

The American Cheese Society

NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2000

Vermont Sheep Dairies Gain Support, USDA Battle Continues

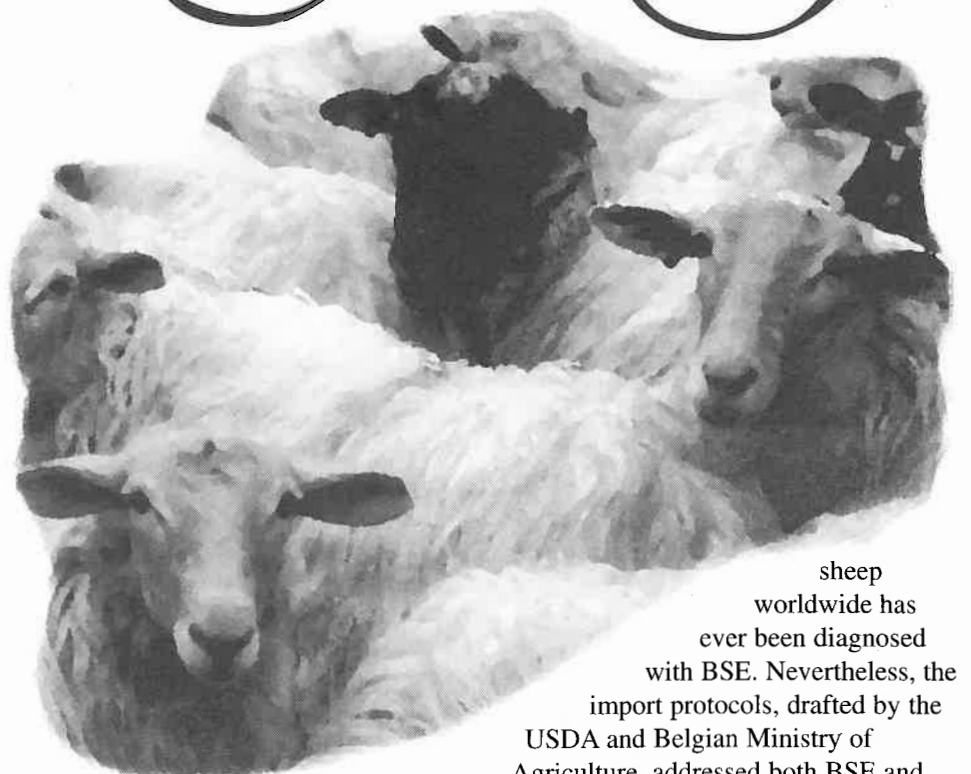
Dr. Lawrence Faillace
President
Vermont Sheep Breeders' Association

What Can Be Wrong?

They have followed all of the rules. Their imported sheep are completely healthy and produce copious amounts of milk. Everything is going according to plan, and the milk is being used to produce several varieties of farmstead cheese that continue to be well received by the public. So what can be wrong with two of Vermont's most well known sheep dairies? That's what Jackie Faillace, America's youngest professional cheesemaker, wonders.

Recent Events

It all began in the summer of 1998, two full years after the successful (and uneventful) importation of high-producing



East Friesian dairy sheep. The USDA arranged to meet with Vermont sheep flock owners Linda and Larry Faillace and Warren and Houghton Freeman of Greensboro to request that USDA purchase and destroy their flocks. USDA's request stemmed from the department's concern that the sheep might have come in contact with contaminated meat and bone meal, the presumed carrier of BSE or "Mad Cow Disease."

Research published in 1993, long before the sheep importation, identified the theoretical risk to sheep and other mammals with regard to BSE. But no

sheep worldwide has ever been diagnosed with BSE. Nevertheless, the import protocols, drafted by the USDA and Belgian Ministry of Agriculture, addressed both BSE and scrapie (a related disease of sheep). In fact, when the Faillaces arranged for the importation for the two farms, they went above and beyond protocol and only chose sheep from flocks formally certified to be free of scrapie, and those who had never used feeds containing meat and bone meal. The latter fact is backed by stacks of documents from both the European shepherds and their feedmills.

The Faillaces and Freemans thought the USDA concern could be easily addressed: simply show the USDA the documents that eliminate the potential risk, and they

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From the President...

Will Your Cheese Be Alive in 2025?



It sounded like such a simple request—just a few words on where I think our niche industry will be in the year 2025. Perhaps a sentence or two regarding which cheeses we might be producing then, how we'll be marketing these cheeses, who will be eating these cheeses, what role the American Cheese Society might play in all this cheese business...

At this moment we are the darlings in our marketplace. We have star quality—romance, a connection to the land, benefits of new technology while preserving traditions of the past. We have taste, flavor, complexity. We complement everything regional.

American farmstead and specialty cheeses are sharing with their European counterparts center stage on the cheese board. Waitstaff wax poetic about the land, the animals, lavender, rosemary, morning and evening milkings. They have met the cheesemakers and visited the farms. It is truly an honor to be considered an American Original.

It's an idyllic picture. One that many of us are marketing most successfully.

But where we'll be, what we'll be producing and how we'll market ourselves in the coming years will depend first and foremost on our cheesemakers, whether they produce raw milk or pasteurized cheeses, no matter how large or small, and their willingness to adopt HACCP programs and best practices. As traditional methods of distribution are being challenged every day, significant changes in how your product reaches the table depend on your best practices. Sustainability depends on your best practices. Your audience is growing, and that too is a direct result of your best practices.

The American Cheese Society's mission is still the same—to encourage the understanding, appreciation and promotion of America's farmstead and natural specialty cheeses. We are in a position to not only influence our customers with a proliferation of flavor profiles, but to positively influence our regulatory boards with assurances that our products and marketplace conform to a Code of Best Practice.

It's a collaborative effort. It will involve the entire membership. Who better to set the proper course than those who play an active and daily role in a very specialized industry?

Ruth Anne Flore

Calendar

January 23-25

NASFT Fancy Food Show, Winter 2000

Moscone, San Francisco

Contact: NASFT 212-482-6440, or online at www.fancyfoodshows.com

February 8-10

Western Dairy Center's 16th Annual Cheese Making Short Course

Contact: 435)797-3466

March 5-7

NASFT Fancy Food Show, Spring 2000

McCormick Place South, Chicago, Ill.

