

The American Cheese Society

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BRINGING BACK THE CHEESE COURSE

by: Ari Weinzwieg

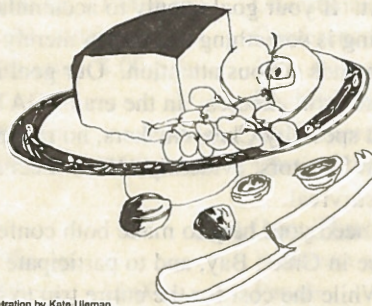


Illustration by Kate Uleman

"It is not just the coffee - I do not remember who said so - that pronounces the final judgment on a good meal. It is also the cheese tray."

Pierre Androuet

If you head to an American College town like Ann Arbor where I live, and randomly ask people what the "cheese course" is, 95 out of 100 would give you a rather puzzled look. At best they'd probably hypothesize that it was some kind of class you had to take if you went to culinary school. Cross the Atlantic and ask 100 French folks the same question, and they'd probably all tell you without a second thought "it is the course you serve near the end of the meal just before the dessert." This pretty much sums up the state of the cheese course in our respective lands; in America it's almost non-existent. In France, and most of Europe, it's a generally accepted affair.

I know that many of us in the cheese world have yet to successfully bring back the cheese course to the American meal. But I'm not done trying yet. I still think we can do it.

The Cheese Course; Where Did It Come From?

No one I've talked to seems able to identify just when and where the cheese course began. At least in Europe, cheese has been an accepted stage of the meal, served after the main course (and the salad, that too should be served after the main course), but before the sweet desserts which has finished the meal for centuries.

In his cheese classic *Guide de Fromage*, Pierre Androuet inquires in an essay entitled "A Letter to my Daughter";

"When should cheese be served?"

With typical French certitude, he answers himself:

"This question may seem superfluous; yet it is worthy of our attention.. Some people recommend that salad and cheese should be served at the same time (this practice is current in Italy). This is a mistake. In England, cheese is served after dessert. Cheese should be served between the salad (which is served after the main course) and dessert. Cheeses neutralize the astringent vinegar or lemon juice in salad dressings and prepares the taste buds for the suaver sensations of dessert."

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CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

by: Dick Groves

(Editor's Note: ACS members are encouraged to let us know about additional upcoming events of interest. Please contact Dick Groves at The Cheese Reporter, 608-246-8430, if you have an event you'd like to see added to this list.)

May 8, 1995: Tasting For Cheese Lovers presented by Joan Synder at NYU 6:00 PM 35 W. 4th St. 10th floor, Rm. 1080 NY, NY. For registration and brochure call Marjorie Possick (212) 998-5588

June 18 - 20, 1995: International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association, annual seminar and exposition, San Jose, CA. For exhibiting and registration information, contact the IDDA, at (608) 238-7908.

July 9 - 12 1995: 41st Annual International Fancy Food and Confection Show, New York, NY. For more information, contact the National Association for the Specialty Food Trade, at (212) 921-1690.

July 22 - 24, 1995: National Food Distributors Association, 68th annual convention and trade show, New Orleans, LA. For more information, contact the NFDA, at (312) 644-6610.

August 2 - 5, 1995: American Cheese Society, Annual Conference and Cheese Judging, Green Bay, Wisconsin.

Watch for more information regarding Conference on Aging of Cheeses to be held in France in 1996.

Mark your calendars for the 1st International Conference on Farmstead & Specialty cheeses sponsored by the ACS to be held either the last week of May or the first week of **June 1996**, in Metsovo, Greece.

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

"The American Cheese Society's Mission is to uphold the highest Standards and traditions in the making of cheese and naturally fermented milk products in America. We give special attention to Specialty and Farmstead cheeses, made from all types of milk including cow's, goat's and sheep's milk. Our goal is to encourage consumption by continually improving quality through the open sharing of information and experience, and to educate the public on the sensory pleasures of cheese and its healthful and nutritional value."

I am currently at work on clarifying and simplifying a new draft of our bylaws. This is the first part, our mission statement. We will vote on the changes at our fabulous conference coming up in August in Green Bay. Dominique and Stacy have been hard at work pulling it all together.

I hope you all noticed the first official announcement in Gourmet News of the Farmstead and Specialty Cheese Conference we are spearheading in Metsovo, Greece, the first week of June in 1996. Work is already in full swing on this conference whose purpose is to bring together in one place Cheesemakers and Cheese lovers from around the world. The American Institute of Wine and Foods has expressed an interest.

The current head of the senate committee on Agriculture implied last month that small farmers are self-indulgent and are not serious commercial ventures deserving federal support. If your goal is only to accumulate money, I suppose that's true. If your reason for living is something more than merely pleasing overzealous accountants, then the small demands serious attention. Our goal is the enrichment of the spirit through the making of wonderful cheeses. In the era of GATT we have more in common with other farmstead and specialty Cheesemakers, no matter what the country, than we do with some of our own Senators, evidently. If we meet and learn from each other we stand a fighting chance of survival.

I need your help to make both conferences successful. I need you to attend our conference in Green Bay, and to participate in the sharing of knowledge and experience.

While the cost for the entire trip to Metsovo will be around two thousand dollars; food, lodging and all - this is too high for some of our Cheesemakers. They must be offered the chance to come. I need volunteers to work on clever ideas for getting funding to help offset the costs for Cheesemakers. Then when we ascend the heights of the Pindus mountains and sit with the Shepherds making cheese beside the herd as has been done since the sun first shown in its glory above Mt. Olympus, there will be American Cheesemakers there, not just press and aficionados.

If you are interested in going to Greece, please contact Maurine at our offices and get on the mailing list. If you can help please let her know, we are assembling a list of contacts. The only profit anyone is going to make from this is in understanding.

