

AMERICAN CHEESE SOCIETY JUDGING & COMPETITION

2026 CATEGORIES & Standards of Excellence

A. FRESH UNRIPENED CHEESES

Cheese Curds, Cottage Cheese, Cream Cheese, Fromage Blanc, Fromage Frais, Impastata, Mascarpone, Quark, Ricotta. **Excluded:** Cheeses with any added flavor (refer to Category KA); Queso Blanco–types (refer to Category G); mozzarella and pasta filata types (refer to category H); spreads, blends or dips (refer to category S); Neufchatel (Refer to Category J); Fresh Goat Cheese (refer to category N); Crème Fraiche (refer to category Q).

AD: Cottage Cheese - all milks

Standards of Excellence: There is a wide range of curd size acceptability in this category, ranging from small curd (~1/8 -inch) to large curd (~1/4 -inch). Smaller, typically means “shattered” and larger may signify “matted”. Uniformity is more important than size. Creamed cottage cheese is expected to exhibit a “blanket” of cream dressing clinging to the curds (“free cream” tends to “break away” from the curd mass when plated). When transparent/yellow, it is “free whey”. Creamed cottage cheese that is “too dry” lacks the expected sheen or gloss. Cottage cheese body should slightly resist tongue pressure when pressed to the roof of the mouth and break smoothly. If excessive force is needed, use the term “too firm” or “firm/rubbery”. If it squishes too easily, use the term “weak/soft”. Curds that remain in the mouth after mastication are called “mealy/grainy”. Cottage cheese flavor should be “delicate”. It should have a flavor/aroma of fresh cream with only slight lactic acid, salt and butter flavors. Anything that stands out can be faulted in a fresh creamed cottage cheese.

AH: Cheese Curds – all milks

ACS recognizes cheese curds as the fresh, solid, unripened form of curdled / soured / cultured / fermented milk that is the foundation for Cheddar and other cheeses, unique in flavor and texture, and optimally consumed within a day of its production. All entries into category AH must be received by Wednesday the week of the competition. Entries received after Wednesday will not be accepted or judged.

Standards of Excellence: Curds should be uniform in size and shape with little to no mechanical openings. Curds should taste fresh and milky (umami) with a slightly salty finish. Fresh curds should “squeak” against teeth when masticating, when tempered properly. Soft curds indicate proteolysis (aging) or poor workmanship.

AM: Mascarpone and Cream Cheese – made from cow's milk

Standards of Excellence: Mascarpone and cream cheese are expected to have delicate, fresh cream flavors. Mascarpone is expected to have a sweet taste with a lack of sour/acid; cream cheese should have lactic acid and salt tastes but not be sour or salty (think delicate). Both should have a smooth, spreadable body without free whey or dryness.

AN: Mascarpone and Cream Cheese – made from mixed or other milks

Standards of Excellence: Mascarpone and cream cheese are expected to have delicate, fresh cream flavors. Mascarpone is expected to have a sweet taste with a lack of sour/acid; cream cheese should have lactic acid and salt tastes but not be sour or salty (think delicate). Both should have smooth, spreadable body without free whey or dryness.

AQ: Fromage Blanc, Fromage Frais, and Quark – made from cow's milk

Standards of Excellence: Fromage Frais and Quark are expected to have delicate, fresh lactic taste with a touch of creamy or buttery flavors. Fromage Frais is expected to be sweeter and both should have lactic acid and salt tastes but not be sour or salty (think delicate). Both should have smooth, spreadable body without free whey or excessive dryness (quark may have a slightly grainy body).

AX: Fromage Blanc, Fromage Frais, and Quark – made from mixed or other milks

Standards of Excellence: Fromage Frais and Quark are expected to have delicate, fresh lactic taste with a touch of creamy or buttery flavors. Fromage Frais is expected to be sweeter and both should have lactic acid and salt tastes but not be sour or salty (think delicate). Both should have smooth, spreadable body without free whey or excessive dryness (quark may have a slightly grainy body).

AR: Ricotta – made from cow's milks

Standards of Excellence: Ricotta may be made from whole milk, skim milk and/or whey. The body is slightly grainy to smooth. It should be firm, but not rubbery or stiff enough to break a plastic spoon. It should have delicate, fresh milk-umami flavors, rather than cream/butter flavors. Although a heat and acid-coagulated product, excessive cooked and acidified flavors are not expected. Salt should be in balance.

AT: Ricotta - made from mixed or other milks.

NOTE: Type I -- Whole Milk Ricotta. The cheese is manufactured from whole milk, and the finished product shall contain not more than 80.0% moisture and not less than 11.0% milkfat. **Excluded:** Type II -- Part-skim Ricotta. The cheese is manufactured from milk with reduced milk fat content, and the finished product shall contain not more than 80.0% moisture and less than 11.0% but not less than 6.0% milkfat. Type III -- Ricotta (Ricotone) from whey or skim milk. The cheese is manufactured from skim milk, whey, or a blend of these products and the finished product shall contain not more than 82.5% moisture and less than 1.0% milkfat. **See category J.**

Standards of Excellence: Ricotta may be made from whole milk, skim milk and/or whey. The body is slightly grainy to smooth. It should be firm, but not rubbery or stiff enough to break a plastic spoon. It should have delicate, fresh milk-umami flavors, rather than cream/butter flavors. Although a heat and acid-coagulated product, excessive cooked and acidified flavors are not expected. Salt should be in balance.

AY: Crescenza and Stracchino style cheeses- all milks

NOTE: Crescenza – typically square or rectangular cheeses under 16 oz, made with uncooked curds – rindless, aged 10 – 15 days. Stracchino – cheeses aged over 14 days made with uncooked curds showing a thin rind and less creamy or spreadable than Crescenza.

Standards of Excellence: Crescenza and Stracchino are mild cheeses with delicate milky, umami, fresh lactic flavors. Anything that stands out (high salt, high acid, high diacetyl, or anything objectionable or unclean) must be called out by technical judges.

OPEN CATEGORY – FRESH UNRIPENED CHEESES

This category is for cheese that does not belong in any of the above listed categories.

AC: Open Category – Fresh Unripened Cheeses – made from cow's milk

Standards of Excellence: Since this is an open category, almost anything “fresh” goes! Expect “fresh” and “delicate” as the standard of excellence for fresh unripened cheeses. Anything that stands out (high salt, high acid, high diacetyl, or anything objectionable or unclean) must be called out by technical judges.

B. SOFT-RIPENED BLOOMY RIND CHEESES

White surface mold ripened cheeses (Brie, Camembert, Coulommiers, etc.) **Excluded:** Cheeses with any added flavor (refer to Category KB); Washed Rind Cheeses (refer to Category TB); External Blue molded cheeses (refer to Category F); Soft ripened cheeses wrapped in bark, leaves or grass (refer to Category DB).

BB: Brie and camembert styles made from cow's milk weighting under 8 oz. The rind is primarily *Penicillium* spp.

Standards of Excellence: The diacetyl-driven flavor of cow's milk is present throughout the cheese with notes of the primary feed perceivable in the paste and cream line, in addition to aromas of white button mushroom from *Penicillium* ripening of rind. The texture of the cheese is pudgy and giving, palate-coating on the initial bite and begins to melt on the tongue as it is consumed. The paste is unified, without distinct curd structure, potentially with a thin layer of more liquefied cream line, not extending beyond 1/4 of the overall paste. The rind is fluffy and white, adding texture to the bite without distinct chewiness, and has a neutral or mineral aroma in addition to mushroom.

BC: Brie and camembert styles made from cow's milk weighing 8 oz and higher. The rind is primarily *Penicillium* spp.

Standards of Excellence: Notes of diacetyl are present throughout the paste, with distinct aromas of brassica, deep earthy greens, and alliums. These aromas and flavors are also present in the rind, with muted notes of mushroom from *Penicillium* ripening, and lactic cream. The texture of the cheese is pudgy and giving, palate-coating on the initial bite and begins to melt on the tongue as it is consumed. The paste is unified, without distinct curd structure.

BR: Soft-Ripened Cheeses with surface rind made exclusively with *Geotrichum* - all milk. **Excluded:** cheeses with added cream (refer to category BT)

Standards of Excellence: The base flavor of milk type and feed are present throughout the paste and cream line. The texture of the paste ranges from velvety & silky to panna cotta & custard, primarily driven by milk type and its available fat content, and without a distinct curd structure. Noticeable cream line that is distinctly more liquefied and silken than paste, with a thin and unified rind. The rind is exclusively

Geotrichum candidum with a brain-like appearance and a white to brown coloring with hints of yellow. Flavor has notes of mushroom, and rind remains adhered to the paste.