Contact: NASFT 212)482-6440, or register online at www.fancyfoodshows.com

March 6-9

15th Annual Cheesemaking Short course

WSU in Pullman, Wash.

Contact: 509)335-2954 or fax 509)335-2959

March 21-24

2000 World Championship Cheese Contest

Featuring broader classes for sheep and goat milk cheeses. Judging is open to the public.

To receive an entry kit containing info for the contest, or for more information: WI Cheesemakers Assoc., PO Box 2133, Madison WI 53701, 608)255-2027, fax 608)255-4434, or e-mail office@wischeesemakersassn.org

April 1

On-Farm Milk Processing Workshop

Complete details and registration forms available by calling Scott Rankin at 301-405-4568

It's a Labor of Love But America is Losing the Family Farm

By the time you read this, you've survived December and the dying of the old year. It's been so dark here as I walk back to the house from the cheese plant, no light but starlight and the yellow windows of the milking parlor. Farms can deaden and inspire. Why would anyone want to go to a cold barn at 4 AM and 4 PM day in day out for six to eight hours a day to look at the rear ends of sheep, goats, and cows, and get bad knees? Why would anyone want to fight what the Faillaces are fighting just for those few moments of inspiration—a barn bedded ankle deep in bright straw, a lamb or calf or kid in that first struggle to stand up, a beautiful cheese? Today, I walked into the cheese plant to a vat waiting to be ladled into molds and the smell hit me—a milky fresh, lemony smell, like milk just spilled on your shirt, and I thought, for now this is why. Sometimes it's that simple.

And sometimes it's not. One reason we're in this very fortunate market is that we are the real thing. We begin with dairymen who do the not-so-easy thing, survive on small family farms, limit herd size, generalize rather than specialize, do most of the work themselves while their bodies hold up. We have customers—God bless them—who love to find a seasonal little Picodon in the Dauphine, but expect American cheese year round with a shelf life of 90 days (no refrigeration), but not packaged in plastic, shipped in styrofoam, or made with animal rennet. Our best advice comes mostly from our dialog with each other, rather than universities, breed organizations, and extension services who seem to serve different agendas. We have no cheese tradition. Our traditional cheese memories include 200-pound wheels of "rat" cheese, and green bean casserole with American processed. We regularly ship our products across the Great Salt Flats via transportation systems that would kill anything not in cans. We're regulated by agencies oblivious to differences in size and scope, and by rules that sometimes seem to be more about covering the bases than producing better, safer cheese.

Today, I walked into the cheese plant to a vat waiting to be ladled into molds and the smell hit me—a milky fresh, lemony smell, like milk just spilled on your shirt, and I thought, for now this is why. Sometimes it's that simple.

We thought if we just kept a low profile and didn't get in the way, no one would notice us but our customers, but it didn't seem to work. And, we are losing our family farms at a rate so alarming that our children and grandchildren may never have a relative or even an acquaintance who lives on one. In one of the wealthiest industrial nations in the world, we say proudly that only 12 percent of our income is spent on food.

By encouraging American specialty cheeses, the ACS is encouraging American family dairymen who have chosen a different road. This is a good thing. I hope in the coming year,

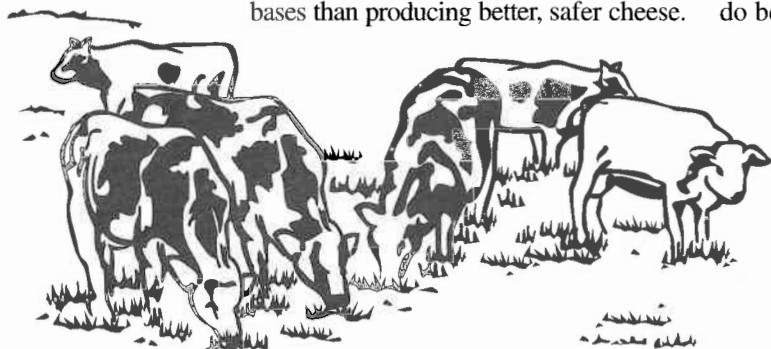
ACS will emphasize the importance of developing standards of practice and HACCPs for specific pasteurized and raw milk cheese. We could organize workshops in much the same way we've put together regional tastings. At issue are our credibility and validity with customers, regulatory agencies, and, most of all, with each other.

In spite of issues, it is energizing to be involved with American specialty cheeses. We are hot, or cool, depending on your generational choice. Are we strong enough to hear about some of things we might do better in the millennium? In this issue there are predictions for the future, the struggles of a dairy couple, several constructive critiques, and commentary, i.e., what's in our hearts and keeps us motivated as we come to the close of 1999. We're coming of age.

Our next issue will concentrate on the meaning of 'farmstead.' We would love your input on what this means to you in your corner of the ACS, but we want your input on any issue that concerns you. Thanks to all of you who took the time to contribute to and comment on the newsletter.

A happy, fortunate New Year to all of you! May we all continue to care about the things we care about, do best the things we do best, and be thankful we have each other!

Judy Schad



The American Cheese Society

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A Report from Bra:

The Slow Food Conference

Over 100,000 people tasted and consumed the 500 world cheeses displayed at the October 1999 Slow Food event, aptly named "Cheese." Carlo Petrini, president of Slow Food, declared the *Artisanal U.S. Cheese and Beer Workshop* a huge success. "In this century, cheese has gone from something eaten every day to a food meant to be savored, a pleasure of the table," and a culture has developed with this. In *The Snail*, the Slow Food newsletter, Petrini says that cheesemongers, cheese courses, and cheese workshops are important to young chefs, and cheese is compared to wine in terms of its origin milk, its geography, and the complex descriptions of its flavors.

While French and Italian cheeses figured heavily in the event, there were some important "new world" additions that demonstrated an American commitment to not only preserve old traditions, but also to foster new ones. Two cheeses selected and displayed as Ark Project cheeses were Ross Gagnon's cloth-wrapped Farmhouse Cheddar from Shelburne Farm and Ig Vella's Vella Dry Jack from Sonoma County.

