

The American Cheese Society

NEWSLETTER 1ST QUARTER 2002

The Fortunes of War Create a World-Class Cheese

*From the California Milk
Advisory Board*

Any list of America's great cheeses will include Dry Monterey Jack near, if not at, the top. Few American cheeses have the rich history of this California original. Dry

ACS Mission Statement

To uphold the highest standards of quality in the making of cheese and related fermented milk products.

To uphold the traditions and preserve the history of American cheesemaking.

To be an educational resource for American cheesemakers and the public through sharing knowledge and experience on cheesemaking as a hobby or as a commercial enterprise, with special attention given to specialty and farmhouse cheeses made from all types of milk, including cow's, goat's and sheep's milk.

To encourage consumption through better education on the sensory pleasures of cheese and its healthful and nutritional values.

Monterey Jack (or Dry Jack) is, as the name implies, a dry, aged form of Monterey Jack, an original California cheese that got its name from David Jacks, a Scot who first commercialized the cheese in the Monterey area in the late 1800s. Dry Jack came into being almost by accident a couple decades later during the First World War. Its history begins in the spring of 1915 when a San Francisco cheese wholesaler, D.F. DeBernardi, entered into his usual annual contracts with local cheesemakers for "fresh" Monterey Jack and stored the first deliveries in his warehouse. San Franciscans — especially the local Italian community — preferred local cheeses very young, hence the "fresh" descriptor. For the hard aged cheeses, they looked to Italian imports.

Two circumstances gave birth to Dry Jack. First, DeBernardi found that the

"fresh" Monterey Jack was not selling as quickly as he expected, while his contracts kept more cheese entering his warehouse. To make room, he stored the oldest wheels, hand salting them as he did so. The second event was that Italy entered the war and the supply of Italian Romano and Parmesan dried up.

Looking for hard cheese to sell, DeBernardi turned to the Monterey Jack aging in his warehouse and found that it had become hard enough to grate while developing a sweet, nutty flavor, not unlike a medium-cured Parmesan. At that point, DeBernardi saw a solution to both problems. Following Italian tradition, he coated the Dry Jack with oil, pepper and lampblack and sold it as a substitute for the then-unavailable Italian grating cheeses. It quickly caught on and before long found a market across the country that lasted for the

duration of the war and for some years after. At its peak, 60 California cheese factories produced it. Dry Jack enjoyed popularity until the mid-1930s when the Depression, combined with a flood of inexpensive foreign grating cheeses, contributed to its decline.

Today, just a few California cheesemakers produce Dry Jack, two of which have been producing it since its early days — Vella Cheese Co. in Sonoma and Rumiano Cheese Co. in Crescent City. Dry Jack is still produced by hand and still carries its distinctive dark brown coating, although unsweetened cocoa has long replaced the rather messy lampblack. Vella uses vegetable oil in the coating while Rumiano prefers mineral oil. Rumiano also produces a version with whole peppercorns.

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The American Cheese Society

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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The ACS Quarterly Newsletter is published by ACS and contains articles and information pertaining to its members. Views of contributors do not necessarily reflect those of the ACS. We encourage you to submit articles, letters, news items or photos to the editor for consideration.

2002 Members of the Newsletter Committee are: Kate Sander, Annie Esser, Patrick Geoghegan, Lynne Devereaux.

On Tuesday, September 11, the world changed around us. We, the committee, and the ACS board and officers, send our thoughts and prayers and good wishes to all of you — not as afterthoughts but constant ones. Be safe and be in touch.

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From the President...

Moving Forward



It is hard to believe that another year has flown by, but here we are and it's 2002. Our cheesemakers are looking to the future and setting new standards by which American made cheeses will be judged. The ACS has a lot on its plate, and the board is ready and committed to launch the ACS to the next level so that we can be of more benefit to our cheesemakers.