BT: Added Cream (Double and Triple Crème) – soft ripened / cream added – all milks

Standards of Excellence: The base flavor of milk type and feed are present throughout the paste and cream line. The texture of the paste ranges from velvety & silky to panna cotta & custard, primarily driven by milk type and its available fat content, and without distinct curd structure. Noticeable cream line that is distinctly more liquefied and silken than paste, with a thin and unified rind. The rind is primarily *Penicillium candidum* with notes of mushroom, and remains adhered to the paste.

OPEN CATEGORY – SOFT-RIPENED CHEESES

This category is for cheese that does not belong in any of the above listed categories.

BA: Open Category – Soft-Ripened Cheeses – made from cow's milk. **Excluded:** cheeses with added cream (refer to category BT)

Standards of Excellence: The cheese has a soft paste, and potentially also cream line, that is distinguishable from the rind, balanced in salt, indicative of milk type and feed source, and unified rind. Notes of diacetyl and feed present in aroma and flavor.

BG: Open Category – Soft-Ripened Cheeses – made from goat's milk. **Excluded:** cheeses with added cream (refer to category BT)

Standards of Excellence: The cheese has a soft paste, and potentially also cream line, that is distinguishable from the rind, balanced in salt, indicative of milk type and feed source, and unified rind. Notes of lactic or citrus-driven acidity and feed present in aroma and flavor.

BS: Open Category – Soft-Ripened Cheeses – made from sheep's milk. **Excluded:** cheeses with added cream (refer to category BT)

Standards of Excellence: The cheese has a soft paste, and potentially also cream line, that is distinguishable from the rind, balanced in salt, indicative of milk type and feed source, and unified rind. Hints of nuttiness and feed present in aroma and flavor.

BX: Open Category – Soft-Ripened Cheeses – made from mixed, or other milks. **Excluded:** cheeses with added cream (refer to category BT)

Standards of Excellence: The cheese has a soft paste, and potentially also cream line, that is distinguishable from the rind, balanced in salt, indicative of milk type and feed source, and unified rind. Hints of nuttiness and feed present in aroma and flavor.

C. AMERICAN ORIGINALS

Cheeses recognized by the ACS as uniquely American in their original forms: Brick Cheese, Brick Muenster, Colby, Dry Jack, Monterey Jack, Teleme, etc. **Excluded:** Cheeses with any added flavor (refer to Category KM) or smoked (refer to category L), Consumer-ready convenience forms (e.g., sliced, shredded) (refer to Category U).

CB: Brick Cheese – made from cow's milk

Standards of Excellence: Made of cow's milk formed into 5 lb loaf. Brick Cheese can have a reddish-brown color and should be sticky to the touch. Some brick cheeses are coated in paraffin which is not part of the original recipe. The texture is sliceable and moist and flavors range from buttery, brothy, salty, yeasty/sweet when fully ripe.

CD: Dry Jack – made from cow's milk

Standards of Excellence: Made from cow's milk into a round wheel often 10 - 12 lbs with a flat bottom. The creases of the cheese cloth is often visible in the original recipe. The rind is dark brown rubbed in vegetable oil, cocoa, pepper and dry to the touch. The interior is straw colored, marked by small holes and is as hard as aged Parmesan. Dry Jack is often aged for two years.

CJ: Monterey Jack – made from cow's milk. **Excluded:** Colby Jack (refer to category CN)

Standards of Excellence: The original recipe is made from cow's milk in a 10 - 12 lb wheel. Square and rectangular shapes are acceptable. Jack is a higher moisture cheese than mild Cheddar and has more elasticity. Flavor should be mild, milky with a lightly citrus/tangy finish.

CN: Colby-Jack – made from cow's milk.

Standards of Excellence: Created by combining the curds of Colby and Jack cheeses prior to pressing in a square or longhorn shape or wheel. Distinct white and orange marbling is expected, with a mild, lightly citrus/tangy finish.

CY: Colby – made from cow's milk; **Excluded:** Colby Jack (see CN)

Standards of Excellence: Made from cow's milk with annatto coloring. The original recipe is a stirred curd cheese producing an open airy texture and tangy flavor that is soft and moist in the shape of a 13 lb “horn” or tube shape. These properties deserve extra points when present together. Colby can also be made similar to mild Cheddar and has a firmer texture and more acidity.

CM: Brick Muenster – made from cow's milk

Standards of Excellence: Made from cow's milk into a 6 lb loaf. The flavor is fresh milk, fresh cream and slightly salty and the texture is sliceable. The rind often has a reddish coating of paprika but a white natural rind is acceptable. (White Muenster). The interior is off white to pale yellow and the loaf can be uneven due to its high moisture.

CP: Pimento Cheese/Dip - all milks: note flavors are permitted in this category as they are part of the criteria of this particular product.

Standards of Excellence: Must include a balance of flavor between cheese, pimentos, and any flavorings. The weight of the natural cheese shall be the primary ingredient of the finished product. May include non-dairy ingredients such as mayonnaise, vegetable oil, starches, stabilizers, emulsifiers, spices, natural and/or artificial flavors and colors.

CT: Teleme – made from cow's milk

Standards of Excellence: Originally made from cow's milk into a 10 lb square shape. The rind is dusted with rice flour and is thinly crusty. The interior is creamy when ripe and can be runny. The flavor ranges from butter, lactic tanginess, and a slight citrus finish. Some very ripe Teleme squares are kept in a cardboard box to keep shape and avoid leaking.

ORIGINAL RECIPE / OPEN CATEGORY

This category is for cheese that does not fit into any other established ACS J&C category. It must be truly unique. Cheesemakers will be contacted by an ACS J&C committee member to explain why the entry belongs in this open category.

ORIGINAL RECIPE / OPEN CATEGORY cheeses must be:

- Unique in their recipe and formulation.
- Different from other acknowledged recipes and cheese types. (i.e. if the cheese belongs in an established ACS category, it does not belong in this category. For instance, a fresh mozzarella cheese made with goat and sheep and cow milk, cultured with traditional and an adjunct culture, along with the coagulating aid or lemon juice and thistle rennet is NOT an American Original--it is a TWIST on fresh mozzarella.)
- Created with a combination of at least THREE of the following elements that causes it to be globally new and unique from all other cheese types:
 1. **RECIPE**—when a cheesemaker makes measurable changes to any or all of these: pH or titratable acidity targets, vat cooking time or temperature, target moisture, treatment of the curd (e.g., washing, stretching), use of whey or other manipulation of the raw materials of milk or culture or starter agent or salting, brining, or pressing that yields an obvious difference to an existing recipe or is completely new from all other cheese recipes. For example, recipe changes may result in unique:
 - **BODY & TEXTURE**—noticeable and desirable changes to cheese body (e.g., firmness, crumbliness) and/or texture (e.g., crystals, eyes, mechanical openings) qualities with an obvious tactile or mouthfeel sensation.
 - **FLAVOR PROFILE**—an obvious profile of a specific flavor or combination of flavors not available in other cheeses.
 2. **COMBINATION OF TWO OR MORE MILKS OR TWO OR MORE CHEESES**—when a cheesemaker combines two or more milks or two or more cheeses in a unique manner (for instance, Colby Jack is its own American Originals category. Two more changes and the cheese would still belong in the Colby Jack category unless completely new). Must be dairy milk (not a non-animal source).
 3. **NON-DAIRY INGREDIENTS**—the addition of natural, non-artificial flavor agents or ingredients that **contribute(s) to the uniqueness and are central to the cheese identity (not**

simply a flavoring). NON-DAIRY INGREDIENTS must produce an obvious, measurable contribution to the uniqueness/original recipe and not dominate the flavor (e.g., vegetation or produce sourced where the cheese is made). The use of ingredients and flavor agents commonly used in cheeses entered in Categories K or P (e.g., herbs, seasonings, peppercorns, hot peppers, fruits, oils, marinades) is strongly discouraged.

4. **RIPENING PRACTICES**—when a cheesemaker takes unusual steps (e.g., uncommon, complex, overlapping or repetitive ripening methods) that measurably produce uniqueness to the finished cheese.
5. **APPEARANCE/RIND**—when a cheesemaker creates an enhanced cheese surface or rind that alters the cheese and/or its appearance, flavor or texture and contributes to its uniqueness.

CC: Original Recipe / Open Category – made from cow's milk- note flavors are permitted in this category as they are part of the criteria of uniqueness

Standards of Excellence: Cow milk cheeses should show some measurable degree of originality and difference from any other cheese. Cheeses can have an unfamiliar appearance, flavors (Cheddar/ Manchego), textures (fudgy interior with wrinkled rind), and aromas to create their originality to qualify for this category. Some deliberate characteristics include Calcium Lactate, wild organic vegetable/ fruit/alcohol aromas, forced ripening for mature flavors with a young texture, special packaging for melting/ cooking, the addition of other cheeses into the original recipe (creme fraiche/ quark butter) and unusual coatings sourced from the locale/terroir of the dairy.

