

2017 ACS Post-Conference Essay
by Ana Kelly of Dayspring Dairy, LLC

Attending the 2017 ACS Conference in Denver was a dream come true. Being selected to attend with a full scholarship was a tremendous honor and I am truly grateful. Owning and operating a farmstead sheep dairy and creamery for the last 4 years has been financially challenging and I wouldn't have been able to attend the conference had it not been for the scholarship. Also, as a scholarship recipient I was able to register for the conference before it was open to the public. I took advantage of this opportunity and registered for several tasting sessions and also for 3 of the experts-in-residence.

Highlights of the first day (July 27) included attending the "Cheese R&D Comes out from Behind the Curtain" where I got to meet cheesemakers from several esteemed companies. It was fascinating to learn about and taste many diverse styles of cheese and discuss technical aspects of production with the cheesemakers. During the Annual Business Meeting luncheon, I was seated with other scholarship recipients and enjoyed learning about their stories and backgrounds and forging new friendships. Afterwards, I met the Business Strategist-in-Residence, Jim Cage, and we discussed many invaluable ideas to get our company onto better financial footing. The rest of the day was all about sampling cheese and networking at "Meet the Cheesemaker" and the opening reception.

The 2nd day brought more expert advice for both food safety and cheese production. In only 30 minutes, Ivan Larcher was able to pinpoint critical problems with production and aging of two of our aged cheeses and provided ideas to improve affinage on the farm without a huge expenditure. I attended the Small Ruminant Sheep

Deep Dive and heard amazing research carried out by the Spanish in the development of the Assaf breed of sheep. How it applied to US dairy sheep was very uncertain with little industry cohesiveness and record keeping ability in the US.

The Awards Ceremony on Friday evening was very anticipated since I took the opportunity to enter several of our cheeses in the competition this year. Seeing the state rivalries (WI and CA!) and football stadium atmosphere with cheering and flags flying brought a lot of excitement to the annual event. Dozens of awards were given out until they finally arrived at our category for flavored sheep cheeses. We won 3rd place for our Truffle cheese and 2nd place for our marinated feta. The affirmation of a job well done was greatly appreciated after years of actual blood, sweat, and tears on the farm!

The final day came much too quickly and was filled with eating cheese, lots and lots of cheese! I attended the “Science of Taste” session in the morning which will forever change my appreciation of sensory evaluation. The afternoon tasting session “Enjoying Cheese with Chocolate and Beer” was a highpoint of the entire conference. The 3 experts representing their respective fields (cheese, chocolate, and beer) were simply amazing to listen to and the pairings they created were mind blowing not to mention delicious! The Festival of Cheese brought an amazing climax to the conference which did not disappoint. Tasting several of the country’s most famous cheeses, including Harbison and Talentaise, was a very special rare treat. I had to call it quits after two hours of sampling, drinking, and socializing with strangers and friendly faces alike. Thanks to the ACS Scholarship Committee and Foundation for making this amazing opportunity possible. I will treasure the memory of the 2017 conference for many years to come.