In my conversations with quite a few cheesemakers over the past few months, one topic keeps coming up — "new cheeses." Over the past few years we all have seen the interest in cheese increase. More cheese is being consumed, consumers are looking for better quality cheese and restaurants and retailers are not just looking for new cheeses but higher quality products to offer to their customers. Cheesemakers I have spoken with seem to put on their research and development hats and give the industry what they are clamoring for — great quality cheeses, whether that means developing new ones or refining some existing ones with different ripening techniques or experimenting with different cultures. To walk through a retail store and see the breadth of products being sold and the focus being placed on American-made cheeses is really exciting. The current evolutionary period of our industry is amazing; more and more people are interested in not just producing cheese but looking to raise the bar and produce cheeses of the highest quality. They realize that this will set them apart and create a niche in which they can grow their business and flourish within an industry that demands passion and craftsmanship.

The board met in Louisville in January to create a new "policy governance" system that will enable it to be proactive and not reactive. This will lay the groundwork to move the ACS onward and upward. Clearly, in order for the ACS to grow, an improved system is necessary. Policy governance will create accountability, and a volunteer organization needs to have its board made accountable in order for the organization to successfully achieve its goals. The board is committed and ready to do this, and we are all excited to set the foundation for a better ACS.

In January, the ACS also participated in the Winter NASFT show with what has turned out to be the start of an ACS pavilion. The ACS had two booths available for our participating cheesemakers to display and sample their cheeses. Some of our participating cheesemakers agreed to move their booths at the NASFT so they could be adjacent to ours, so there were five booths in a row all featuring ACS cheesemakers' cheeses. In 2001, both New York and San Francisco's NASFT shows were a great success for the ACS booths. There was such a buzz on the show floor about our booth, at times people were five deep trying to see and taste ACS cheeses. I would encourage any of our members who have not participated in our NASFT booths to do so in the future as this is an excellent way to get your cheeses seen and tasted at a fraction of what it would cost you to do the show on your own. I also would encourage any members that have their own booths to move them so that they are adjacent to the ACS booth. To be able to realize the goal of creating an ACS Pavilion at these shows would be incredible for the ACS.

Our Cheese of Choice Coalition is moving forward and taking great strides in order to put together a symposium in order to address the issues surrounding pasteurization vs. raw milk so that we will have the right to choose what types of cheeses we eat.

All I can say about this year's conference is that it is going to be the best yet! Cathy Strange is working hard to pull it all together and we are all behind her. This is the first year in which so much of the planning has been done well in advance with the support of past conference chairs. Judy Schad and I visited with Cathy in D.C. along with Jodie Wische who did the festival last year. We toured the Capitol Hilton, and the venue will be perfect for our needs. More info on the conference is forthcoming soon.

I want to take a moment to thank Barry King and FSA for the great job they are doing for ACS. We are looking forward to working with Barry and FSA to help take us to the next level.

In closing, I want to personally wish everyone a prosperous 2002.

Best to all, Bill McKenna

We Need Your Input to Make this Newsletter a Useful Tool for Everyone

The newsletter welcomes your thoughts, suggestions, articles, ads and calendar events. If you are interested in contributing, please contact: Judy Schad, 812-923-9408 (phone & fax) or e-mail judygoat@aol.com. While each issue has a focus, we invite other timely and pertinent information. The features for 2002 focus on American traditional cheeses.

The newsletter is now actively soliciting black and white ads.

- \$425 full page
- \$225 1/2 page
- \$130 1/4 page (about 3-1/2" x 5")
- \$90 1/6 page (about 2-5/16" x 5")
- \$45 about 2-5/16" x 2 "
- \$30 classified (35 characters or less)

For inquiries about ads, including specs, rates, and discounts for consecutive ads:

Barry King

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Payment can be made via check, MasterCard or Visa to The American Cheese Society at the address above.

In future issues, your contributions may be edited. We welcome information pertinent to cheesemaking, cheese education or new cheeses; however, we will use editorial discretion to define what may be more appropriate for ad copy and will advise contributors if we feel it should appear in ad form and be accompanied by payment.

Upcoming Issues & Topics

• 2ND QUARTER 2002

Washed rinds of Wisconsin.

Contact for this issue is through Patrick Geoghegan. This issue will contain the pre-conference program and registration.
E-mail: pgeoghegan@WMMB.org.

March 1, 2002: Deadline for all articles, photos, ads and information.