Six other American cheeses were carried to Bra in the suitcases of Garret Oliver, brewmaster of Brooklyn Brewery, and Rob Kaufelt, owner of Murrays Cheese Shop, "the oldest and, according to the *New York Times* and *New York Magazine*, best cheese shop in NYC." The pairings of beers and cheeses included: Humboldt Fog with Post Road Ale; Vella Dry with Brooklyn Lager; Mont St. Francis with Omnegang Hennepin; Major Farms with Brooklyn Brown Ale; Peluso Teleme with New Glarus Wisconsin Red; and Great Hill Blue with Sierra Nevada Bigfoot.

While Slow Food exhibited its commitment to having U.S. cheeses compared to the best cheeses of Europe, Rob explained that, "American farmhouse cheese development is many years behind that of other artisanal food products in the U.S., such as wine and beer. Between those who have made cheese for centuries and those who are new, there sometimes need to be intermediaries, and the experience of those who sell cheese to the customers can be helpful. Logically these need to be the people who sell the cheeses to the customers."



What do we want? How do we get there? We decided it isn't how big we get, or how much cheese we make, but how much we love what we do. At what point does it stop being fun? Is there a

way to grow and still keep the things we honor? I think most of us who are small and mid-sized specialty cheese makers started for similar reasons. We wanted something creative to do. Something that we could be proud of and something that, in a small way, makes a difference. We came to cheesemaking because we had animals we loved, too much milk, or a family to feed. We stayed because it is a satisfying occupation that is unlimited in scope and possibility. Just like cheese itself. I see that

as returning to reality, or hanging on to reality in a busy, stressful world. People across the country are turning to specialty cheese, produce, bread, etc., for the same reasons. It gives us all a chance to have something real in our lives. I think we have industrialized and computerized and that will continue, but those innovations will cause us to need more real food, real people, and real experiences in our lives. There will always be the large and the small in cheese-making and agriculture, but quality will be more and more important. I think we will see more new cheesemakers enter the field every year. We will all be making new cheeses because we can't help it. Huge companies will all have "specialty departments" and the cheeses they make may be specialty by technical definition, but not really special. The field can't help but grow because it is real and it is needed.

Mary Keehn, Cypress Grove Chevre

continued from front page

would have the assurances they needed. But the USDA has been immovable in their desire to have the sheep killed. They cite intense political pressure from both the beef cattle industry and the pharmaceutical industry as the basis for their crusade. But why?

Political Pressure on USDA

Some people have linked this situation to the current trade war between the EU and the U.S. U.S. trade officials have made no secret of their disdain for the EU's refusal of American beef, and the EU defends their decision on the basis of the widespread use of artificial hormones in the United States and Europe's longstanding philosophy against hormone use. Others have pointed to the fact that the U.S. continues to claim to be BSE-free, even though fewer than 9,000 cattle have been tested out of a cumulative population of over 1 billion cattle since testing began in 1990. The USDA's faulty logic appears to be that eliminating these sheep would be perceived as a strong step to defend the U.S. against BSE, and it would help stave off the increasing domestic and international criticism of the inadequacies of the cattle testing program.

Groundswell of Support for Shepherds

Since the story broke in the media in early October, support for the two sheep dairies has grown. Citizens from all over the country have been calling, writing, and e-mailing expressing support and asking what can be done to help. Sheep farmers at home and abroad have done the same. Local politicians, including town select boards and a state senator, have written strongly worded letters on behalf of the flock owners. Recently, some people have even sent money to support a legal defense fund for the Faillaces.

Europe Shows Support

Support has even come from overseas. As I write this in December, Linda Faillace is in Europe, having been invited to meet with the Belgian Ministry of Agriculture, eminent scientists, owners of the source flocks, and Confederation Paysanne, a Paris-based organization supporting family farmers with a membership of 40,000. All are looking for ways to help. Linda is being followed by a movie producer, who is filming a documentary sponsored by the Vermont State Grange. The Grange is also holding a "Save Our Sheep" rally on January 22, to be held at the Warren Grange. Want to eat some good grange home cooking, and maybe be on the big screen? Come to the rally.

If you wish to contact or help Dr. Larry and Linda Faillace, contact them at Ag-Innovations Inc./Three Shepherds of the Mad River Valley, 565 Behn Road, Warren, VT 05674.
Phone 802-496-3998, or fax 802-496-4096 or 802-496-3998.

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Upcoming Issues

Speak Your Mind in Future Issues with Topics that Interest You

2nd Quarter 2000: Farmhouse Cheese

Farmhouse Cheese is the subject of our May issue. What are they? How do they impact those who make, monger, and serve them? What is their place in the industry as a whole? What role will they play in the future of ACS?

We would like to have input from all of you, especially cheesemakers who produce 50–100% of their own cheesemaking milk.

Deadline for articles, input and photos: March 1, 2000

3rd Quarter 2000: Terroir

Terroir is the idea that place, geology, genealogy, and geography all contribute to a finished product—a great peasant bread, a wine, a cheese.

Terroir will be the subject of our July newsletter. What does it mean to you in your particular corner of the cheese world? Have some thoughts or facts that support or debunk the idea that territory contributes to flavor?

Deadline for articles and photos: May 1, 2000

We invite you to participate in any or all of the upcoming issues. Editor 812-923-1180, or fax 812-923-9408.

The ACS Store

Order information here • Call Whom?



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Vermont Shepherd
Winchester Cheese
Widmer Cheese Cellars

A NEW YORK CHRISTMAS... Black Tie and American Cheese Required

David Grotenstein, Food and Image

NEW YORK—Of the many charitable events that take place here this time of year, none are grander than “A New York Christmas” presented by Volunteers of America, one of the country’s oldest human services organizations. This annual chef’s event invites the best restaurants in town to show what they’re made of, and this year’s gala at The Four Seasons Restaurant was astounding. Mario Batali of Po and Babbo and Tom Valenti of Butterfield 81 acted as co-chairs, and participating chefs included Picholine’s Terrence Brennan, Uni on Pacific’s Rocco Di Spirito, An American Place’s Larry Forgione and Beacon’s Waldy Malouf.