Daniel Strongin

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We welcome Maurine Killough at the American Cheese Society Offices in San Francisco. Please let her know if there is any change of address or information needed for prospective members.

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INFLUENCE OF CULTURE SELECTION ON CHEESE CHARACTER

by: Mike Comotto

Cheese -- (n.) -- *a solid food prepared from the pressed curd of milk, often seasoned and aged.* This is the definition of cheese taken from the American Heritage Dictionary, Second College Edition. The definition does not give justice to the many varieties of cheese enjoyed by humankind for the past two or three thousand years. When asked to define cheese, most people would probably identify with one of hundreds of cheese varieties that most please their palate. And to think, all cheese varieties start with the same principle ingredient - milk.

With the hundreds of cheese types recognized around the world, it is interesting that the first hour or so of the manufacturing processes are almost identical. However, the addition of different ingredients and the later application of make procedure and curing determine the final specific cheese character. While every procedure and ingredient makes the transformation of milk into cheese a unique product, bacteria and their contribution to flavor, body and texture has become a focal point of research.

Volumes of books have been written to describe cheese varieties. Years of research efforts have been spent trying to unlock the secret of how different bacteria influence the final characteristics of cheese. Much has been learned, but the unknowns of the how and why still exist.

Since early cheesemaking times, cheese varieties have evolved within regional, cultural and ethnic pockets. Many early cheese varieties resulted from "natural" bacteria indigenous to the farm, milk shed, factory or curing room.

Some of these "natural" bacteria are the major contribution to cheese varieties we enjoy today. The cheese industry has been very aggressive in manipulating various combinations of "natural" microflora to produce other unique cheese varieties.

Milk is a very nutritious medium for the growth of bacteria, yeasts and molds. Many of the bacteria that enjoy milk as a growth medium are undesirable from the standpoint of public health, shelf-life and cheese manufacture.

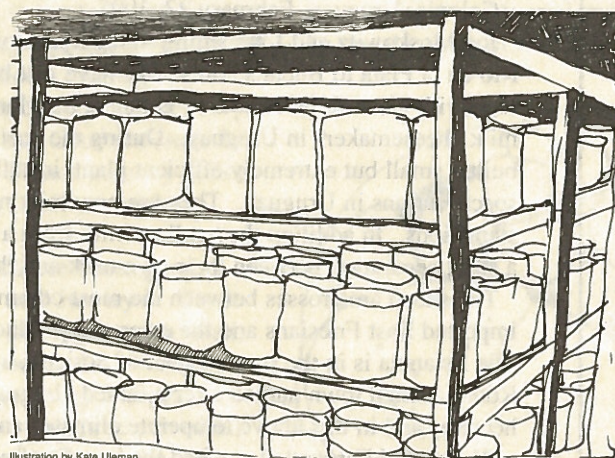


Illustration by Kate Uleman

In the past 25 to 30 years, regulatory agencies around the world have worked diligently to create standards to lower the initial "natural" bacteria count in farm milk. The regulatory agencies have also implemented aggressive regulations on pasteurization of raw milk. While these efforts have helped assure a wholesome milk supply, many cheesemakers feel the tight regulations have also put an end to milk's "natural" ability to add unique characteristics to cheese. Successful cheese makers continue to experiment to develop unique cheese varieties and make cheese that meets current consumer demands.

Regardless of the cheese variety, it is very important that the cheesemaker begin with a starter culture that is capable of converting lactose to lactic acid. Typical homofermentative lactic acid bacteria species (bacteria which convert lactose to lactic acid) belong to the genus *Lactococcus*, *Streptococcus* and *Lactobacillus*. Initial fermentation of these organisms provides the cheese with the proper foundation to impart a pleasant acid flavor, protect the cheese from undesirable pathogenic organisms, produce enzymes necessary for cheese breakdown, produce fermentation by-products or precursors necessary for secondary fermentation by other bacteria and promote proper conditions for extending shelf-life. However, the most apparent tangible asset of lactic acid bacteria is their contribution to flavor to flavor and aroma.

There are several procedures applied to milk which contribute to specific cheese attributes. The influence of additional cultures in cheesemaking is considered to be one of the most critical factors in differentiating the final desired cheese character. For instance, a consumer is often offended by the growth of mold on Cheddar cheese. However, the same consumer expects blue-veined mold in Blue Cheese and white surface molds on Brie and Camembert.

Desired characteristics of Cheddar cheese are a clean lactic acid flavor, smooth elastic body and a texture with no mechanical or gas openings. On the other hand, Blue Cheese exhibits a somewhat crumbly body, texture with many openings, a pungent burning or peppery flavor characteristic of distinctive peptides and fatty acids derived from specific proteolytic and lipolytic enzymes produced from the *Penicillium roqueforti* mold. Brie and Camembert have a smooth texture with a somewhat pungent flavor produced by enzymes expressed by specific strains of *Penicillium candidum*.

The same initial lactic acid bacteria common to Cheddar cheese are necessary in the early stages of Blue, Brie, and Camembert cheese varieties. However, it would be impossible to achieve their proper composition and final character without adding specific molds. When selecting the proper mold, careful consideration must be given to desired density of mycelial growth, temperature of curing, color of mold, pH of cheese, salt concentration and degree of proteolysis and lipolysis desired. Each specific strain of mold possesses their own unique characteristics.

The cheeses previously mentioned are surface ripened using molds. Other surface ripened cheeses depend on bacteria and yeasts to produce their characteristics. Limburger and surface ripened Brick cheese depend on the combination of yeast and bacteria to produce an extremely pungent, putrid flavor.