• 3RD QUARTER 2002

Cheeses of Virginia

What could be more timely for the ACS Conference in Washington, D.C.

June 1, 2002: Deadline for all articles, photos, ads and information.

• 4TH QUARTER 2002

Vermont Cheddar, and post conference report

August 1, 2002: Deadline for all articles, photos, ads and information.



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From the Editor...

The Sum of the Parts Are Greater Than the Whole

A very Happy New Year! And a watermark year for American cheese it's been, with the promises of even better ones to come! We have all in the past year had a wake-up call, and found how much we rely on each other. Now its time to enter the new year with lessons learned in the old one.

Planning the 2001 conference this past year was an eye-opener for me. Because I exist here on the little circle of our farm — pasture to animal to milk to cheese, an entity unto ourselves — it's so easy to forget there is a substantial network of mutual support outside myself and my concerns — who did not show up for work, why my aging room is too cold, etc., etc., etc. The conference made me look at the individual parts of ACS and how these pieces interact: cheesemakers — from the tiniest to the largest; retailers — independents to national chains; distributors and brokers; marketing boards; media; consumer groups; and other organizations that share our goals. I have a new mental geography of sorts, a physical map made up of distinct pieces and colors that overlap to make a design of common needs and goals.

Within a single week over the holidays, I heard several comments about the ACS that made me wonder if as individual members, we don't need to frequently remind ourselves more of our commonality rather than our differences, and at the same time assume more responsibility for making an individual contribution. During that week, I heard that: ACS concentrates too much on large cheesemakers; ACS concentrates too much on small cheesemakers; ACS conference programs were too critical of the distributor and distribution system; ACS conference programs were too critical of retailers; and ACS programs were not critical enough of retail and distribution!

This tells me that it's not as much about ACS failing its membership as it is about individual members taking the responsibility of defining their own roles and making a difference. One of the many messages of 9/11 is how what happens to one of us, affects us all.

So, while the first part of my resolution for the new year is to concentrate on making my own farm work, the second part is to see it work in a much larger context. I need this organization. It is the only one that speaks directly to my particular concerns. I think of myself a part of it every-day. This awareness and responsibility of and to a larger whole, also gives me an opportunity to better understand the needs and concerns of my customers in my own business. And the support that I feel around me is palpable; there is both a practical and emotional security in being a cog rather than the entire wheel. I can resign as master of the universe.

The ACS board has just had a very intense two days

in Louisville on the policy governance process — defining the role of our management company, our committees and the board, and how we can better serve and be responsible to our entire membership, and our "moral ownership," the cheesemaker. How can you make ACS work for you?

- Make it your responsibility to learn what ACS is all about.
- Define what you personally can contribute.
- Take a piece in the coming year of the larger whole. I'm on the board and get what I want about 50 percent of the time, so if at first you don't succeed...etc.

This is not just about doing something for ACS but for yourself.

Keep in touch! Judy Schad, Editor

Slow Food International Cheese '01

By Jeff Roberts, Co-chair, Artisan Cheeses of America

Between Sept. 21–24, 2001, 85 artisan cheeses made by 52 producers (44 ACS members) from 17 states represented the United States in the world's largest cheese show, organized by Slow Food International. "Cheese '01" presented the largest grouping of American artisan cheeses ever displayed in Europe.

How would we describe Artisan Cheeses of America at Cheese 2001 in Bra, Italy? Awesome, touching, lots of hard work and immensely rewarding. The Sept. 11 attacks almost took the wind out of our sails. Gregory McClarren (Slow Food High Desert Oregon and co-chair of the event), Patrick Martins (president, Slow Food USA), and I debated about whether we should participate, talked with both cheesemakers and Slow Food folks around the country, and received further information from the U.S. Embassy in Rome. In the end, we decided the best way to honor America was to go forward.

After making the decision on Wednesday the 12th, little did we know what the next 12 days would entail. In addition to riding an emotional rollercoaster, we found ourselves confronting unimaginable logistical challenges that literally changed from minute to minute. For example: What happened to the cheeses shipped on Monday the 10th (most arrived in Boston the

next morning!)? Would any planes fly? When they did fly, could we get cargo aboard? How much would all this cost us? Would we be in any danger? Could everyone get to Italy if they still wanted to go? Would Logan Airport re-open in time to ship all the cheese to Milan?

