networking opportunities you need! During the business meeting, the FDA's Mike Taylor participated in a lunchtime discussion with cheesemakers, retailers, industry experts and other members of the American Cheese Society; it was remarkable to witness this forum and absorb such an open discussion on recent legislation and current food safety policies. I also learned that ACS also offers the highest standard for cheese professionals called a Certified Cheese Professional, which qualifies a person who has acquired a



thorough and passionate knowledge of cheese, to share that knowledge with others as an "expert." Friday night's "Festival of Cheese"

was a festive, well-organized, and well-attended event. The cheeses were skillfully cut and beautifully displayed. I took dozens of photos that evening to share on my blog because words alone cannot describe the appearance of 1600+ cheeses in one room! What a way to end my week of "Cheese Immersion!"



Although I still have another year to complete my undergraduate education, I know that this conference has played a major role in shaping my future career in the food industry and I have initiated some lifelong relationships. This ACS conference proved to be the perfect place for me to

learn and grow in my knowledge of all things cheese-related. I know that I will be attending this conference in the future! **From the bottom of my heart, I would like to thank the American Cheese Society Committee for selecting me as a student scholarship recipient and for this truly unforgettable experience at the 2014 Conference!**