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DO THEY MAKE "AMERICAN" CHEESE IN URUGUAY?

by: Gerd Stern

Colonia, Uruguay, February 22, 1995

Joe Moskowitz and I are sitting in the hydrofoil terminal, waiting to scoot over the Rio de la Plata to Buenos Aires. We have just been delivered here by Walter Kugler who with his wife Fernanda, of Estancia La Mariana, are the only farmstead sheep milk cheesemakers in Uruguay. During the past few years they have designed and built a small but extremely efficient plant, installing excellent equipment built to their specifications in Uruguay. They are now milking about 400 ewes, in a parlor with 24 stanchions. In addition they collect milk from a number of other herds, but they keep a strict separation between their own milk and the milk collected elsewhere.

The sheep are crosses between the most common local breed, Corriedale and imported East Friesians and the ewes can produce up to 400 liters per milking year. The Estancia is in the rural district of Soriano, a few kilometers from Jose Enrique Rodo, a small town named after a famed Uruguayan poet. It comprises some 300 hectares and in this above temperate climate can grass feed all year round.

Walter and Fernanda have had the benefit of counsel from world-wide sheep breeding and cheesemaking aficionados and have managed to absorb technical and aesthetic information and come up with some absolutely outstanding and distinctive cheeses, related to their ethnic prototypes, but with unique characteristics of subtle texture and flavor. Our favorite was the Manchego type, a semi-cured 3.5 kilo specimen which was sampled before dinner. It has a rough curd grain with a deep, gentle flavor that lasts on the palate, and without the typical bite of the Spanish ancestor but a hint of spiciness in the after taste. Their Saint Michel, in the same physical format, is a creamier, smooth and washed paste bodied cheese. They also make Feta, a harder Pecorino type, and are constantly experimenting with different make and curing procedures to expand their product line.

Our visit gave me pause as I considered the question of whether this farmstead sheep estancia, certainly an American (South) reality, would qualify for membership in ACS. I would certainly hope so and if our board agrees with me will invite Walter and Fernanda to participate in our 1995 Cheese Judging and Conference next August 2nd through 6th in Green Bay, Wisconsin. As they toast in the southern hemisphere, "Salud, Amor, Pesetas y Tiempo para disfrutar" -- health, love, money, and time to enjoy them all.



MEET THE MEMBERS - CHEESEMAKERS FROM THE NORTHEAST REGION

by: Lynne D. Edelson and Jacques A. Williams

The Northeast is a highly diverse cheesemaking region. Farmhouse and artisanal cheeses are made in extremely remote rural areas and also within a few minutes of major metropolitan congestion. Some cheesemakers have easy access to sophisticated big city markets while others are faced with the same sorts of distribution and marketing challenges as their counterparts in Oklahoma or Minnesota. The profiles given here are a small cross-section of the cheeses and dairy products we have found in this region.

Major Farms RFD #3 Box 265 Westminster West, VT 05346 802-387-4473

Cindy and David Major milk about 200 ewes on a 200 acre farm in Westminster West, Vermont. Their 10 - 12 pound raw milk wheels won an award at the ACS Conference in 1993. When the Majors began making cheese in 1987, they were one of a tiny handful of sheep dairies in the United States. They found it extremely difficult to obtain information and the proper equipment. Dissatisfied with the quality of the cheese they were producing, they spent several months in the French Pyrenees making cheese with local farmers and refining their own cheesemaking techniques.

Major Farms is one of the first American sheep dairies to take advantage of available genetic material from higher yielding European sheep breeds, which should lead to a significant increase in ewe milk production in 1995. They also plan to train local farmers to make fresh cheeses that Cindy and David will age and distribute. The Majors have developed another unique program called the Mountain Shepherd grazing project which combines their areas two most important industries: sheep and skiing. Sheep are being used instead of machinery to mow the grass on the ski slopes in Vermont. They also manufacture and sell milking stanchions for sheep which were previously unavailable in the United States.

Egg Farm Dairy 2 John Walsh Blvd. Peekskill, NY 10566 1-800-CREAMERY

Engineer Jonathan White gave up a job at an investment banking house to achieve the goal of "setting the dairy industry back 100 years." Recapturing the freshness and purity that characterized American dairy products a century ago, his plant in Peekskill, NY (a thirty minute drive from New York City) makes cultured sweet butter, chocolate butter, Clabbered Cream and "wild ripened" cheeses.

Butter is made from vat pasteurized cultured cream with out added water or salt, producing a more flavorful butter with a higher fat content. Over the last two years, his butter has become extremely popular with many restaurant chefs in New York. Its higher butterfat allows it to be heated to higher temperatures much longer without browning. This makes it perfect for the French style of cooking. Clabbered Cream is a cultured cream with a lower acidity than Creme Fraiche, giving it a richer flavor. Jonathan also makes Muscoot, a soft, mold-ripened cow's milk cheese with a small amount of added cream. Muscoot won an award as Best Soft-Ripened Cow's/s Milk Cheese at the ACS 1994 Conference. Quejo Jaime, a mixed sheep and goat's milk cheese from Portugal, is also ripened at the dairy. Jonathan produces Ricotta with his whey and buttermilk.

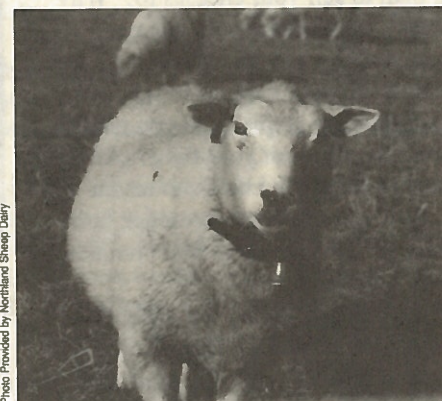


Photo Provided by Northland Sheep Dairy

Northland Sheep Dairy RD I Box 107B Marathon, NY 13803 607-849-3328

Karl and Jane North of Marathon, New York in the Finger Lakes region, produce and process milk from a flock of 50 sheep. Their operation emphasizes small-scale integrated farming, intensive rotational grazing and sustainable agricultural practices.