CG: Original Recipe / Open Category – made from goat's milk: note flavors are permitted in this category as they are part of the criteria of uniqueness

Standards of Excellence: Goat milk cheeses should show some goat (short-chain fatty acid) flavor and tangy finish with possible sour notes. Cheeses can have an unfamiliar appearance, flavors (simultaneously tangy and sweet), textures (dense interior with wrinkled rind), and aromas to create their originality to qualify for this category. Some deliberate characteristics include wild organic vegetable/ fruit/alcohol aromas, forced ripening for mature flavors with a young texture, special packaging for melting/ cooking, the addition of other cheeses into the original recipe, unusual coatings sourced from the locale/ terroir of the dairy.

CS: Original Recipe / Open Category – made from sheep's milk note flavors are permitted in this category as they are part of the criteria of uniqueness

Standards of Excellence: Sheep milk cheeses should show some sheep (lanolin) flavors and some salt/ piquant flavor notes. Cheeses can have an unfamiliar appearance, flavors (simultaneously salty and full fat), textures (dense interior with wrinkled rind), and aromas to create their originality to qualify for this category. Some deliberate characteristics include wild organic vegetable/ fruit/alcohol aromas, forced ripening for mature flavors with a young texture, special rind treatments for appearance and flavor, the addition of other cheeses into the original recipe, unusual coatings sourced from the locale/ terroir of the dairy.

CX: Original Recipe / Open Category – made from mixed or other milks note flavors are permitted in this category as they are part of the criteria of uniqueness

Standards of Excellence: Mixed or other milks must be animal milk only and do not need to show the flavors of the original milks in the original recipe cheese. Cheeses can have an unfamiliar appearance, flavors (simultaneously salty and full fat), textures (deliberately crumbly or uneven shapes), and aromas to create their originality to qualify for this category. Some deliberate characteristics include wild organic vegetable/ fruit/alcohol aromas, forced ripening for mature flavors with a young texture, special rind treatments for appearance and flavor, the addition of other cheeses into the Original Recipe, unusual coatings sourced from the locale/ terroir of the dairy.

D. AMERICAN MADE / INTERNATIONAL STYLE-

Cheese modeled after or based on recipes for established European or other international types or styles (Abondance, Beaufort, Butterkase, Caerphilly, English Territorials, Gruyere, Juustoleipa, Monastery, Port Salut-styles, etc.). **Excluded:** Cheeses with any added flavor, including Leyden (Refer to Category KD), Cheeses with a washed rind (Refer to Category T), all Cheddars (Refer to Category E), all Hispanic/Portuguese-style (refer to Category G), all Italian-style Pasta Filata types, Grating types and Mozzarella types (refer to Category H), all Feta (refer to Category I); Spreads, dips or blends (Refer to Category S); Consumer-ready convenience forms (e.g., grated, sliced, shredded refer to Category U).

DB: Cheeses wrapped in bark, leaves or grass: Mont D'Or, Bannon, Robiola style cheeses, etc. - all milks

Standards of Excellence: Flavors of bark and cheese are in balance and both present (leaf/grass may not be present as a flavor but can be). Even ripening throughout the cheese. Uniform moisture content and rind development. Salt in balance.

DD: Dutch-style (Gouda, Edam, etc.) – aged through 9 months - all milks

Standards of Excellence: Clean flavors with sweet milky (umami) and nutty finish. Smooth paste, without eye defects, cracks (splits) or large holes. Even rind without cracks or discoloration.

DF: Dutch-style (Gouda, Edam, etc.) – aged 10 months and over - all milks

Standards of Excellence: Clean flavors, sweet and savory and nutty finish. Paste will go from smooth to hard depending on age but should not be dry, without eye defects, cracks (splits) or large holes. Even rind without cracks or discoloration.

DE: Emmental-style with Eye Formation (Swiss, Baby Swiss, Blocks, Wheels, etc.) – made from cow's milk

ALLOWED: Cheesemakers producing traditional Emmental wheels (180 lb. approx.) are permitted to submit cuts from original wheels. Entries cut from original wheels must weigh a minimum of 22 lbs.

Standards of Excellence: Uniform eyes (in size, shape and distribution) ranging from pea- to walnut-sized. Pliable paste without cracks or fissures. Sweet, clean milky (umami) and nutty flavors. Even rind without cracks or discoloration.

OPEN CATEGORY – AMERICAN MADE/INTERNATIONAL STYLE

This category is for cheese that does not belong in any of the above listed categories. Intended style required on entry form.

DC: Open Category – American Made/International Style – made from cow's milk

Standards of Excellence: Clean cow's milk flavors. Looks like intended style, in shape, size and color. Paste and rind evenly ripened, without cracks or discoloration. Salt in balance.

DG: Open Category – American Made/International Style – made from goat's milk

Standards of Excellence: Clean goat's milk flavors (short-chain fatty acids). Looks like intended style, in shape, size and color. Paste and rind evenly ripened, without cracks or discoloration. Salt in balance.

DS: Open Category – American Made/International Style – made from sheep's milk

Standards of Excellence: Clean sheep's milk flavors (lanolin). Looks like the intended style, in shape, size and color. Paste and rind evenly ripened, without cracks or discoloration. Salt in balance.

DX: Open Category – American Made/International Style – made from mixed, or other milks

Standards of Excellence: Clean milk flavors. Looks like the intended style, in shape, size and color. Paste and rind evenly ripened, without cracks or discoloration. Salt in balance.

E. CHEDDARS

All Cheddars – all milks – Based on age at time of Judging & Competition. **Excluded:** Pasteurized process cheeses of any kind; Cheddars with any added flavors (refer to Category KE), Smoked Cheeses (refer to Category L); Spreads, dips or blends (refer to Category S), Consumer-ready convenience forms (e.g., sliced, shredded) (refer to Category U).

EA: Aged Cheddar – aged 13 months through 23 months – all milks

Standards of Excellence: Balance of flavor characteristics like acid, sweet, nutty, salt. Be critical of excessive weak body, short body, slits, mottled body, seamy body, curdy body. Be critical of excessive bitterness, fruity, whey taint, lipase, lacking or flat flavor.

EC: Cheddar – aged through 12 months – made from cow's milk

Standards of Excellence: Balance of flavor characteristics like acid, sweet, nutty, salt. Be critical of excessive weak body, short body, slits, mottled body, seamy body, curdy body. Be critical of excessive bitterness, fruity, whey taint, lipase, lacking or flat flavor.

EG: Cheddar – aged through 12 months – made from goat's, sheep's, buffalo's, mixed, or other milk

Standards of Excellence: Balance of flavor characteristics like acid, sweet, nutty, salt. Be critical of excessive weak body, short body, slits, mottled body, seamy body, curdy body. Be critical of excessive bitterness, fruity, whey taint, lipase, lacking or flat flavor.

EX: Mature Cheddar – aged 24 months through 47 months – all milks

Standards of Excellence: Balance of flavor characteristics like acid, sweet, nutty, salt. Be critical of excessive weak body, crumbly, slits, mottled body, seamy body, curdy body. Be critical of excessive bitterness, whey taint, lipase, lacking or flat flavor.

EE: Mature Cheddar – aged 48 or more months – all milks

Standards of Excellence: Balance of flavor characteristics like acid, sweet, nutty, salt. Be critical of excessive weak body, crumbly, slits, mottled body, seamy body, curdy body. Be critical of excessive bitterness, whey taint, lipase, lacking or flat flavor.

EW: Cheddar with natural rind – May be larded, bandaged, clothbound, or coated with breathable treatment. aged through 12 months – all milks. Excluded: cheeses with a natural wax or plastic coat.

Standards of Excellence: Balance of flavor characteristics like acid, sweet, nutty, salt. Be critical of excessive mites, cracked rind, weak body, short body, slits, mottled body, seamy body, curdy body. Be critical of excessive bitterness, whey taint, lipase, lacking or flat flavor.

EB: Cheddar with natural rind – May be larded, bandaged, clothbound, or coated with breathable treatment. – aged 13 or more months – all milks, Excluded: cheeses with a natural wax or plastic coat

Standards of Excellence: Balance of flavor characteristics like acid, sweet, nutty, salt. Be critical of excessive mites, cracked rind, weak body, short body, slits, mottled body, seamy body, curdy body. Be critical of excessive bitterness, whey taint, lipase, lacking or flat flavor.

EF: Sweet Cheddar- commonly made by including *Lb. helveticus* adjunct culture - all milks, all ages

Standards of Excellence: Aged Cheddar flavor with more pronounced sweet, nutty, and fruity flavors. Be critical of excessive mites, cracked rind, weak body, short body, slits, mottled body, seamy body, curdy body. Be critical of excessive bitterness, whey taint, lipase, lacking or flat flavor.

F. BLUE MOLD CHEESES

All cheeses ripened with *Penicillium roqueforti* or *glaucum*. **Excluded:** Blue Mold Cheeses with Flavor Added (refer to Category KC), Smoked Blue Cheeses (Refer to Category LC or LX); Spreads, dips or blends (refer to Category S). Consumer-ready convenience forms (e.g., crumbled refer to Category U).