The program included an article, under the ACS banner, written by yours truly, on

how to keep and care for cheese at home. Guests were invited into the kitchen for the first time, where these masters prepared and served “la grande bouffe” right before our eyes. Out in the dining room, the wine and appetizers were flowing, and Max McCalman, ACS member and Maitre de Fromage at Picholine, was hosting a cheese table...comprised entirely of American specialty cheeses. Those of you who attended the ACS conference in August

will remember Max’s panel discussion and photos of the staggering selection of cheeses he puts together each night, likely the most extensive restaurant board in the country. Max presents 60 or so items, from here and abroad, all hand-selected and aged in his own “cave” at Picholine.

Last year, for this same event, I asked Max if he would consider doing all American specialties, and he welcomed the opportunity. The effort proved so successful that it was all anyone wanted to do again this year...volunteers and chefs alike. Our selections included chevres of different ages from Coach Farm, Cypress Grove and Capriole, Grafton Gold, Vermont Shepherd’s Timson, Lovetree’s Trade Lake Cedar and Great Hill Blue (which I have seen on no less than four cheese boards in New York restaurants this year!)

At a time when awareness of American Farmstead product is beginning to take hold in a truly meaningful way with both retailers and restaurateurs, this particular showing feels especially rewarding and encouraging. ACS cheeses were not even requested...they were presumed! All the cheesemakers who donated product for the evening’s festivities did so with great enthusiasm. They were not only contributing to an important cause, but their cheeses were showcased in an exciting and attentive venue.

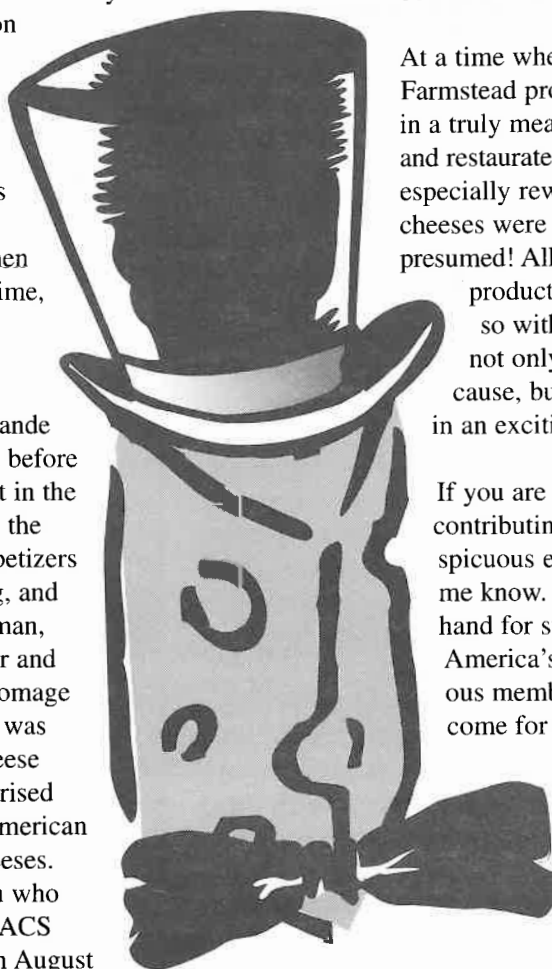
If you are a cheesemaker interested in contributing product to worthy and conspicuous events like this one, please let me know. I’d love to have a “database” at hand for supplying these benefits with America’s best as requests come to various members of the Society. Requests come for cheese in all classifications and quantities, so even a little can mean a lot.

Phone 212-222-4578

Fax 212-222-4592

E-mail

foodandimage@aol.com



I met Paula Lambert when we'd just begun to make cheese. At a Fancy Food show in Atlanta this beautiful, smiling lady stood behind a wood cutting board sampling goat cheese torta and a smooth, biting cheese called caciotta. She seemed totally focused on what she was doing and didn't miss a beat when asked how she had started.

Paula has a story and knows how to tell it. She learned to love mozzarella in 1968 when she and a friend decided to study Italian in Perugia, and she still managed to get back to Italy on vacations after she and Jim Lambert were married in 1973. It was on one of these trips that she decided she would go back to Dallas and make mozzarella. Paula likes to keep the story simple—a nice girl from Dallas decides to do the unusual thing and is still having fun doing it. But don't underestimate her for a minute. The truth is that Paula adores what she does. She makes it look like fun, because after 17 years of cheesemaking, it still is. Her customers love flavored cheeses, chic or not, and Paula is proud to make them happy. "Mozzarella roll, with ginger, cilantro, and sesame—you never know," she muses. Believe me, you don't know until you've tried it sliced thin and drizzled with olive oil and a dash of balsamic for lunch on a warm summer day.

Paula predicts that the industry will continue to grow for both large and small producers. Cheeses are growing in popularity every day, and appreciation is growing as well. "Large producers will continue to enter the specialty arena, and small-scale ones will continue to create new and interesting cheeses whose very nature will require that they be made in small quantities. While she can't really predict how farms and dairies will be impacted by all this, she does see environmental concerns creating pressure on the farms. "More and more grocery stores will be selling cheeses that are locally produced," and restaurants will not only be purchasing more cheeses for ingredients, but for cheese trays as well. "I hope more and more people will eat cheese, and the role of the Society will be to focus on education for its members who can then go and spread the word to the public."

Paula's latest venture is her new book, *The Cheese Lover's Cookbook*, which will be out in October 2000.

"It will have 150 recipes for everything from appetizers to meats, vegetables, and desserts and include all types of cheeses—not just our own. There will also be helpful information ranging from cheese history and nutritive benefits to tips on buying, storing, and serving. There's even a chapter on lactose intolerance and its relationship to cheese, and the photography is fabulous." The lady who would like to have Julia Child and MFK Fisher to dinner, who wishes she could sing like Cecilia Bartoli, is a diva—in the very best sense of the word. —JS

**Paula likes to keep the story simple—
a nice girl from Dallas decides to do the
unusual thing and is still having fun doing it.
But don't underestimate her for a minute.**

The Queen of Mozzarella



Raw Milk Cheesemaking: The Future Hangs in the Balance

A Perspective by Professor Paul S. Kindstedt, University of Vermont

A contentious and ominous debate is once again looming over the U.S. cheese industry. Some 50 years ago, cheesemakers, scientists, and government regulators struggled over the issue of whether to prohibit the use of unpasteurized milk for cheesemaking on the grounds that the cheese-consuming public was entitled to the higher level of safety made possible by pasteurization. Much of the industry at that time produced cheese from unpasteurized milk. Consequently, there was widespread industry opposition to mandatory pasteurization. In the end, an uneasy compromise was forged that allowed the requirement for pasteurization to be substituted (in certain cheeses) with a 60-day aging requirement that, in 1949, was considered to provide an acceptable level of safety.