Cheeses are made from fresh unpasteurized milk and aged for more than ten months before sale. Tomme Bergere is a semi-hard pressed wheel covered in wax that resembles both in texture and taste an artisan Tomme de Pyrennes. Bergere Bleu is a blue mold-ripened cheese also wax coated that is convincingly similar to Roquefort Cheese. Both are certified organic by the New York State Chapter of the Northeast Organic Farming Association. Cheeses are sold at the Ithaca Farmer's Market, The Green Star Co-op Market, Turback's (both in Ithaca), and at Mad 61 in New York City.



Photo by: Lynne D. Edelson

Woodchoppertown Chevre 178 Longview Road Boyertown, PA 19512-9221 610-689-5498

Bob Spotts has been milking goats and producing all natural goat's milk products on his farm in Berks County, Pennsylvania since 1949. In addition to making many interesting ethnically diverse fresh dairy products such as Neufchatel, Queso Blanco, Plain and Vanilla Yogurt, and Mild Chevre, Spotts also produces and ages Emmenthaler, Feta and Cheddar. Woodchoppertown Chevre also sells and markets a colorful Chevre "Pate" with fresh herbs and other natural ingredients.

Over the years, Bob has come up with a number of innovative ideas as many of the early goat dairies have had to, to simplify the milking process and day to day caring of their goats. The Spotts sell their cheeses to restaurants; most notably Joe's Wild Mushroom Restaurant in Reading, PA. Regular local long term customers, and various gourmet stores around the country make up the remainder of sales.

MARKETING STRATEGIES THAT LEAD TO SUCCESS

by: Paula Lambert

First of all, I think that you should know your product. What is it? Is it a specialty cheese, a farmstead cheese or a more commercially produced cheese?

Why is your product unique? What makes it different from others and what makes it special? These simple questions need to be clearly defined. Once you have determined exactly where you fit into the marketplace, you are on your way.

In my case, I am a specialty cheesemaker. In other words, I buy all the milk that we use to produce our cheeses. I don't live on a farm, nor do I know very much about milk-producing animals. We buy cow's milk, goat's milk, sheep's milk and water buffalo milk directly from farmers. We then make all our cheeses by hand in small batches. Our cheeses are not sophisticated. They are simple, everyday cooking cheeses. Many are fresh and need to be consumed soon after they are made. Others are aged and have developed more intense flavors.

Next you must identify your market. Who do you plan to sell your cheeses to? Why should they want to buy your cheeses? How can you best reach your market? Do you plan to sell your cheeses to specialty stores and grocery stores? Do you plan to sell them directly from your farm? Are you interested in selling to chefs and restaurants? Will you sell your cheeses at farmers' markets? How can you best communicate with your customers?

At first we began selling our cheeses to specialty gourmet stores. They were interested in our cheeses and knew what they were. They thought that their customers would buy our cheeses. But they didn't sell the cheeses very quickly. We wanted to sell a larger volume of cheese, so we began to focus on sales to restaurants. I felt that if the chefs would cook with our cheeses, people would eat our cheeses in the restaurants and then go out and buy the cheeses so that they could cook with them at home. This has worked very well for our company. The restaurants have really helped us.

It is very important to educate your market. Perhaps your potential customers don't know about your cheeses. It is so very important to sample your products. Especially goat cheese! Many people have preconceived ideas that goat cheese is strong and stinky. Once they taste the cheese and like it, you will have a converted customer! I'm sure that you all have experienced this time and time again with various cheeses. Cooking demonstrations are another wonderful way to teach people about your cheeses and how to use them. And give away lots and lots of recipes. People love recipes.

They save them and use them time and time again. Learn which wines go best with your cheeses. Participate in seminars. Get involved in promoting your cheeses. I spend a great deal of time educating my market. I pass our cheeses out at all kinds of festivals, wine tastings, and events. I develop recipes and give cooking demonstrations. I work at this all the time. I enjoy it and so do my customers.

Should you advertise? This is a very hard question. I feel that it must be cost effective. And you must advertise in a media that reaches your customer, as well as one you can afford.

When we first opened our cheese factory 13 years ago, we tried advertising in various ways. Once we tried a classical music station. Another time we advertised our holiday gift baskets in a local business journal. Other times we have advertised in various Junior League publications. The classified section of state and local magazines is another inexpensive place to advertise. None of these proved successful for our company. I felt our ads were just a drop in the bucket, lost in the midst of all the other ads. When we queried our customers about where they had found out about our cheeses, none had ever seen the ads! So now we have decided not to advertise. Now our policy is to donate cheeses to all sorts of charitable and non-profit organizations. Our customers appreciate our involvement. And we feel we are reaching the specific market we wish to reach. We also try to reach that



Paula shows her store-front cheese case.

Photo by: Richard A. Haws

market through public relations.

Public relations is very important. I have heard that if you are mentioned in print, in an article or story, it is seven times as effective as an advertisement. So then, how do you get your cheese into those stories and articles? It isn't easy. It takes a lot of effort and constant work. First of all, you should develop a press kit. This can be a simple folder with your labels, a photo of your cheeses, an information sheet on your company and your cheeses, and copies of any articles that have been written about you and your cheeses. When you meet or talk to a writer you can offer to send your press kit. Write press releases about your cheeses and any news-worthy events you can dream up. Send these releases to your local and regional food editors, to radio and TV stations, etc. They will be interested in knowing what you are doing. Write press releases about your new products, your old products, your animals, your factory, anything you can think of. Call to follow up once the releases have been sent to ask if they have questions or would like further information. It will work and it is very easy!

continued next page

Marketing Strategies Continued....

When I first began the Mozzarella Company, I thought that public relations would be important to the success of our company, and I talked to several agencies about helping me. I couldn't afford to hire anyone to help me, so I've always done the public relations myself. It has really worked well. To me, it is as important as sales calls! If one call or press release results in an article, just think of how many people you are reaching.