RINDLESS BLUE–VEINED CHEESE

Defined as having no additional rind or coating on the external face of the cheese (Roquefort-style, Danish Blue-style, etc.).

FC: Rindless Blue-veined – made from cow's milk

Standards of Excellence: Surfaces of wheels or wedges may appear white- to cream-colored. Blue cheeses should slice cleanly, without excessive force or crumbling. Blue-veined cheeses should have recognizable lactic acid, acetic acid, aroma upon opening. Extensive, vibrant, blue-green veining is expected throughout the body (from interior to just below the surface) of the white-to-cream-colored open-textured paste. Blue cheeses should break down into a smooth paste relatively quickly during mastication.

FX: Rindless Blue-veined – made from goat, sheep, mixed, or other milks

Standards of Excellence: Surfaces of wheels or wedges may appear white- to cream-colored. Blue cheeses should slice cleanly, without excessive force or crumbling. Blue-veined cheeses should have recognizable lactic acid, acetic acid, aroma upon opening; some goat (short-chain fatty acids) and sheep (lanolin) aromas and flavors are expected. Extensive, vibrant, blue-green veining is expected throughout the body (from interior to just below the surface) of the white-to-cream-colored open-textured paste. Blue cheeses should break down into a smooth paste relatively quickly during mastication.

BLUE–VEINED CHEESES WITH RIND OR EXTERNAL COATING

Defined as a fully developed rind growth different from the naturally occurring blue (Bleu de Gex, Stilton, etc.). The rind can include white mold (soft ripened mold/*Penicillium candidum*; Cambozola, etc.). External Coatings include non-mold coatings such as nettles, ash, herbs, leaves, spices, crust, cloth, oils, etc.

FK: Blue-veined with a rind or external coating – made from cow's milk

Standards of Excellence: Surfaces of wheels or wedges may have external coatings of various colors or styles. Blue cheeses should slice cleanly, without excessive force or crumbling. Blue-veined cheeses should have recognizable lactic acid, acetic acid, aroma upon opening, without being overpowered by the flavor of the coating. Extensive, vibrant, blue-green veining is expected throughout the body (from interior to

just below the surface) of the white-to-cream-colored open-textured paste. Blue cheeses should break down into a smooth paste relatively quickly during mastication.

FZ: Blue-veined with a rind or external coating – made from goat, sheep, mixed, or other milks

Standards of Excellence: Surfaces of wheels or wedges may have external coatings of various colors or styles. Blue cheeses should slice cleanly, without excessive force or crumbling. The cheeses should have recognizable lactic acid, acetic acid, and goat (short-chain fatty acids) or sheep (lanolin) aroma upon opening, without being overpowered by the flavor of the coating. Extensive, vibrant, blue-green veining is expected throughout the body (from interior to just below the surface) of the white-to-cream-colored open-textured paste. Blue cheeses should break down into a smooth paste relatively quickly during mastication.

EXTERNAL BLUE–MOLDED/RINDED CHEESES

Cheeses having **NO INTERNAL BLUE VEINING** but which **DO** have a rind, covering or crust made of **BLUE MOLD** which is completely different and separate from the cheese paste (Hubbardston Blue, Montbriac, etc.)

FE: External Blue molded cheeses – all milks

Standards of Excellence: Surfaces must have external blue mold, but no interior veining. The cheeses should have recognizable clean lactic acid, acetic acid aroma and flavor, without being overpowered by the flavor of the blue surface mold. When cut, a white-to-cream-colored paste is expected; body may vary based on objective of cheesemaker.

G. SPANISH, HISPANIC & PORTUGUESE STYLE CHEESES

Standards of excellence, general: These cheeses should have pleasing and desirable aroma and flavor characteristics consistent with the age of the cheese and should be free from undesirable aromas and flavors. Cheeses made in the Americas based on the recipes of the Central and South American, Cuban, Hispanic, Latino, Mexican, Portuguese, and Spanish communities. **Excluded:** Cheeses with any added flavors (refer to Category KG), Smoked Cheeses (refer to Category L), Consumer-ready convenience forms (e.g., sliced, shredded) (refer to Category U).

GA: Ripened, Aged over 90 days (Anejo, Cincho, Cotija, Flamingo Bolla, Prato) – all milks

Standards of Excellence: Cheeses in this category are expected to exhibit mild to sharp, and may contain low to moderate hydrolytic rancid flavors, depending on type. The body/texture of these cheeses may be crumbly or rubbery/dry (appropriate for slicing or grating).

GC: Fresh, Unripened (Acoreano, Freir, Queijo Branco, Queso Andino, Queso Blanco, Queso Campesino, Queso Crema, Queso de Puna, Queso Fresco) – all milks

Standards of Excellence: Cheeses in this category are expected to have mild, balanced buttery, clean dairy flavors with milk to moderate salt note. They range from crumbly to slightly rubbery in body, depending on type.

GM: Cooking Hispanic – Cheeses intended to be consumed heated or melted (Chihuahua, Para Freir, Quesadilla, Quesillo, etc.) – all milks with or without added flavor. **NOTE – All entries in this category will be cooked for judging.**

Standards of Excellence: Cheeses in this category are expected to melt and stretch readily or hold their shape but bubble and brown, depending on type. Mild dairy cream or buttery and caramel notes are expected upon melting.

H. ITALIAN TYPE CHEESES

Excluded: Cheeses with any added flavor (refer to Category K), Crescenza, Mascarpone, and Ricotta, stracchino (Refer to Category A), Blue Cheeses (refer to Category F), Smoked Cheeses (refer to Category L), Washed Rind Cheeses (refer to Category T), Quesillo or Oaxaca (refer to Category G), Consumer-ready convenience forms (e.g., sliced, shredded) (refer to Category U).

HA: Grating types (Aged Asiago, Domestic Parmesan, Grana, Reggiano, Romano, Sardo) – all milks
For Romano made *only* from cow's or goat's milk (for sheep milk Romano refer to Category OU)

Excluded: pre-shredded or pre-grated cheeses (refer to Category U)

Standards of Excellence: If a rind is present, it exists in unity with the paste without a cream line and cannot be easily removed without tools. Appearance is firm and dry, possibly with an oily sheen. While grating fine shreds should appear without excessive crumbling of the body. Texture ranges from firm-but-pliable to dry, craggy, and crystalline. Color ranges from pure white to golden straw based on milk type and primary feed. Aroma and flavor is nutty, and potentially lactic/acidic and/or sweet like caramelized/burnt sugar. Salt is well balanced and does not overwhelm the flavor of the milk.

HB: Burrata – Fresh mozzarella encasing a distinctly separate core made from softer curd and cream, or other soft cheese – all milks

Standards of Excellence: Exterior appearance is unified in structure, without air holes, and no rind is present. Exterior texture is fluffy and lightly bouncy as a result of air incorporation into paste during stretching and forming, and is a thin casing encapsulating a softer core. The interior core, traditionally stracciatella, is light and fluffy in texture, may consist of a cream dressing with small pieces of mozzarella incorporated throughout, and tastes of lightly salted fresh sweet cream. Salt, whether introduced through brining or directly into curd, has diffused throughout the exterior and interior, accentuating the milk's natural sweetness. Interior should be spreadable and not cakey or overly dense. If a dressing is present, it may be slightly runny.

HD: Traditional Regional Italian Cheeses (including but not limited to: Mezzo Secco, Asiago Piccante and Fresca, Piave, Montasio, Caciotta, Bra, Ragusano, Fontina, Fontal, Toma, Robiola Natural Rind, etc.) – all milks

NOTE: If using an original (new) name but following a traditional recipe, cheesemaker must identify cheese of origin in the comment field.

Standards of Excellence: Cheese exhibits the regionalized characteristics of the reference cheese of Italian origin, while expressing flavor and aroma profiles of the milk's terroir-of-origin.

HM: Mozzarella types (Brick shape or loaf, Scamorza, String Cheese, Whips) – all milks

Standards of Excellence: Appearance is unified in structure, with any noticeable rind having resulted from air drying or brining. Paste ranges in texture from bouncy to sinewy as a result of curd stretching time and intensity, with notable loss of moisture during stretching and aging. Flavor ranges from sweet fresh milk to mildly nutty. A slight level of acid may be present. Salt is evenly distributed within the paste and accentuates the milk's natural sweetness.

HP: Pasta Filata types (Provolone, Caciocavallo) – all milks

Standards of Excellence: Appearance is unified in structure, with any noticeable rind having resulted from air drying or brining. Paste ranges in texture from bouncy to sinewy as a result of curd stretching time and intensity, with notable loss of moisture during stretching and aging. Flavor ranges from sweet fresh milk to lactic pineapple. Salt is concentrated from aging but not overpowering the flavor of the milk.