The fate of raw milk cheesemaking hangs in the balance, and it would appear that a negative decision is almost certainly assured unless a compelling case for raw milk cheese can be articulated and skillfully presented....

Fast forward to 1999. Frighteningly large and highly publicized outbreaks of food poisoning involving a variety of foods have occurred in the U.S. in recent years. This has placed regulatory authorities, notably the FDA and USDA, on the defensive and in need of new strategies to strengthen food safety. Pasteurization is a proven first line of defense for the safety of dairy products. The U.S. cheese industry is now dominated by pasteurized milk cheeses and much of the industry is advocating the prohibition of raw milk for cheesemaking. Therefore, it is not surprising that the FDA, which oversees the regulation of cheeses, is taking a hard look at mandatory pasteurization as an approach to enhance the safety of cheeses.

Many have argued that mandatory pasteurization would be a good thing for

the cheese industry. The proponents of raw milk cheese have been less vocal and less organized. The fate of raw milk cheesemaking hangs in the balance, and it would appear that a negative decision is almost certainly assured unless a compelling case for raw milk cheese can be articulated and skillfully presented to policy makers and regulatory authorities by credible bodies such as the Vermont Cheese Council and its larger sister organization, the American Cheese Society. The question...is there a compelling case to be made on behalf of raw milk cheese? Here are a few reasons why I think there is a case to be made:

1. First of all, pasteurization doesn't guarantee safety. It simply reduces risk. A good argument can be made that safeguards other than pasteurization can be developed to achieve a comparable level of risk reduction. This approach is being taken by some European countries where there is a concerted effort to strike a workable balance between the public's right to the highest level of food safety and a deep cultural appreciation of raw milk cheeses. The Europeans have been working on the problem of how to produce safe raw milk cheeses far more intensively than we in the U.S. We stand to gain much by analyzing the HACCP-based alternatives to pasteurization that have been developed by countries such as Belgium. We needn't reinvent the wheel, but rather should borrow the successful elements of the European experience, adapt them to U.S. needs, and present them to the FDA as a viable option.

2. Raw milk cheeses are worth saving. They are a distinct value-added product niche. Because they provide a high return on investment, they are able to sustain agriculture in a form that is rapidly disappearing—the small farm. Small farms are vital to the agricultural economies of states like Vermont,

which cannot compete well in the arena of large scale agri-business. Some states may not be interested in retaining small-scale agriculture, but Vermont is, and Vermont is not alone.

3. In general, raw milk cheeses are artisanal in nature. In states such as Vermont, where tourism and arts and crafts are the mainstay of the economy, artisanal cheesemaking complements and adds to the strength of the economy far beyond the actual value of the cheese produced. It does so by elevating the image and appeal of the state.

Artisanal tourist-friendly cheeseries, small working dairy farms, and unique products all contribute to the ambiance upon which Vermont depends for its economic survival.

4. If raw milk cheesemaking is banned in the U.S., presumably imports of raw milk cheese from Europe will also be banned. If so, this will be a very contentious thorn in the side of U.S.-European trade. Is it really worth risking an all-out trade war with Europe when it seems possible that an alternative to pasteurization can be developed to ensure a comparable level of safety?

5. There is a growing market in the U.S. for raw milk cheeses. American consumers want the choice. Clearly, they demand and are entitled to safe products, but they also value choice. I know I do. Thus, if there is a way to insure safety while preserving choice versus insuring safety by regulating away the choice, I vote for the former.

In the final analysis, my vote or your vote doesn't matter. What will make a difference, or rather may make a difference, will be a thoughtful, well documented, clearly articulated and compelling case that is respectfully but aggressively presented to policy makers and regulatory authorities. Who will step up to the plate and come to bat for raw milk cheese? That remains to be seen.

...And from Allison Hooper

Allison is both President of the Vermont Cheese Council and Vermont Butter and Cheese Co. Her President's Message appeared in the Autumn 1999 Vermont Cheese Council Newsletter:

Each year at the American Cheese Society's Annual Conference, cheesemakers get together and celebrate the diversity of cheeses worldwide. As a trade group, we enjoy eating and selling raw milk cheeses. As cheesemakers we treasure the choice of using raw or pasteurized milk in our cheeses. I think that this niche specialty and farmhouse cheese industry would like to maintain that choice. If so, we need to live in the real world and be resigned to the fact that our regulatory environment is changing. We can either attempt to influence those changes or wait until the privilege of making raw milk cheeses is outlawed. It is time for a strategy that is pragmatic.

I am reminded of a wonderful evening at Shelburne Farms last May when the Vermont Fresh Network hosted Carlo Petrini and Patrick Martins from THE SLOW FOOD MOVEMENT. SLOW FOOD has created a grassroots campaign to revive and champion small, sustainable food production in Europe. Petrini, Italy's own "Epicurean Ralph Nader" made a U.S. tour to establish regional chapters and spread the word about how a standardized global market endangers artisan food production.

Vermont, where small family farming remains the backbone of our agricultural heritage, was Slow Food's first stop. Chef David Hugo from the Inn at Shelburne Farms cooked up a sumptuous Vermont meal of Vermont Fresh

Both Dr. Paul Kinstedt's article and Allison Hooper's have been reprinted here with the permission of The Vermont Cheese Council.

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Network venison, organic greens, and David Miskell's tomatoes. Of course we topped the meal off with a resplendent flight of Vermont cheeses.

Impressed by the efforts of Vermont cheesemakers to make distinctive cheeses as one strategy to save the family farm, Carlo spoke eloquently about the struggle of European cheesemakers to defend the production of raw milk cheeses. With humor, charm, and passion, he urged American and European cheesemakers to join efforts to raise public awareness of the fact that without concerted action we will lose many of our traditional cheeses of the world. As we all wiped away joyous appreciative tears, I silently wondered whether American consumers were ready to wage a revolution in the name of raw milk cheeses.