Once when I met Julia Child, I told her that I thought our company had been successful for two reasons -- the quality of our cheeses and also for the service we give our customers. In fact, I told her that I thought they were equally important, 50/50. She told me she felt otherwise. She said that she had always felt that the product was 30%, that service was 30% and that promotion was 30%. I think that she is probably correct!

One other point about a successful public relations/marketing strategy is that you must have a "story" -- a story that you can tell over and over again about your cheese and your company. Something that people can remember.

My story involves the fact that when I lived in Italy I loved fresh Mozzarella. When I came back to Texas, there wasn't any fresh Mozzarella and no one had even heard of my favorite Italian dish -- Mozzarella and tomato salad!

So I decided to open a cheese factory and make Mozzarella! I can't begin to tell you how many people I meet who know that story and remember reading about our company years ago. It's incredible. And so I just tell my story over and over again. And people who buy our cheeses then tell our story to their friends over and over again.

You need to have a plan. Not only do you need a business plan but you also should have a marketing plan. You will need to define your short-term and long term goals. And then set priorities and strategies.

One of my business strategies that is different from most small cheese factories involves the distribution of our cheeses. I have always felt that the most efficient way to ship our cheeses is directly from the factory to the customer -- a shop, a restaurant or an individual. It has worked very well for us, but it is complicated. The best point of this is that we are in constant contact with our customers. The worst is the high cost of overnight delivery service! But we couldn't operate our business without it.

I'm sure that many of you use distributors. Keep in mind that distributors mainly distribute products. You still need to work with them to sell your cheeses to their customers. Don't feel that just because you have sold your cheeses to the distributor, your sales efforts have been completed. Visit the distributors regularly and go with their salespeople to visit your customers. No one can sell your products better than you can!

There is one more point, the most important point of all, and that is to have a good time and enjoy what you are doing. It's infectious. Your customers can sense it. They'll love you and your cheeses!

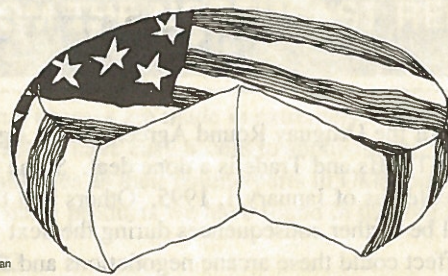


Illustration by Kate Uleman

ACS Member Captures US Cheese Championship Top Honors

by: Dick Groves

Charles Malkassian of ACS member Vella Cheese Co. of California, Inc., Sonoma, CA, was recently named US Champion Cheese Maker for his entry of a Dry Monterey Jack cheese. The award caps a remarkable year for Vella Cheese, which was featured as part of the Wine & Cheese Country Tour at the end of last summer's ACS Conference.

A year ago, Vella's Malkassian was judged first runner-up in the Biennial World Championship Cheese Contest, finishing as the highest-scoring domestic cheese and just 0.049 point behind the World Champion (a Blue cheese from Denmark). And last August, Vella's Dry Monterey Jack captured Best of Show honors in the Annual American Cheese Society Judging held in Rohnert Park.

The United States Championship Cheese Contest, sponsored by the Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association, is held in odd-numbered years; the association sponsors the World Championship Cheese Contest in even-numbered years. This year's US Cheese Contest featured a record 451 entries from some 18 states, with Wisconsin, California, Illinois, Ohio and New York having the leading entries.

First Runner-Up in the US Championship Cheese Contest was another ACS member: John Schmid of Kolb-Lena Bresse Bleu, Watertown, WI, for his entry of a Montrachet-in-oil.

Ten judges from seven states gathered in Green Bay, WI, in February to judge the US Championship Cheese Contest entries. Among the judges were Marc Bates of Washington State University, who also served as a judge in last summer's ACS judging and ACS members Deborah Haws and Allen Hendricks.

Judging in the WCMA contests differs somewhat from ACS judging. In the WCMA contests, judges (two for each class) start from a maximum possible 100 points, and deductions are made for various defects found by each judge. Defects are noted in the areas of flavor, body and texture, color, finish, packaging, and in appropriate classes, sliceability and eye development. Best of Class winners in each of the 18 contest classes are then entered in a Championship round, with all judges evaluating each cheese. Again, each judge independently scores each cheese beginning with 100 points and deducting for defects.

This year, WCMA added a special demonstration class for retail packaged cheese products, with special judging criteria. In this class, cheeses were judged not only for their flavor and texture, but also for their aesthetic qualities, including the attractiveness, utility and convenience of their shape and packaging. As with the ACS judging, this class utilized both a technical judge and an aesthetics judge, with both judges scoring each entry on a 50-point scale for a theoretical "perfect" score of 100 points. Winner in this class was Fleur de Lait Foods, New Holland, PA, with an entry of cream cheese spread.

Next year's WCMA-sponsored World Championship Cheese Contest will be held in February in Green Bay, WI. For more information, contact the WCMA, at (608) 255-2027.

WHAT'S GATT TO US?

by: Gerd Stern

The signing of the Uruguay Round Agreement on Agriculture of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade is a done deal. Some of the provisions have already been implemented as of January 1, 1995. Others will fall into place on July 1, 1995, and there will be further consequences during the next years.

But what effect could these arcane negotiations and shifts to tariffication have on specialty and farmstead cheese makers in these United States? The basic philosophy and objective of the agreements are to encourage free trade and to reduce subsidies. Over the years, European subsidies have enabled cheese makers to sell their specialties in the US at prices better than competitive with our own small scale producers. Reduction of these subsidies will inevitably raise the prices of the imported products and give us a more level playing (working) field.

