

As I entered the convention center to sign in for the 2014 American Cheese Society Conference, I was immediately greeted by a group of happy and helpful volunteers dressed in their red t-shirts emblazoned with a yellow cross, reminiscent of the iconic Red Cross symbol, but made of cheese and reading: Cheese Guard *'to prepare and serve'*. These volunteers welcomed me with so much energy and enthusiasm; I just knew it was going to be an amazing experience. Over the next 4 days I met so many remarkable cheesemakers, cheesemongers, retailers, and the various other people that make up the community that is the American Cheese Society. I attended lectures on a variety of subjects. And, let us not forget, tasted the wide variety of amazing cheeses and other foods that are made and sold by these brilliant people. Additionally, the networking and learning opportunities at the conference are endless.

For example, I learned so much during the various sessions I attended. The 3rd Party Audit session provided an abundance amount of useful information that we plan on utilizing at our facility. I believe it also showed how we need not fear these audits, but use them as a way to help provide a delicious, as well as safe, product to the consumer. The Microbiology of Cheese Rinds session was absolutely amazing. I love how the science and the processes we use to make the cheese keep teaching us something new every day. It is exciting to think that people have been making cheese for so long and we are still making new discoveries every day. It is one of the many joys I get to experience while making cheese; you truly never stop learning. I do not want to leave out the tasting sessions. I attended the Comb Sweet Comb: Exploring a "Taste of Place" in Cheese and Honey. It was very informative and unquestionably delicious. The panel experts did a great job showing how honey and cheese can or, if you make the wrong choice, cannot pair well with each other.

I was pleased to see that there were people from other food industries and food organizations who also appeared at the conference. The panel from the shellfish industry provided a session about traceability of food, from the harvest to the plate, to ensure the health and safety of perishable food products. They provided several useful ideas that I feel can be implemented in our creamery. Moreover, I would like to thank the ACS board for inviting the FDA to this year's conference, and to thank FDA for attending. I believe that it was a step in the right direction to opening a path for cooperation and learning for both parties.

Naturally, I must also talk about the item that brought us all together in Sacramento, the cheese. The Meet the Cheesemaker and the Festival of Cheese are two perfect events to sample some spectacular cheeses and meet truly wonderful people. I really enjoyed the Meet the Cheesemaker event. It allowed me, a cheesemaker, to meet the consumers and get feedback on the cheeses we create. If you do not interact with your customers, how can you know how you are doing? Ultimately, there is always room for improvement. And what better way to get feedback than from the consumers, your peers, and your mentors in an environment where everyone can taste and compare all the different cheeses from around the countries in the western hemisphere.

Finally, I must mention those hardworking volunteers from earlier. If you attended any ACS conference, I highly recommend volunteering. You do not have to give all your time. Any little bit helps as I found out when I volunteered. You get to meet some fun and cheerful people. In addition, you get to help make the conference become the amazing thing that it is, a magnificent gathering of people who teach and learn so much from each other. I feel privileged to have been chosen for a scholarship to attend the 2014 American Cheese Society Conference. I look forward to seeing everyone I met, as well as some new faces, at the next conference.