We have a lot in common with European cheesemakers. For both producer groups, the sustainability of small farming depends on the ability to make complex and distinctive products for a sophisticated market. What differs most in our struggle to maintain raw milk cheese production is the fact that unlike our European counterparts, the American market does not have a history of taste for raw milk cheeses. Sure, anyone reading this newsletter undoubtedly knows the difference. We may even communicate these subtle palate nuances to that part of our customer base that will appreciate them. The Europeans have enjoyed raw milk cheeses for generations. To them, the potential loss of raw milk cheeses is a threat to their way of life. They live in communities whose very identity is characterized by the variety of artisan cheeses made there. Sad to say that here, for most Americans, agricultural communities are no longer the prevailing way of life. We are having to re-teach our kids that milk comes from a cow and not from the supermarket. Our current struggle to keep our regional dairy compact is testament that the U.S. is a country where a low-cost food supply is top priority.

The American Cheese Society and the Vermont Cheese Council do not have the resources to mobilize the public to act as our advocate on behalf of raw milk cheese. Our infant industry is simply

We can either attempt to influence those changes or wait until the privilege of making raw milk cheeses is outlawed. It is time for a strategy that is pragmatic.

too small to attempt a public relations campaign about such a controversial issue. And, when we add the necessary cautions about the potential hazards of improperly produced raw milk cheeses, we could inadvertently dissuade a confused potential customer base from buying dairy products at all.

A public awareness campaign of passionate letter writing and pages of signatures from our already loyal customers may get the attention of our respective congressional delegations, but it is not likely to influence FDA policy with regard to public health and safety. Instead, the American Cheese Society, a small, 400-member, non-profit organization of cheese aficionados, artisans, and niche market retailers needs to be strategic in thinking about the problem from the regulators' perspective.

Let's not complain that the cost of pasteurization will put us under. From a regulator's perspective that is simply the cost of doing business. The cash flow challenge of maintaining a farm, aging our cheese inventories and hustling our receivables are far more likely to put us out of business than the additional interest payment on a pasteurizer and boiler.

Instead, let's attempt to convince regulators that ours is a small, professional industry that is economically viable and that we are as concerned as they are about public health and safety. Our resources should be spent to mitigate the hazards of badly produced cheeses made from both raw and pasteurized

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Why Can't We Sell More American Cheeses?

A View From Retail

Matthew Rubiner
Formaggio Kitchen
Cambridge, Mass.

My goal is to provoke serious discussion among the members of our Society about ways to lower the retail cost and increase the overall quality and marketability of American cheeses.

I write to express my concerns about the high cost and inconsistent quality of American artisan cheeses. I write from the point of view of a specialty cheese retailer. I do not claim to speak for all cheese retailers, but I have heard my concerns echoed throughout the industry. My goal is to provoke serious discussion among the members of our Society about ways to lower the retail cost and increase the overall quality and marketability of American cheeses.

Today is an exciting time for the American cheese industry. At Shelburne Farm I saw a greater wealth of artisan American cheeses than ever before. I saw old favorites that have become American classics. I saw worthy American versions of great Old World cheeses, and I saw an encouraging number of true American originals. Many of the cheeses I tasted reached great heights. All showed great promise. The cheesemakers I met were vibrant and passionate. The press seems excited, our promotional efforts have begun to bear fruit, and an often suspicious American public seems poised to embrace American cheeses.

Selling American artisan cheeses, however, can still be a difficult, frustrating task. At Formaggio Kitchen, sales of American cheeses are far short of our expectations, even as sales of fine European cheeses increase at a dramatic pace. We sell a greater variety of American cheeses than ever before as we try the many promising new cheeses entering the market. But too few of these become steady sellers. In-store promotions and articles in the press yield brief flurries of sales, but they are rarely sustained.

Certainly there have been successes. Locally made fresh goat cheeses and New England cheddars sell briskly. A few modern American classics sell steadily if in modest volume, and some notable newcomers have become fixtures of our cheese case. As a whole, however, sales of American cheeses are disappointing.

I believe the causes of this sluggish performance are the high cost and inconsistent quality of American cheeses. Artisan cheeses made anywhere are expensive. American artisan cheeses seem disproportionately so. I have spoken with cheesemakers throughout the country to better understand why costs are so high. I have heard many reasons: The onerous American regulatory environment, the low yield of our breeds, unachievable economies of scale, expensive milk, expensive land, expensive feed, expensive equipment, little or no government support, and a young and poorly developed distribution system. All are real and legitimate. But high cost alone is

not the problem. If a cheese is good, it will sell, even at a premium. At \$21.95 a pound, it better be very good. Our industry is young, and lessons are being learned. But the overall quality of the cheeses we receive is, with many notable exceptions, unacceptable. The peaks can be very high, but the valleys are often much too low. Some variation, within a range, is to be expected, of course. Indeed, subtle change from season to season and wheel to wheel are part of the charm of an artisan cheese. But the variation in quality we experience can be dramatic.

I appreciate the difficulty of producing high quality cheese on a consistent basis. I recognize also that the some of the quality problems come after the cheese has left the producer, in transport or in the inhospitable warehouses of distributors. However, too many poor quality cheeses are being released into the market, either because of economic pressures to move inventory that cloud a producer's selectivity, inadequate appreciation of the requirements of the market, or, in worst cases, negligence. We cannot sell a bad cheese. One unacceptable cheese can damage irreparably the confidence of our cheese-selling staff and of our clientele. Patriotism is an insufficient motivator to sell or buy American cheese. The cheese must be good.

The problems are easy to see. The solutions are less visible. There may be incremental decreases in the costs of production as the market grows, but costs will remain high. The quality of the American cheeses on the market must improve. I believe the only solution is a nationwide collaborative effort among cheesemakers, retailers and distributors to improve communication about quality and marketing issues, to improve the selection and grading of cheeses at the producer level, to explore outlets for medium quality cheeses that do not meet retail market specifications, and to look for ways to lower retail costs.

I PROPOSE THE FOLLOWING INITIAL STEPS:

- **Create a committee of retailers within the American Cheese Society** to explore ways to improve communication between retailers and producers on issues of quality and marketability.
- **Increase efforts by retailers to lower margins** on American cheeses while our industry matures and gains a firmer footing.
- **Establish and fund an active panel** of troubleshooting advisors to work closely with cheesemakers to improve quality.
- **Explore market outlets** for cheeses that do not meet the high standards of the retail market, including discount programs, restaurant sales, and second labeling.