That is a very simplistic view on a complex international economic matrix. Time will tell if this prediction holds true but there is no doubt that the prices of imported specialty cheeses, from everywhere in the world, are rising rapidly. When you consider your own costing and pricing policies, take a look in the high end specialty stores and watch the prices of the imported products. I don't mean to demean the status and vitality of the imported cheese market. Many of us in the trade realize that it is the growth and quality of that segment which stimulates interest and sales for our own specialty cheeses. It's not necessarily fate, but how about synergy.

Cultures Continued.....Again, these cheeses depend on specific lactic acid producing bacteria as precursors to "set-up" the conditions necessary for secondary fermentation. Thermophilic lactic acid bacteria provide the acid conditions necessary for initial cheese character.

The second week, while the cheese is in the salt brine, yeast dominate the cheese surface, producing specific vitamins and nutrients essential for development of *Brevibacterium linens* to finish the curing process. *B. linens* is responsible for development of the pigmented surface and pungent flavor specific to Limburger and ripened Brick cheese. The proper selection of yeast and strain of *B. linens* dictates the degree of red surface and proteolytic composition of the cheese.

Cheeses with eyes such as Swiss, Emmentaler, Fontina, Gruyere, and Jarlsberg, depend on specific gas forming bacteria. Again, typical thermophilic lactic acid producing bacteria are necessary for the primary fermentation. The fermentation in the case of eye formed cheese is not only necessary for preservation and elimination of pathogenic microorganisms but is essential for the gas former, *Propionibacterium shermanii*. At proper curing temperatures, the propionibacter converts lactic acid to propionic acid and carbon dioxide. Propionic acid produces the sweet, nutty flavor while the carbon dioxide produces the shiny holes.

In pursuit of expanding the cheese market, the dairy industry attempts to arrive at new cheese varieties every day. Trying to meet new consumer demands is a challenge. What do we have to do to achieve "flavor" in low fat cheeses? Applying what we know about existing cultures, we have to come up with a culture or group of cultures to fill the void that fat removal has left. We have found that raw protein is not a desired flavor and that fat has a tendency to mask these protein flavors. The addition of adjunct cultures seems to be the short-term solution. However, science still has to define the combination of cultures to best satisfy the consumer's palate.

The few cheeses discussed here are age-old. Cheesemaking has become more sophisticated as have characterization, classification, selection and isolation of the dominant microflora unique to each cheese. Selecting the desirable and eliminating the undesirable has made the art of cheesemaking a lot easier. Conventional cheese is better understood by identifying the desired fermentation of each style. When making the decision to alter a product or change a style of cheese, it is important to consider the make procedure, equipment and culture needed. First consider the desired end product and then ask for assistance to find which bacteria can make your product consistently unique.

Goat Cheese Entries Continue To Rise

by: Avice R. Wilson

Reading through the results of the 11th ACS competition I was struck at the number of classes incorporating goat milk products.

It is no news to anyone that the popularity of goat milk cheeses is growing every year, and it is no news to any of those who attended last year's conference that some of the most exciting developments in the use of goat cheese are happening in California.

I worked out a few rough statistics based on the cheese competition:

one third of the entries were goat milk products; of the goat milk entrants more than half came from California; of the 65 awards, 23 were awarded to goat milk products, and of these 13 went to California cheesemakers. At the 4th Annual Festival of Goat Cheese and North Coast Wine, 22 cheesemakers were represented; of those, 16 had entered our cheese competition and between them had obtained 19 awards.

The goat cheeses and products I tasted at the competition and at the festival left me with memories of tingling new flavor combinations, with fascinating changes in textures and consistencies. Looking through Patrick Rance's French Cheese Book, I could see that the major factor contributing to the goodness of these cheeses is that they are being created in the basic, traditional ways of cheesemaking. But the addition of American ingenuity is making a difference. There is the New World concept of cooking with cheese that California has embraced so heartily. Textural and consistency changes add now dimensions not only to the cheeses, but to the foods served with them. Cheesemakers are willing to tailor their cheese product at the request of a chef wanting to create a particular dish.

How inspiring all this is turning out to be. I can hardly wait until August to again taste the goat cheese entries at Wisconsin. Which is not to say I shall limit my pleasure to the goat milk products, the tried and the traditional will give equal enjoyment.

Cheese Course Continued.... I'm not sure exactly how we lost the cheese course in this country. But with the advent of so many top quality, traditionally made cheeses now being made in the US, now is the time to reclaim it, to make the cheese Course an All-American way to eat and enjoy all-American cheeses.

Bring back the Cheese Course

The cheese course as it's presented in fancy French restaurants is an extreme and formal end to what is really a pretty down to earth way to enjoy good food, good cheese and good company. To me, the thing of it is to leave behind the formality and innate French-ness of it all, and make the cheese course into something any apple pie loving American can get their hands on. Don't worry about it, just eat. Good cheese is for everyone who likes to eat; there's no French culinary police hovering above your head waiting to see if you pick the wrong piece of cheese to serve.

Bottom line on the cheese course: cheese tastes good after the main course. Don't believe me? Just try it. Try it on as all-American meal as you can get: say a green salad, a nice thick medium rare steak, potatoes and after you finish, sit for a second. You'll want to get up and get going. But don't race off to the other room in search of salvation. Don't demand that the dessert appear on the table ten seconds after the main dishes have departed. What's the hurry? I know in my family the routine of the dining experience was to get away from the table as quick as I could. But that was the 1960's and I was ten years old. Now it's the 90's. Take a second. Simmer. Stop for the cheese. Appreciate the little things in life.

Like a nice sliver of an incredible farmhouse cheddar.

What do we have to do to make the cheese course an accepted part of American eating? I think we have to educate, let American cheese lovers know that they've got an opportunity to get in on one of the cheese world's great pleasures. And most importantly, I think we have to take the cheese course out of the context of fancy restaurants only and get it back to where it started: as a great, down to earth way to eat good cheese, without pretense or posturing. Mostly, I think we have to just do it.

What's a good dessert cheese?