HS: Stracciatella – Mozzarella and cream typically used to fill Burrata – all milks

Standards of Excellence: A creamy mix of delicate shredded mozzarella and cream. The cream is balanced with the slightly acidic curd.

HY: Fresh Mozzarella – 8 oz. or More (Balls or Shapes) – all milks

Standards of Excellence: Appearance is unified in structure, without air holes, and no rind is present. Texture is fluffy and lightly bouncy as a result of air incorporation into paste during stretching and forming. Salt, whether introduced through brining or directly into curd, has diffused throughout the paste and accentuates the milk's natural sweetness.

NOTE: Sizes listed in HY refer to the size of the individual mozzarella ball, not the weight of the package.

HZ: Fresh Mozzarella – Under 8 oz. (Ovalini, Bocconcini, Ciliegine sizes) – all milks

NOTE: Sizes listed in HZ refer to the size of the individual mozzarella ball, not the weight of the package.

Standards of Excellence: Appearance is unified in structure, without air holes, and no rind is present. Texture is fluffy and lightly bouncy as a result of air incorporation into paste during stretching and forming. Salt, whether introduced through brining or directly into curd, has diffused throughout the paste and accentuates the milk's natural sweetness.

I. FETA CHEESES

Excluded: Cheeses with any added flavors (refer to Category KI); Spreads, dips, blends or whipped feta (refer to category AC, KQ, KI or S). Consumer-ready convenience forms (e.g., crumbled) refer to Category U.

IC: Feta – made from cow's milk

Standards of Excellence: Feta is a rindless white to cream colored cheese made WITHOUT added coloring. The aroma may be mild to pungent depending on age and traditionally cured in brine. The texture can be creamy to crumbly with a dominant salty flavor and tang.

IG: Feta – made from goat's milk

Standards of Excellence: Goat feta is a rindless pure white cheese. The aroma may be mild to pungent depending on age and traditionally cured in brine. The texture can be creamy to crumbly with a dominant salty flavor and tang.

IX: Feta – made from sheep, mixed, or other milks

Standards of Excellence: Feta made from ewe's or mixed milks may be pure white to light cream in color and rindless. The aroma may be mild to pungent depending on age and traditionally cured in brine. The texture may vary from creamy to crumbly with a pronounced salty tangy flavor.

J. LOW FAT / LOW SALT CHEESES

Each cheese entry must be labeled with one of the following terms:

- **Fat-Free:** less than 0.5 grams fat per labeled serving size & no added fat or oil
- **Low Fat:** maximum 3 grams total fat per serving for serving size if serving size is more than 30 grams or 2 tablespoons; and 3 grams of fat or less per 50 grams of product if serving size is less than 30 grams or less than 2 tablespoons.
- **Light or Lite:** if less than 50% of calories come from fat the cheese label must show a 33.3% reduction of calories than referenced amount or 50% reduction in fat. If more than 50% of calories come from fat, the cheese labels must show a minimum of 50% reduction of fat per reference amount.
- **Reduced Fat:** minimum 25% reduction in total fat per referenced amount.

Source: U.S. Nutrition Labeling & Education Act - Nov., 1990

Excluded: Cheeses with any added flavors (refer to Category KJ), Smoked Cheeses (refer to Category L), Pasteurized Process Cheese of any kind. Consumer-ready convenience forms (e.g., sliced) refer to Category U.

JL: Fat Free and Low Fat cheeses – *Limited to cheeses with 3 grams or less total fat per serving size* – all milks

Standards of Excellence: Clean flavor. Be critical of excessive sour and bitter flavors. Be critical of excessive short body.

JR: Light/Lite and Reduced Fat cheeses – *Limited to cheeses with 25 – 50% reduction of fat per serving size when 50% of calories in the serving size come from fat* – all milks

Standards of Excellence: Clean flavor. Be critical of excessive sour and bitter flavors. Be critical of excessive short body.

K. FLAVORED CHEESES, BUTTER, AND CULTURED DAIRY PRODUCTS

Cheeses, butters, and cultured dairy products containing ingredients distinct from, and not included in, the dairy process itself. Ingredients are either blended internally or applied externally for the purpose of adding additional flavors not found in those dairy products themselves. **Excluded:** Smoked Cheeses and smoked ingredients added (Refer to Category L), marinated cheeses (Refer to Category P), cheeses wrapped in bark, leaves or grass (Refer to Category DB), consumer-ready convenience forms (e.g., grated, shaved, cubed, matchsticks, sliced or shredded forms.) (refer to Category U).

Entries are judged on the quality of the base cheese or dairy product and the complementary balance of its added flavors.

KA: Fresh Unripened Cheese with Flavor Added (Cream Cheese, Fromage Blanc, Fromage Frais, Impastata, Quark, etc.) – cow, sheep, mixed, and other milks (All fresh 100% goat milk cheeses, refer to Category KN)

Standards of Excellence: Look for balance between the added flavor and the flavor of the product. The added flavor should enhance the overall experience. Fresh unripened cheeses are expected to have delicate, fresh lactic taste with a touch of milky umami, creamy or buttery flavors (depending on the typical fat content of the product). The products are often expected to have smooth, spreadable body without free whey or excessive dryness.

KB: Soft-Ripened with Flavor Added – all milks

Standards of Excellence: Look for balance between the added flavor and the flavor of the product. The added flavor should enhance the overall experience. The diacetyl-driven flavor of cow's milk is present throughout the cheese with notes of the primary feed perceivable in the paste and cream line, in addition

to aromas of white button mushroom from penicillium ripening of rind. The texture of the cheese is pudgy and giving, palate-coating on the initial bite and begins to melt on the tongue as it is consumed. The paste is unified, without distinct curd structure, potentially with a thin layer of more liquefied cream line, not extending beyond 1/4 of the overall paste. The rind is fluffy and white, adding texture to the bite without distinct chewiness, and has a neutral or mineral aroma in addition to mushroom.

KD: International-Style with Flavor Added – all milks. Intended style required on entry form

Standards of Excellence: Look for balance between the added flavor and the flavor of the product. The added flavor should enhance the overall experience. Clean flavors with sweet milky (umami) and nutty finish. Smooth paste, without eye defects, cracks (splits) or large holes. Even rind without cracks or discoloration.

KE: Cheddar with Flavor Added (refer to category KH for intended hot flavors) – all milks

Standards of Excellence: Look for balance between the added flavor and the flavor of the product. The added flavor should enhance the overall experience. Balance of flavor characteristics like acid, sweet, nutty, salt. Be critical of excessive weak body, short body, slits, mottled body, seamy body, curdy body. Be critical of excessive bitterness, fruity, whey taint, lipase, lacking or flat flavor.

KF: Farmstead Cheese with Flavor Added (must conform to all guidelines in Category M) – all milks

Standards of Excellence: Look for balance between the added flavor and the flavor of the product. The added flavor should enhance the overall experience. Farmstead cheese may assume any shape or format according to the discretion of the producer. The milk must be pasteurized and have a clean and inviting aroma representative of the style of cheese being produced. The texture and flavor should be typical for the species and breed of animal milk it represents. Ideally, the animals would be fed with grain and forages local to the farm.

KG: Hispanic-Style with Flavor Added – all milks. Intended style required on entry form. All cheeses that need melting refer to category GM.

Standards of Excellence: Look for balance between the added flavor and the flavor of the product. The added flavor should enhance the overall experience. These cheeses should have pleasing and desirable aroma and flavor characteristics consistent with the age of the cheese and should be free from undesirable aromas and flavors.

KH: Cheddar with hot pepper (capsaicin) /spicy flavor added (intended hot)– all milks

Standards of Excellence: Look for balance between the added flavor and the flavor of the product. The added flavor should enhance the overall experience. Balance of flavor characteristics like acid, sweet, nutty, salt. Be critical of excessive weak body, short body, slits, mottled body, seamy body, curdy body. Be critical of excessive bitterness, fruity, whey taint, lipase, lacking or flat flavor.

KI: Feta with Flavor Added – all milks

Standards of Excellence: Look for balance between the added flavor and the flavor of the product. The added flavor should enhance the overall experience. Feta is a rindless white to cream colored cheese made WITHOUT added coloring. The aroma may be mild to pungent depending on age and traditionally cured in brine. The texture can be creamy to crumbly with a dominant salty flavor and tang.

KJ: Reduced Fat Cheese with Flavor Added – all milks refer to category J for fat content requirements

Standards of Excellence: Look for balance between the added flavor and the flavor of the product. The added flavor should enhance the overall experience.

KK: Rubbed-Rind Cheese with added flavor ingredients rubbed or applied on the *exterior surface of the cheese only*. **Excluded:** Washed-Rind cheeses, refer to Category T – all milks

Standards of Excellence: Look for balance between the added flavor and the flavor of the product. The added flavor should enhance the overall experience. The appearance of the rind should be enhanced by the rub.