We made it with all of our goods intact, albeit after paying a lot literally and figura-

And for the next three days, we ran, laughed, cursed (well I did when a wheel of cheese fell on my foot), sweated and celebrated until Monday when people were still arriving at 6 PM even though we were out of cheese (1,000 pounds mind you).

tively to get everything there on time. At 10 PM, Thursday, Sept. 20, 1,000 pounds of American cheese arrived at the warehouse in Bra (so too all the dry goods – posters, catalogs, handtowels – and the display). Unbelievable – the 85 cheeses made it intact and in great shape! Cripes, the beer, wine and cider arrived three hours before the first American workshop on Friday!

By noon on Friday, we were ready to go at the Mercato stand. But the afternoon was very quiet and I wondered what would we do with all the cheese if nobody arrived? We left the stand around 4 PM

to attend the opening ceremony in the Piazza Caduti per la Libertà, site of the town hall. Imagine for a moment, a beautiful town square dominated at one end by a huge church with the town hall next to it. The cobblestone-paved square slopes down from the church, almost like a natural amphitheater. At the base was a raised platform with six to eight chairs — yikes, were we about to hear that many speeches about cheese? Yes indeed, speeches about cheese from the mayor, regional officials, Giovanni Alemanno, the Italian Minister of Agriculture, and Carlo Petrini, founder and president of Slow Food International.

As the ceremony began, Sindaco (Mayor) Francesco Guida acknowledged representatives from Switzerland, France, Ireland and Japan. Then he turned to us and, clapping his hands in appreciation extended a special warm welcome to us and asked us to stand. The entire crowd, nearly 1,000 people, arose and applauded for nearly 30 seconds. We were in tears of pain, of joy, of feeling connected. And it was just the beginning of four days of intense work and sharing.

Upon returning to the Mercato, we met a totally different scene. A huge crowd surrounded the booth, totally overwhelming the three people behind it, who were furiously dashing about as they made

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Dry Jack is the Flagship Cheese at Vella Cheese

By Kate Sander,
Cheese Market News

Ignazio Vella, owner of Vella Cheese, grew up at the cheese vat, learning his father's trade.

Tom Vella, Ig's father, started the company with fellow cheesemaker Celso Viviani in 1931 when Ig was a small boy. Eventually, the two cheesemakers amicably took different paths and operated their own cheese companies. After moving cheese production to a different facility, today Vella Cheese is headquartered right back where the two cheesemakers first got started in 1931 — a stone building in Sonoma, Calif.

In its latest stint at its present factory, Vella Cheese has operated there since 1969. While Ig says that though the cheese company isn't a tourist magnet, it was tourists who discovered the building and its unique atmosphere and the company's wheels of fresh and dry Jack

a Scot named David Jacks, whose name it carries today.

The company has been making Jack cheeses from its early days, including its Dry Jack, one of the cheeses for which the company is best known. Vella Cheese is one of only two companies he knows of making Dry Jack today, says Vella, noting that once upon a time there were 60 plants that made

the cheese. By the time the Korean War was over, though, there were only six, and the number has since dwindled further due to apparent lack of interest, Vella says.

For Vella Cheese, though, Dry Jack is considered a flagship cheese. When Vella — who also was involved in

other career aspirations including serving in the Korean War and 16 years in local politics before coming full circle and back to the cheese business — assumed the operation of the company from his father in 1982, he



Ig Vella

continued to make the cheese and give it increased attention while other cheesemakers ignored it.

"I felt there was a niche that could be filled," he says. "It became our flagship cheese because no one was paying any attention to it."

His father was making 12,000 wheels of the cheese a year and Vella has bumped production to 60,000 wheels.