I think that the mistaken search for the "perfect dessert cheese" is part of what puts people off eating cheese late in the meal. Because the answer is that there aren't really any "good dessert cheeses"; just dozens, no, hundreds, of cheeses which are good to eat at the end of a meal.

This "dessert cheese" thing has led many honest folks into a well intentioned, but misdirected, limiting of their cheese choices to those that are mild, creamy, almost sweet - like cheesecake without the sugar. This inevitably brings them to triple cremes - those exceptionally rich, fat-added "cream" cheeses from France. But they're hardly the only ticket to get into the cheese course. Personally, I'd take a nugget of golden, crumbly, nutty two year old Dry Jack.

"If I had a son who was ready to marry, I would tell him: beware of girls who don't like wine, truffles, cheese, or music."
Colette

Final Thoughts

I know some of you are out there thinking "this'll never work." Americans won't do it. But listen, we're not looking to amend the Constitution here, just slowly, one or two at a time, get our compatriots to see - or more accurately taste - the beauty of enjoying a great piece of cheese after the main course. All it takes is a few of us to serve a couple pieces of great cheese to a few friends a month, get them to tell a few more and before you know it, like Arlo Guthrie used to say, "You've got a movement." A movement to bring back the cheese course. Just do it.

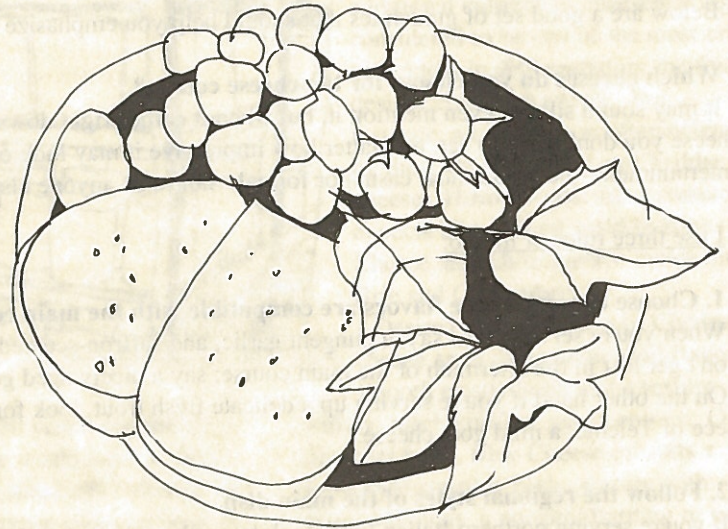


Illustration by Kate Uleman

A Quick Guide to Serving a Cheese Course

by: Ari Weinzweig

There are no hard and fast rules that legislate obscure legal complexities into the life of a cheese course. It can be as formal as an array of elegant cheeses served on centuries old silver platters, or as familiar as a wedge of good local cheddar quickly set out on a wooden cutting board with a basket of bread and a crisp green apple. So don't worry too much about cheese course rules. Instead, let your guests sit back, enjoy the company, swallow the last soft sips of wine, and enjoy the cheese.

Below are a good set of guidelines that should help you emphasize the pleasures of the cheese course on your table.

Which cheeses do you choose for the cheese course?

It may sound silly to even mention it, but when it comes right down to it, just choose cheeses you like. There's no sense serving cheese you don't want to eat, no matter how impressive it may look or sound. The point is to create a pleasurable part of an evening's entertainment - no matter how casual or formal - not to fit anyone else's idea of the "proper" cheese course.

I use three rules of thumb:

1. Choose cheeses whose flavors are compatible with the main course you've served before them.

When you're serving, let's say, a pungent garlic, and saffron-scented bouillabaisse for dinner, you'll want to find cheese flavors that won't get lost in the aftermath of the main course; say a nicely aged goat cheese, maybe a bit of beautiful blue.

On the other hand if you're serving up a delicate fresh trout, look for cheeses with softer less assertive flavors; say a nice creamy piece of Teleme, a mild goat cheese.

2. Follow the regional styles of the main dish.

If you're serving northern Italian food, look to northern Italian style cheeses. More often than not the cheeses of the region will be well suited to the local cooking - after a few hundred years together one will have adapted to the other to create a mutually rewarding culinary relationship.

3. Pick the best cheeses you can find.

You're looking for big bang for your cheese buck; buy small quantities but buy the best. A few slivers of a great cheese will satisfy in a way that mediocre cheese never will. Eat it slowly. Appreciate it.

The only cheeses that don't work well for me are smoked or spiced cheeses; their flavors tend to be too intrusive when you're trying to make your way gently from savory to sweet.

How many cheeses should you serve after dinner?

However many you want. One is fine. Two is good. Three's OK. Quality is much more important than quantity.

How much cheese do you need?

Not much really. In most cases, a half an ounce to an ounce per person per cheese is more than enough. If you're offering up an outstanding aged cheddar after dinner for four, a quarter pound wedge should be plenty. The point is to linger, not to fill up.

What do you serve with your cheese course besides cheese?

Bread, fruit, Crackers are all fine. I like to keep it simple. A great loaf of bread that will compliment, but never get in the way of the cheese.

Serve Cheese at Room Temperature

I would guess that most everyone reading this newsletter already knows this. But if you're trying to get someone else to set out a bit of cheese late in the meal, remind them that they'll get the most out of theirs at room temperature. Even the best farmhouse cheddar may get lost in the after-math of a big meal if it's served right out of the refrigerator. So don't do it.