KL: Cheese Curds with sweet predominant flavor – all milks

ACS recognizes cheese curds as the fresh, solid, unripened form of curdled / soured / cultured / fermented milk that is the foundation for Cheddar and other cheeses, unique in flavor and texture, and optimally consumed within a day of its production. All entries into category AH must be received by Wednesday the week of the competition. Entries received after Wednesday will not be accepted or judged.

Standards of Excellence: Look for balance between the added flavor and the flavor of the product. The added flavor should enhance the overall experience. Curds should be uniform in size and shape with little to no mechanical openings. Curds should taste fresh and milky (umami) with a slightly salty finish. Fresh curds should “squeak” against teeth when masticating, when tempered properly. Soft curds indicate proteolysis (aging) or poor workmanship.

KU: Cheese Curds with savory predominant flavor – all milks

Standards of Excellence: Look for balance between the added flavor and the flavor of the product. The added flavor should enhance the overall experience. Curds should be uniform in size and shape with little to no mechanical openings. Curds should taste fresh and milky (umami) with a slightly salty finish. Fresh curds should “squeak” against teeth when masticating, when tempered properly. Soft curds indicate proteolysis (aging) or poor workmanship.

KM: American Originals (see C category) with Flavor Added – all milks. **Excluded:** Flavored Colby, Monterey and Colby Jack cheeses (refer to Category KW)

Standards of Excellence: Look for balance between the added flavor and the flavor of the product. The added flavor should enhance the overall experience. should show some measurable degree of originality and difference from any other cheese. Cheeses can have an unfamiliar appearance, flavors (Cheddar/Manchego), textures (fudgy interior with wrinkled rind), and aromas to create their originality to qualify for this category. Some deliberate characteristics include Calcium Lactate, wild organic vegetable/ fruit/alcohol aromas, forced ripening for mature flavors with a young texture, special packaging for melting/ cooking, the addition of other cheeses into the Original recipe (creme fraiche/ quark butter) and unusual coatings sourced from the locale/terroir of the dairy.

KN: Fresh Goat Cheese with sweet predominant flavor – aged under 30 days – 100% goat’s milk

Standards of Excellence: Look for balance between the added flavor and the flavor of the product. The added flavor should enhance the overall experience. Soft goat cheeses such as chevre are expected to be refreshing (fresh) with a slight tang (lactic acid) and recognizable but not strong goat flavor (characterized by caproic, caprylic, and capric acids).

KP: Fresh Goat Cheese with savory predominant flavor – aged under 30 days – 100% goat’s milk

Standards of Excellence: Look for balance between the added flavor and the flavor of the product. The added flavor should enhance the overall experience. Soft goat cheeses such as chevre are expected to be refreshing (fresh) with a slight tang (lactic acid) and recognizable but not strong goat flavor (characterized by caproic, caprylic, and capric acids).

KO: Sheep Cheese with Flavor Added – 100% sheep’s milk. **Excluded:** Sheep’s milk cheese with added flavor and bloomy rind (refer to category KB)

Standards of Excellence: Look for balance between the added flavor and the flavor of the product. The added flavor should enhance the overall experience. Cheeses should appear white and opaque. Aromas can range from sheepy mild lanolin to mild milkiness. Flavors are mild sheep and piquant/ spice with a soft creamy texture.

KQ: Yogurt and Cultured Products with Flavor Added (Set yogurts, Greek-style, Dips, etc.) – cow’s milk

Standards of Excellence: Look for balance between the added flavor and the flavor of the product. The added flavor should enhance the overall experience. Yogurt and cultured products should have typical lactic (and in some cases diacetyl and acetaldehyde) flavors. Should have a smooth and creamy texture, and can be sweet, savory, sour, and/or rich.

KR: Butter with Flavor Added – all milks

Standards of Excellence: Look for balance between the added flavor and the flavor of the product. The added flavor should enhance the overall experience.

KS: Cold-Pack and Club Cheeses with Flavor Added – with a maximum moisture of 42% – all milks. Refer to definition in Category S. **Excluded:** Pasteurized Process Cheeses, Spreads or Dips with added mayonnaise, cream cheese or yogurt.

Standards of Excellence: Look for balance between the added flavor and the flavor of the product. The added flavor should enhance the overall experience. All the normal desirable flavor profiles from cheese should be found in the cold-pack also. When ingredients are added to the cold-pack there should still be a good balance of cheese flavor to ingredient flavor. You should be able to taste both. Texture should be spreadable with a knife. Undesirable if runny, sticky, too stiff, or grainy. Most judges will use a plate and smear it on with a knife to check texture. It should spread like butter.

KT: Yogurt and Cultured Products with Flavor Added (Set yogurts, Greek-style, Dips, etc.) – all mixed and other milks

Standards of Excellence: Look for balance between the added flavor and the flavor of the product. The added flavor should enhance the overall experience. Should have a smooth and creamy texture, and can be sweet, savory, sour, and/or rich.

KV: Yogurt and Cultured Products with Flavor Added (Drinkable, Pourable, Smoothie, etc.) – all milks

Standards of Excellence: Look for balance between the added flavor and the flavor of the product. The added flavor should enhance the overall experience. White to cream-colored milk drink with a slightly fizzy, viscous consistency; a distinct sour smell; and a tart, creamy taste.

KW: Jack-style American Originals (flavored Colby, Monterey and Colby Jack cheeses) – all milks

Standards of Excellence: Look for balance between the added flavor and the flavor of the product. The added flavor should enhance the overall experience.

- **Monterey Jack:** The original recipe is made from cow's milk in a 10 - 12 lb wheel. Square and rectangular shapes are acceptable. Jack is a higher moisture cheese than mild Cheddar and has more elasticity. Flavor should be mild, milky with a lightly citrus/tangy finish.
- **Colby:** Made from cow's milk with annatto coloring. The original recipe is a stirred curd cheese producing an open airy texture and tangy flavor that is soft and moist in the shape of a 13 lb “horn” or tube shape. These properties deserve extra points when present together. Colby can also be made similar to mild Cheddar and has a firmer texture and more acidity.
- **Colby Jack:** Created by combining the curds of Colby and Jack cheeses prior to pressing in a square or longhorn shape or wheel. Distinct white and orange marbling is expected, with a mild, lightly citrus/tangy finish.

OPEN CATEGORY – FLAVOR ADDED

This category is for cheese that does not belong in any of the above listed categories (e.g., Flavored Blue Cheese).

Excluded: Pasteurized Process Cheese of any kind

KC: Open Category - Cheeses with Flavor Added – all milks and mixed milks.

Standards of Excellence: Look for balance between the added flavor and the flavor of the product. The added flavor should enhance the overall experience.

L. SMOKED CHEESES

Information about the smoke source (i.e. natural and/or smoke flavorings) must accompany each cheese entry.

Excluded: Pasteurized Process Cheese of any kind. For entries with added smoked ingredients (e.g., smoked peppercorns) refer to Category K.

LD: Smoked Cheddars – all milks

Standards of Excellence: Look for balance between smoke flavor and the flavor of the product. The smoke flavor should enhance the overall experience.

LG: Smoked Gouda – Smoked Cheeses – made from all milks

Standards of Excellence: Look for balance between smoke flavor and the flavor of the product. The smoke flavor should enhance the overall experience.

LM: Smoked Italian Styles (Mozzarella, Scamorza, Bocconcini, Ovalini, etc.) – all milks

Standards of Excellence: Look for balance between smoke flavor and the flavor of the product. The smoke flavor should enhance the overall experience.

LU: Consumer-ready Convenience Cheese. This category is for large format cheeses converted into consumer-ready convenience formats – all milks. Natural smoked cheese of any type, presented in consumer-ready grated, shaved, cubed, matchsticks, sliced or shredded forms.

Standards of Excellence: Look for balance between smoke flavor and the flavor of the product. The smoke flavor should enhance the overall experience. Distribution of size and shape should be consistent (e.g., minimal fines). Flavor should be representative of the intended natural cheese style. Packaged cheese should not exhibit visual defects (e.g., calcium lactate crystals, free anti-caking agent). Slices and cubes should be devoid of mechanical openings or gas unless representative of the intended style (e.g., Baby Swiss).

OPEN CATEGORY – SMOKED CHEESES

This category is for cheese that does not belong in any of the above listed categories.

LC: Open Category – Smoked Cheeses – made from cow's milk

Standards of Excellence: Look for balance between smoke flavor and the flavor of the product. The smoke flavor should enhance the overall experience.

LX: Open Category – Smoked Cheeses – made from mixed, or other milks

Standards of Excellence: Look for balance between smoke flavor and the flavor of the product. The smoke flavor should enhance the overall experience.