News & Notes

According to a study in the October 1999 issue of *Gourmet News* more than half the U.S. population is inclined to make food purchases based on or reflecting concern for the environment." Referring to these customers as 'green shoppers', the article cited four environmentally conscious segments of the market: "True Naturals" (11%) or "the graying children of the '60s" who make a regular commitment to purchase organic; "New Green Mainstream" shoppers (17%) concerned with convenience first and environment second; "Affluent Healers" (11%); and "Young Recyclers" (14%).

Things have been happening at Major Farm and Vermont Shepherd! In addition to the award-winning Shepherd's Tommes, they're offering two new cow milk cheeses made from raw milk. Timson, a 6-pound washed-rind wheel, is made from a neighbor's eight Jersey cows and aged five to six months. It is rich, woodsy, almost smoky, in flavor. The texture is smooth and buttery, and creamy near the edges. The exterior is orangish-yellow with a pale yellow interior. Putney Tomme, also made from Jersey milk, is a smooth, open textured, four-month cheese with a tangy, earthy flavor, a grey rind and a yellow interior. In the past, Vermont Shepherd/Major Farm has had limited production, but with two new farms also producing, they are now welcoming new accounts. For more info call Vermont Shepherd at 802)387-4473 or fax at 802)387-2041. They also have a web site: www.vermontshepherd.com.



I predict...more variety and less fresh cheese, as well as more aged and value added ones. I also think cheese as an ingredient will continue to become more interesting to chefs. The purity of our milk source and of our cheeses also will become more important to our customers, as will the ability to communicate to the customer how the farm monitors the purity of the feeds, water, and land. Cheese will be increasingly marketed through the Internet and distributors. The national press and the organic press will be opinion leaders, and the Society will need to advocate and popularize the human effort required to create cheese that is unique to the USA. — *John Greeley, Sheila Marie Imports*

My friends will quit talking to me entirely if I don't quit putting them in print, but this, from Mary Doerr of Dancing Wind Farm in Minnesota, came rolling in right before Christmas. Mary decided several years ago to scale back her production and is milking less than 20 goats and selling in a local market. I expect that we'll hear from her in the May Farmstead issue. She is such a special person, that if you miss snow or need to drop out for a while and spend time eating cheese with someone who loves it, you might want to visit her B&B. From Mary: "Just made the last batch of Dancing Winds goat cheese of the CENTURY and of course as fate would have it, MPR (Minnesota Public Radio) will be doing a piece on me just before Christmas. Luckily, we are promoting the Goat in general and maybe I'll get some B&B/Retreat guests out of the deal as well. I'll still have some "Bombay Buttons" left to sell I hope, and of course the chevre logs. Might have to dig out the aged Gavottes too—they are precious few and dear as gold. I'm TRYING to expand my repertoire, but it's all a wild adventure at this point...all for now. I'll do my best to get something to you before the end of the millennium, although I

feel as though I'm probably out the loop as far as what's going on in the specialty cheese world. Most days (luckily), I feel so fortunate that what I do is truly a labor of love!"

At a time when the price of milk is forcing dairy farmers out of business, the Boucher family of Highgate Center, Vt., have decided that diversity is the key to keeping the family down on the farm. These 12th-generation dairyman decided two years ago to lessen their reliance on milk as a source of income, and are now producing a raw milk blue cheese with the 1% of the total milk of their Holsteins. This yields about 100–200 pounds of blue a week. Only six months after beginning production, Vermont Blue won its first award in the 1999 ACS competition in Shelburne Vt.

Beth Carlsen has joined the C.E. Zuercher Co., distributors of fine cheeses in Chicago. While Major Farms' favorite 'cave girl' will be missed in Vermont, Joe, John, Roberto, and Helder will love having her in the wind tunnel. At last report, she was struggling through the December heat wave!

Herdsmen needed at farmstead dairy/cheeseplant milking 200–250 goats. \$25,000 a year or more starting salary with incentives based on working dairy experience and husbandry skills. Call 812-923-1633 for more information.

By the time you have the newsletter in hand, the first ACS food event of the new millennium may be taking place at the Winter Fancy Food Show in San Francisco. ACS had such a successful show at the 1999 Summer Fancy Food in New York that we've reserved a double booth at Moscone Center January 23–25. Our man, David G., will conduct the command performance with space for 40, yes folks, that's right, 40 of our cheesemakers! More later!

A Prediction...

As The Economy Goes, So Goes Farmstead Cheese

**Bernard Horton, Horton International
Cambridge, Massachusetts**

"The push by the State of Wisconsin to promote a shift from commodity to specialty cheese production should benefit farmstead cheesemakers throughout the region, if not the entire country, because more about specialty cheeses is being put before the consumers. Assuming the U.S. economy continues to be healthy, more and more people will pay more and more to satisfy the growing sophistication of their palates. 'Assuming' is the key word. A turn down in the economy would not be good for specialty cheesemakers.

The question of what kind of cheeses will be produced seems less important than a more specific one of whether the use of raw milk will be forbidden or not. The freedom to continue to produce raw milk cheeses is a central issue on which the Society must focus. If there is any hope of being permitted to continue to make these cheeses, the impact of HACCP procedures that must be employed in all serious farmstead/specialty cheesemaking operations will extend back to how farming will be conducted. This is a big deal and could be pivotal in deciding who stays and/or

enters specialized cheesemaking. The Society must follow through with its Task Force work to engage those with power in political and scientific circles to help show that raw milk can be made without significant risk to consumers. The Society should play a central role in organizing and conducting short courses on the HACCP and quality control procedures which will be necessary if raw milk cheeses are to be made without creating health risks to the consumer. The Society could earn money while providing this essential service to our cheesemaker members."

As someone who has for years been involved in the ACS Cheese Competition, Bernie also suggests that in conjunction with the ACS judging each year, we provide a cheese clinic for cheesemakers who would like to have their cheeses evaluated outside the competition itself. The clinic would be only for cheesemakers, who might expect to pay for this critique just as they would pay for an entry in the competition, but the focus might be on a wider variety of judges with technical expertise. What a great idea and an opportunity for cheesemakers to ask specific questions about specific cheeses, without detracting funds and time from the competition! I predict that we will see only our best cheeses in the competition which should require less time and energy that can then be diverted to educational sessions.—JS

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milk. The Vermont Code of Best Practice is a gentle first step. Let's build on this set of voluntary guidelines with a set of enforceable standards for raw milk cheesemaking in our state.