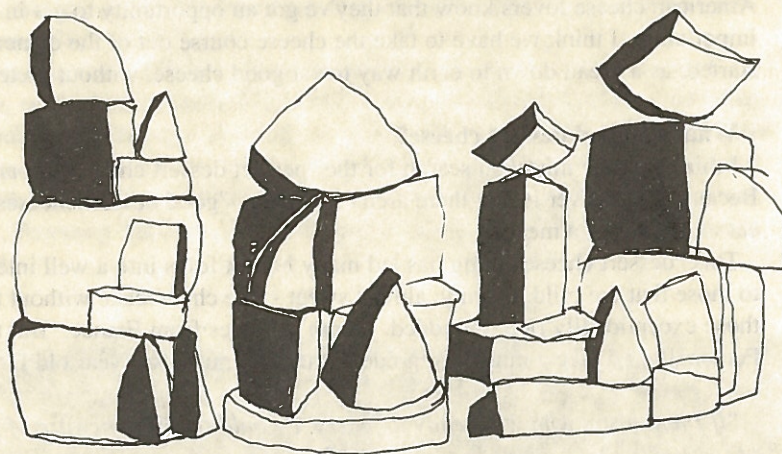


Illustration by Kate Uleman

DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOUR CHEESE IS TONIGHT?

by: Regi Hise

In my experience with hundreds of cheesemakers, I have come to regard the art of cheesemaking as a demanding craft requiring patience and expertise. The variables in cheesemaking and producing consistent top-quality cheese is truly an art form and, to a person, the cheesemakers I've met are very serious about their craft, the traditions of cheesemaking, and their love of fine cheese.

Most of the cheesemakers I've worked with over the years are far more comfortable and happy making cheese than doing anything else. The benefit in this for the rest of us is that we eventually get to enjoy the fruits of your labor: lovingly hand-crafted, delicious cheeses. The drawback is that for all of your love of cheese and cheesemaking, not enough time is spent getting away from the cheese vat to better understand your customers' needs and how your products are used. Keep in mind that your customer is not the trucker who picked the cheese up at your factory, but rather the people who will actually be opening the box and using the cheese, whether at retail or foodservice. The best way to understand your customers' needs is to put yourself in their shoes.

If your cheese is going to the retail market, go visit the stores where it's being sold. Take a look at how the product is cut, wrapped, merchandised, and signed. You will get a chance to see how your customers perceive your products alongside your competition in the same cheese case. The people who are handling your product will tell you what they think are your products' strengths and weaknesses, and you will gain valuable insight from them. If possible, coordinate your visit with their production schedule so that you can see the process your cheese goes through from receiving all the way to the cheese case. If they can't easily find your product in the cooler, maybe it needs more prominent marking on the case. If there is a typical shape your cheese is cut into for the retail case and your re-pack labels don't fit well on them, keep it in mind when it comes time to reprint your labels and consider a different shape or size. If they were simply cutting the product incorrectly you may wish to include cutting diagrams in your case pack.

If your cheese is going to the foodservice market, go visit the restaurants and the chefs who use it. Look not only at how the cheese ends up on the menu or on the finished dish, but how the cheese is handled in the kitchen as well. There may be some simple guidelines for utilizing your cheese that would help them in their operations. Keep in mind that the chef may make the purchase decision for the cheeses used on the menu, but a host of other people are responsible for handling them along the way.

If a chef is using your cheese in a particular recipe or performance application, make note of it.

The 12th Annual American Cheese Society Conference will take place on August 2nd through August 4th, 1995 in the city of Green Bay in the heart of beautiful Northeastern Wisconsin.

Further information will be published at a later date, but in the meantime, feel free to call Dominique Delugeau, Conference Chair at (414) 863-1153. If you have any suggestions for panels please send them to Dominique's attention at:

Auricchio Cheese, Inc.

5810 Highway NN

Denmark, WI 54208

Fax: (414) 863-8791

Conference Hotels

(All located within a block of each other)

Embassy Suites (Headquarters Hotel)

Green Bay, WI 54301

(800) 236-3330

\$89.00 Double (breakfast included)

Holiday Inn - City Centre

Green Bay, WI 54301

(414) 437-5900

\$61.00 Single \$71.00 Double

Days Inn

Green Bay, WI 54301

(414) 435-4484

\$52.00 Single & Double

Wednesday, August 2nd, 1995

10:00 am - 1:00 p.m.

12:00 - 4:00 p.m.

9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

3:00 p.m.

4:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Cheesemaking Workshop

Conference Registration - Embassy Suites

12th Annual Cheese Judging

Lov it Creamery, Green Bay, WI

ACS Board Meeting - Embassy Suites

Chef's Challenge Workshop - American Club, Kohler, WI

Day One: Thursday, August 3rd, 1995

9:00 a.m.

9:20 a.m. - 12:00

12:00 noon

2:00 - 5:00 p.m.

5:15 - 6:00 p.m.

7:00 p.m.

Welcome and Introduction

Panels

Lunch - Embassy Suites

Panels

Open Membership Meeting, Election of Officers

Ballroom - Embassy Suites

"Meet the Trade" Party

Neville Public Museum, Green Bay, WI

Day Two: Friday August 4th, 1995

9:00 a.m. - 12:00

12:00 noon

2:00 - 4:30 p.m.

4:30 p.m.

7:00 - 10:00 p.m.

Panels

Lunch - Embassy Suites

Panels

Closing Remarks/Closing of Conference

12th Annual Festival of Cheese & Awards Ceremony

Heritage Hill State Park, Green Bay, WI

If you know for example that a piece of your chevre broiled on top of a warm salad melts perfectly, go so far as to detail the amount of time and type of heat source required. Basically, the chef is doing performance testing for you that you may not be able to afford to have done. This sort of information will serve as a basis for establishing performance tips for your products.

"Perception is Reality" is a marketing phrase that often rings true. Interacting with your customers and understanding how your customers perceive your products will yield you some of the most valuable information you will ever find on your own products. However perfect the cheese you produce, a production mentality needs to be balanced by a market orientation of your customer's needs. The best way to do that is to put yourself in your customer's shoes. The next time you have the opportunity to break the mold (pardon the pun), get your hands out of the cheese vat and go walk a mile in your customer's shoes.