M. FARMSTEAD CHEESES

For a cheese to be classified as “farmstead,” as defined by the American Cheese Society, the cheese must be made with milk from the farmer’s own herd, or flock, and aged on the farm where the animals are raised. Milk used in the production of farmstead cheeses may not be obtained from any outside source. Farmstead cheeses may be made from all types of milk and all styles. **Excluded:** Cheeses with any added flavors (refer to Category KF); cheeses made from the milk from the farmers own herd but not made or aged onsite (third party affineurs); Smoked (refer to Category L).

Limited to cheeses and fermented milk products produced with:

- Milk obtained solely from the farmer’s own herds/flocks on the farm where the animals are raised
- Care and attention given to the purity, quality, and flavor of the milk
- Production primarily accomplished by hand
- Natural ripening with emphasis on development of characteristic flavor and texture, without the use of shortcuts and techniques to increase yield and shelf life at the expense of quality
- Respect for the traditions and history of cheesemaking regardless of the size of the production

MA: Farmstead Category – Aged less than 60 days – all milks

Standards of Excellence: Farmstead cheese may assume any shape or format according to the discretion of the producer. The milk must be pasteurized and have a clean and inviting aroma representative of the style of cheese being produced. The texture and flavor should be typical for the species and breed of animal milk it represents. Ideally, the animals would be fed with grain and forages local to the farm.

MC: Farmstead Category – Aged 60 days or more – 39% or higher Moisture – made from cow's milk

Standards of Excellence: The cheese may be made with raw or pasteurized milk and may assume any form or shape. A clean and inviting aroma is consistent with well produced cheese. The flavor and texture should be typical for the style of cheese being produced. Ideally, local feeds would be offered to the animals.

ME: Farmstead Category – Aged 60 days or more – Less than 39% Moisture – made from cow's milk

Standards of Excellence: The cheese may be made with raw or pasteurized milk and may be presented in any shape or format. The flavor, aroma and texture should be consistent with the age of the cheese and the style being produced.

MG: Farmstead Category – Aged 60 days or more – made from goat’s milk

Standards of Excellence: The cheese may be made with raw or pasteurized milk and be pure white in color. The flavor, aroma and texture would be more intense than a similar style cheese of cows milk and may be made in any shape or format.

MS: Farmstead Category – Aged 60 days or more – made from sheep's milk

Standards of Excellence: The cheese may be made of raw or pasteurized milk and be pure white to buff in color. It may assume any shape or format according to the discretion of the cheesemaker. The aroma and flavor should be buttery to nutty and the texture smooth to slightly granular.

MX: Farmstead Category – Aged 60 days or more – made from mixed, or other milks

Standards of Excellence: The cheese may be made with any combination or other species of ruminant milk and may be raw or pasteurized. The appearance and shape is at the discretion of the cheesemaker. The flavor, aroma and texture should represent the characteristics of the contributing animals in a unique way according to the ratio of milks being used and the style of cheese being produced.

N. GOAT’S MILK CHEESES

Standards of excellence, general: Goat cheeses should have pleasing and desirable aroma and flavor characteristics consistent with the age of the cheese and should be free from undesirable aromas and flavors. A term that should come to mind is balance. The most common attributes shared in U.S. goat cheeses include: overall dairy (especially buttery, dairy fat, dairy sour (i.e., lactic)), goaty (short-chain fatty acids (i.e., caproic, caprylic and capric)), astringent, biting, pungent, sharp, salty, sour and bitter (though bitterness should not be objectionable). Goat cheeses should be downgraded if they lack typical goaty flavor, but goat flavor should not overwhelm. The body and texture of most goat cheeses vary depending on cheese style, so a judge must be familiar with the intended style of the cheese to be a fair evaluator.

Open to all shapes and styles of 100% goat’s milk cheeses; based on age at time of Judging & Competition.

Excluded: Cheeses with any added flavor (Refer to Category KN), Cheese Curds, Cottage Cheese, Cream

Cheese, Fromage Blanc, Fromage Frais, Mascarpone, Quark, and Ricotta (Refer to Category A). Cheeses with bloomy rinds (refer to Category BG), cheeses with bloomy rinds and added cream (Refer to Category BT); Spreads, blends or dips (refer to Category S), consumer-ready convenience forms (e.g., crumbled) refer to Category U.

NO: Fresh Rindless Goat's Milk Cheese Aged 0 to 30 Days - Extruded (logs, cylinders, buche style, etc.) or in containers (cups, tubs, cryovac bags). Vegetable ash coating permitted

Standards of Excellence: Soft goat cheeses such as chevre are expected to be refreshing (fresh) with a slight tang (lactic acid) and recognizable but not strong goat flavor (characterized by caproic, caprylic, and capric acids).

NS: Fresh Goat's Milk Cheese Aged 0 to 30 Days – Hand-shaped (formed or molded by hand into pyramid, disc, drum, crottin, basket or other shape). Vegetable ash coating permitted

Standards of Excellence: Soft goat cheeses such as chevre are expected to be refreshing (fresh) with a slight tang (lactic acid) and recognizable but not strong goat flavor (characterized by caproic, caprylic, and capric acids).

NT: Goat's Milk Cheese Aged 31 to 60 Days. Extruded or hand shaped.

Standards of Excellence: Moderately aged goat cheeses may exhibit more complex and pronounced flavors than the fresh varieties.

NU: Goat's Milk Cheese Aged Over 60 Days. Extruded or hand shaped.

Standards of Excellence: Aged goat cheeses are expected to exhibit more complex and pronounced flavors than the younger varieties, and less moist/more firm body.

O. SHEEP'S MILK CHEESES

Open to all shapes and styles of 100% sheep's milk cheeses; based on age at time of Judging & Competition. **Excluded:** Cheeses with any added flavors (Refer to Category KO), cheeses with bloomy rinds (refer to Category BS), cheeses with bloomy rind and added cream (Refer to Category BT); Spreads, blends or dips (refer to Category S).

OO: Fresh Rindless Sheep's Milk Cheese Aged 0 to 30 Days

Standards of Excellence: Cheeses should appear white and opaque. Aromas can range from sheepy mild lanolin to mild milkiness. Flavors are mild sheep and piquant/spicy with a soft creamy texture. The mouthfeel/ body can be weak or medium but can also show full body if mixed with cow milk.

OT: Sheep's Milk Cheese Aged 31 to 60 Days

Standards of Excellence: Cheeses should appear white and rinds can be off-white, firm, medium body mouthfeel and spicy or have a salty/ piquant finish. Cheeses of mixed milks will reduce sheep milk flavors and aromas but increase the body/mouthfeel.

OU: Sheep's Milk Cheese Aged Over 60 Days

Standards of Excellence: Cheese should appear white or off white or gray if very aged. Cheese aromas can range from mild sheep, salt, spiciness to wet wool and lanolin. Textures can range from very firm to hard and flavors should be definite sheep with an obvious piquant/sharp note or finish. Sheep milk mixed with other milks will show reduced sheep flavor and aroma but fuller body and mouthfeel.

P. MARINATED CHEESES

Entries must identify the type of marinade (olive oil, safflower oil, vinegar, wine, spirits and liqueur, etc., including additional ingredients). Entries do not need to be in the marinade solution at the time of judging.

PC: Cheeses Marinated in Liquids and Ingredients – made from cow's milk

Standards of Excellence: Flavors of marinade and cheese should be distinctly recognizable, complementary and pleasing. Both should add depth to the flavor of the other.

PX: Cheeses Marinated in Liquids and Ingredients – made from mixed, or other milks

Standards of Excellence: Flavors of marinade and cheese should be distinctly recognizable, complementary and pleasing. Both should add depth to the flavor of the other.

Q. PLAIN CULTURED MILK and CREAM PRODUCTS

Limited to Buttermilk, Yogurt, Sour Cream, Crème Fraiche, Kefir, Labneh. **Excluded:** Cultured products with any added flavors, or yogurts blended with any other cheeses (Refer to Category KQ), Cultured products made with added oil (refer to Category P)

QD: Yogurts – Plain with NO Additional Ingredients – made from goat's milk

Standards of Excellence: Smooth and creamy texture, and can be sweet, savory, sour, and/or rich (acetaldehyde or natural green apple flavor).

QF: Crème Fraiche and Sour Cream Products – made from cow's milk

Standards of Excellence: Shall present a clean, natural color, with a smooth, velvety appearance. Natural color may range from a bright white to a light cream color. The surface should appear smooth without free whey. It shall be free from visible sediment, mold and surface discoloration. Body should be thick and smooth, uniform, free from lumps or graininess, and spoonable to a soft mound. Shall possess a pleasant, mild, aromatic acid (lactic, diacetyl, acetaldehyde or natural green apple flavor) and/or cultured flavor and be free from undesirable flavors such as: rancid, oxidized, stale, yeasty and unclean.

QK: Drinkable Cultured Products, Kefir, Drinkable Yogurt, Lassi, Buttermilk, or other drinkable cultured products – all milks

Standards of Excellence: White to cream-colored milk drink with a slightly carbonated, viscous consistency; a distinct sour smell; and a tart, creamy flavor.