We learned at the American Cheese Society Conference at Shelburne Farms in August that the French and the Belgians have imposed additional standards for raw milk cheesemaking. HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point) programs on the farm and in the creamery have not only reduced the incidence of pathogens in cheese but have improved the marketability of farmstead cheeses. Increased

control over the process will only produce a better cheese. Just as Vermont cheesemakers collaborated with the British Specialist Cheesemaker's Association to produce a Code of Best Practice, we should glean what we can from those who are living with new regulations and thriving in a growing market for artisan products from France and Belgium.

We hear you Carlo Petrini. We too want to promote small-scale food production while satisfying demand for good-tasting food. We are ready to join with the Europeans to adopt best practices. But, raw milk cheesemakers have some work to do on our farms and in our cheese plants before we raise public awareness about such a controversial issue.

Love Does Not Conquer All

"Passion, dedication, and motivation are the most important ingredients in farmstead cheese production," said keynote speaker Gerd Stern at the Farmstead Dairy Day Conference in Mosinee, Wis., in November. Stern, past ACS president, advised the 250 participants, "We're in a battle to preserve on-farm cheesemaking in the world." ACS member Regi Hise, president of foodcomm in Madison, Wisc., encouraged future development of on-the-farm cheeses, pointing out to participants that there are definitely factors that favor specialty and farmstead cheesemaking endeavors, including well traveled, food-curious chefs and consumers with a passion for food; but both Stern and Hise warned of pitfalls. Passion is not enough, said Hise, adding, "I don't believe everything small is good. There are a lot of bad farmstead cheeses already." Stern agreed that while small is still beautiful, it's not a guarantee of quality, and he voiced concern about the increasing numbers of bad cheeses present at the 1999 ACS Cheese Competition. While the number of entries was up from 100 to more than 300, Stern said there were also a fair number of "really horrible cheeses" with bitter, off flavors and textural problems, that should have been subjected to more critical review before being submitted to the competition. Hise agreed quality and safety are more important marketing concerns than packaging and presentation. Both speakers addressed the balance needed in order to be successful in farmstead dairy ventures. While enthusiasm and passion are a must, they must be balanced with a real understanding of the process of cheesemaking, as well as of the customer who wants a farmstead product. Growth of the larger industry also will reflect growth in of smaller production. "It's a balancing act," said Stern, "the culture needs both sides of the equation."

21st Century ACS

Consumers Are Becoming More Discriminating, Offering New Challenges to Cheesemakers

From Laura Jacobs-Welch, who loves cheese and is not afraid to show it

Judy asked me to prepare something for this newsletter. Focusing on the new millennium and the specialty cheese industry, from the perspective of the administrative office, I was just happy she gave me 2½ months to think about it. In the meantime, I had the presence of mind to sign up for and participate in the recent Farmstead Dairy Day Conference, which had more than 250 attendees and was hosted by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, & Consumer Protection (WDATCP). The event was put together by WDATCP in response to requests from a group of producers to review the current licensing of cheesemakers in Wisconsin because of concerns that the current apprenticeship requirement imposes a serious difficulty for those living far from a cheese plant.

In the not too distant past, there were some 2000 cheese plants operating in [Wisconsin]. Currently there are 90.

The attendance astonished members of WDATCP who were planning on a mere 60 or so. In the not too distant

past, there were some 2000 cheese plants operating in the state. Currently there are 90. All that said, my point is that the WDATCP is interested in growing the specialty cheese industry in the state. I have seen growing interest on a national level since the early '90s, and can attribute our success as an organization to increased media and consumer awareness of the industry. As consumers' horizons have broadened beyond the geographical boundaries of the continent, our culture has grown to include many regional foods of which we weren't previously aware.

...we should think backwards to the way our organization first began. The network must work from the outer roots—the grassroots—and draw its energy upward to the bloom of the organization as a whole.

In the past, the ACS as been fully involved in activities which make everyone feel part of the greater organization, and in the years since I came to work with ACS, we have focused on a "national" inclusion of our members. Recently, our network has been working from the Executive Committee to the Board of Directors, and then out to the members. I believe however, that in the new year, we should think backwards to the way our organization first began. The network must work from the outer roots—the grassroots—and draw its energy upward to the bloom of the organization as a whole. Our annual conference is our single most successful financial endeavor outside membership dues, and the fact that these yearly events are in themselves regional in much of their focus should point out something very important to us. In each of these conferences, the largest group of members attending is the group from the region where the event is held, and often, members hold off attending until the conference is held in their region.

Listening to a radio review recently, I heard the statement that "the only revolution is our evolution." Well folks, we

are involved in a mini-revolution, and the consumer is 'evolving' us back to responsibility and accountability when it comes to their food source. They have become discriminating with regard to the taste and production of their food, a completely different stance from the recent, homogeneous past. If we, as an organization are to be successful at serving their demands, we will have to evolve into an organization that better serves our members needs in the regions where they live and work. Our cheesemaker members will continue to do what they do best, inventing and creating wonderful cheeses born out of the Appalachian or Kentuckiana hills, or the seaside, or the breadbasket of the Midwest.

...our greatest challenge...will be to reshape the Society...which does take its members concerns seriously, developing programs that benefit each individual segment of our industry, and still providing a complete voice for American specialty cheeses to the world.

To do that, they will need more support in dealing with the regulatory environment and learning how to best market their products. Retailers will continue to open stores off the beaten path, and provide variety in pairing cheese with so many other specialty products. We will help them with printed materials and details on how to handle those cheeses. Chefs will continue to be the front runners and "town criers" for much of this creativity by introducing consumers to their first taste of the region's finest new products. We will support them and educate future chefs about the potential of the fresh products of their own states, counties, and rural areas. I believe our greatest challenge in the days and years following January 1, 2000, will be to reshape the Society as an organization of parts which make a whole, which does take its members concerns seriously, developing programs that benefit each individual segment of our industry, and still providing a complete voice for American specialty cheeses to the world.