QL: Labneh, Greek Style Yogurt, and Other Strained Cultured Products – all milks

Standards of Excellence: Labneh is a bit thicker than Greek yogurt - almost like soft cream cheese. In tradition, Greek yogurt is made from goat milk while labneh is made from cow's milk. It's tangier and creamier than yogurt. Greek Style Yogurt will be thicker in texture as it is strained.

QX: Yogurts – Plain with NO Additional Ingredients – made from sheep mixed, or other milks

Standards of Excellence: Smooth and creamy texture, and can be sweet, savory, sour, and/or rich (acetaldehyde or natural green apple flavor).

QY: Yogurts – Plain with NO Additional Ingredients – made from cow's milk

Standards of Excellence: Smooth and creamy texture, and can be sweet, savory, sour, and/or rich (acetaldehyde or natural green apple flavor).

R. BUTTERS

Whey Butter, Salted Butter, Sweet Butter, Cultured Butter, Ghee or Clarified Butter, etc. **Excluded:** Butters with any added flavors (refer to Category KR)

RC: Salted Butter with or without cultures – made from cow's milk

Standards of Excellence: Salted butter should have a pleasant, clean, sweet, and delicate aroma. It should be uniform in color, easily spreadable, and salt should be evenly distributed. Flavors should be delicate and clean and instigate the desire to eat more.

RE: Ghee – all milks

Standards of Excellence: Nutty, slightly caramelized, slightly brown clarified butter.

RO: Unsalted Butter with or without cultures – made from cow's milk

Standards of Excellence: Unsalted butter should have a pleasant, clean, sweet, and delicate aroma. It should be uniform in color and easily spreadable. Flavors should be delicate, clean, and instigate the desire to eat more.

RX: Butter with or without cultures – made from mixed, or other milks

Standards of Excellence: Mixed milk butter should have a pleasant, clean, sweet, and delicate aroma. It should be uniform in color and easily spreadable. Flavors should be delicate, clean, and instigate the desire to eat more.

S. COLD-PACK, CLUB, CHEESE SPREADS

Produced by grinding, mixing, blending or whipping one or more natural cheeses, without the aid of heat and/or emulsifying salts (plant-based gums permitted). Cold pack cheese and cheese food, unflavored – Maximum Moisture 42%. **Excluded:** Pasteurized Process Cheese of any kind; spreads or dips with added mayonnaise, cream cheese or yogurt. Cheeses with any added flavor (Refer to Categories KA, KC, or KS).

SC: Cold-Pack, Club Cheeses, and Cheese Spreads – all milks

Standards of Excellence: These products are real cheeses made spreadable. All the normal desirable flavor profiles from cheese should be found in the cold-pack cheese as well. When ingredients are added to the cold-pack cheese, there should still be a good balance of cheese flavor to ingredient flavor. You should be able to taste both. Texture should be spreadable with a knife. Undesirable if runny, sticky, too stiff, or grainy. Most judges will use a plate and smear it on with a knife to check texture. It should spread like tempered butter.

T. WASHED RIND CHEESES

Cheeses with a rind or crust washed in salted brine, whey, beer, wine, other alcohol, or grape leaves. **Excluded:** Blue Cheeses with a washed rind (refer to Category F)

TB: Soft-Ripened Washed Rind – Cheese using soft ripened cheese-make recipes with these differences from white mold rinds: elevated pH and lower acidity or high moisture over 42% or exhibiting an obvious smeared or sticky rind or crust (*B-Linens/ Brevibacterium*) – all milks. **Examples of bacterial surface-ripened cheeses in the style of:** Alsatian Munster, Chimay, Epoisses, Italico, Langres, Limburger, Pont L’Eveque, Robiola/Taleggio, St. Nectaire, Vacherin Mont d’Or. **Excluded:** Brined/washed rind cheeses with very firm texture and a moisture content less than 42%. (Refer to the Open Category – Washed Rind Cheeses below.)

Standards of Excellence: These cheeses want a living, thin rind, slightly pink or pink with a dusting of white over them. It should be moist, rather than wet or dry. The aroma and flavor will be balanced and sweet with a touch of barn rather than compost. The paste should be bright and have flavor characteristics of the rind and the milk in balance. The aftertaste will be long and savory.

TR: Raclette-style – Aged over 45 days – Alpine-style cheese able to be scraped when warmed and melts without excess free oil release – all milks. **NOTE – All entries in this category will be cooked for judging.**

Standards of Excellence: Appearance light pink, alive. Rind thin, well-formed and consistent. Aroma should be rich, slightly pungent and balanced. When cooking, the fat is retained in the paste of the cheese rather than separating. The scrape is even, reflecting a consistent paste and it will spread gently on the plate. The cooked flavor is a mixture of the paste and the washed rind, slightly pungent with the flavor of the milk still clearly part of the profile.

OPEN CATEGORY – WASHED RIND CHEESES

This category is for cheese that does not belong in any of the above listed categories and that have a moisture content up to 42%. **Examples:** Appenzeller-style, Vignerons-style, Alpine-style, Monastery-style

TC: Open Category – Washed Rind Cheeses – made from cow's milk

Standards of Excellence: Appearance light pink to brown, alive not dead or wet. Aroma balanced sweet/pungent. The thickness of the rind depends on age though consistent. The paste is bright and the flavors rich, savory and sweet, balanced. The texture is toothsome, breaking down well and sometimes may have tyrosine crystals. The finish is long.

TG: Open Category – Washed Rind Cheeses – made from goat's milk

Standards of Excellence: Appearance light pink to brown, alive not dead or wet. Aroma balanced sweet/pungent. The thickness of the rind depends on age though consistent. The paste is bright and the flavors rich, savory and sweet, balanced. The flavor of the goat's milk is part of the balance. The texture is toothsome, breaking down well and sometimes may have tyrosine crystals. The finish is long.

TS: Open Category – Washed Rind Cheeses – made from sheep's milk

Standards of Excellence: Appearance should be light pink to brown, alive not dead or wet. Aroma balanced sweet/pungent. The thickness of the rind depends on age though consistent. The paste is bright and the flavors rich, savory and sweet, balanced. The flavor of the sheep's milk is part of the balance. The texture is toothsome, breaking down well and sometimes may have tyrosine crystals. The finish is long.

TX: Open Category – Washed Rind Cheeses – made from mixed, or other milks

Standards of Excellence: Appearance should be light pink to brown, alive not dead or wet. Aroma balanced sweet/pungent. The thickness of the rind depends on age though consistent. The paste is bright and the flavors rich, savory and sweet, balanced. The flavor of the mixed milk is part of the balance. The texture is toothsome, breaking down well and sometimes may have tyrosine crystals. The finish is long.

U. CONSUMER-READY CONVENIENCE CHEESE

This category is for large format cheeses converted into consumer-ready convenience formats – all milks.

Natural unflavored cheese of any type, presented in consumer-ready cubed, grated, matchsticks, shaved, shredded, sliced forms. Consumer packaging is required, with no brand labeling visible. **Examples:** shredded Monterey Jack, Shaved Parmesan, sliced Cheddar, cubed Havarti, Grated Cotija, etc.

Excluded: Smoked (refer to Category LU), String Cheese and Whips (refer to Category HM); Cold Pack or spreads of any kind (refer to Category S); Pasteurized Process Cheese of any kind.

UC: Consumer-Ready Convenience Cheese Unflavored – All milks

Standards of Excellence: Distribution of size and shape should be consistent (e.g., minimal fines). Flavor should be representative of the intended natural cheese style. Packaged cheese should not exhibit visual defects (e.g., calcium lactate crystals, free anti-caking agent). Slices and cubes should be devoid of mechanical openings or gas unless representative of the intended style (e.g., Baby Swiss).

UJ: Light/Lite and Reduced Fat/Salt cheeses – made from all milks – grated, cubed, diced, slices, shredded, shaved, or matchstick) unflavored and flavored

Standards of Excellence: Clean milk flavors. Converted product that is intended to be used by consumers. Distribution of size and shape should be consistent (e.g., minimal fines). Flavor should be representative of the intended natural cheese style. Packaged cheese should not exhibit visual defects (e.g., calcium lactate crystals, free anti-caking agent). Slices and cubes should be devoid of mechanical openings or gas unless representative of the intended style (e.g., Baby Swiss).

UK: Consumer-Ready Convenience Cheese Flavored – All milks

Standards of Excellence: Distribution of size and shape should be consistent (e.g., minimal fines). Flavor should be representative of the intended natural cheese style. Flavoring should not overwhelm the natural cheese flavor. Packaged cheese should not exhibit visual defects (e.g., calcium lactate crystals, free anti-caking agent). Slices and cubes should be devoid of mechanical openings or gas unless representative of the intended style (e.g., Baby Swiss).