Since providing the cheese with increased attention, Vella, who has no formal training as a cheesemaker but who gained all of his experience hands on, has developed a loyal following for the cheese, even though early on, "a lot of people didn't even know what it was back East." The

Vella Cheese is one of only two companies making Dry Jack today, says Vella, noting that once upon a time there were 60 plants that made the cheese.

cheese. As the tourists went home, they spread the word about the marvelous "new cheese" they had tasted. It was pale and creamy, with a delicate flavor. It was the cheese created during the Gold Rush in Monterey by

cheese also has won numerous awards including the California State Fair Best of Show and Best of Class at the World Championship Cheese Contest.

But to keep the following he has developed, Vella has strict parameters for the cheese.

"If handled correctly, it will rival Parmesano," he says.

Through trial and error — literally sampling the cheese and taking notes on it — Vella has found that the cheese must be aged seven months in order to be of the best quality. Somewhere between four and six months of aging, the cheese briefly takes on a soapy flavor, something, of course, the company wants to avoid consumers getting ahold of.

Some cheese is aged longer than the seven months — and a bit is even sold at the ripe old age of four years!

The cheese has become popular and has attracted a lot of attention — particularly as consumer interest in specialty cheese has grown in recent years. Vella, who at age 73 is making cheese at a time in life when many people have retired, also has attracted a great deal of attention among food writers. He is quick to deflect the attention from himself, though, and focus it on his cheese.

"We make a very good fresh Jack, too," he says.

The company also makes Mezzo Secco, a combination of a dry and regular Monterey

Jack. The cheese, which Vella reintroduced a few years ago, hadn't been made since the late 1930s and has met with rousing interest from specialty stores and upscale restaurants.

"We're having trouble keeping up with demand. We've increased production of it. It has done really, really well," he says.

The company also has recently revived Romanello, a cheese made in hoops in Northern California several decades ago. The cheese can either be eaten young as a fresh cheese or dried and used for commercial grating. In addition, the company makes Cheddar and Italian cheeses. Vella's only made one batch so far, though, as he doesn't want to push things too far and he already has his hands full filling other orders.

"You can only make so much out of a small plant," he says. "You can't force it."

Vella also is involved in other cheesemaking enterprises as well. In addition to Vella Cheese, Vella now owns Rogue River Valley Creamery in Central Point, Ore. His father had owned several plants at one point during his career and



still owned the Rogue River plant when he died in 1998. After his father died, Vella purchased the blue cheese plant from the estate and has been working ever since to refurbish the plant and bring it back to its heyday when it was well known for its "Oregon Blue." Interest is growing in the cheese, he says.

But success isn't always easy to come by. For example, Vella's Toma ala Piemonte, a soft-ripened cow's milk cheese, hasn't generated the interest Vella expected. It's not that it isn't good, he says, but that other cheeses have received more attention. Regardless, he says, it is all hard work.

Though Vella and his cheese have been profiled in countless books and periodicals, he takes exception to the romantic nature surrounding specialty cheese today. It's not an easy business, he says.

"This should not be romanticized," he says. "This is W-O-R-K, physical W-O-R-K." 🐄



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Wilmington, Mass.

Sid Wainer & Son
New Bedford, Mass.

Straus Family Creamery
Marshall, Calif.

Swiss American, Inc.
St. Louis, Mo.

The Pasta Shop
Oakland, Calif.

The Perfect Pantry
Oakland, Calif.

The Smoke House Market
Chesterfield, Mo.

Tinn's Cheeses
Corunna, Mich.

Vermont Butter and Cheese
Websterville, Vt.

World of Cheese
Scotts Valley, Calif.

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little plates of small tastes for people to try. And for the next three days, we ran, laughed, cursed (well I did when a wheel of cheese fell on my foot), sweated and celebrated until Monday when people were still arriving at 6 PM even though we were out of cheese (1000 pounds mind you).

Slow Food organizers estimate 130,000 people attended the four-day event! The number just boggles my mind — 130,000 people for cheese. Officials said our stand was by far the most popular. America's artisan cheeses received smiles, pleased looks and comments like, "pretty good cheese from America" from an Englishman and, "how can I get this for my store in Palermo," from a Sicilian deli owner. Several business owners wanted more information about importing cheeses, and the Comune of Castegnato invited us to participate in its cheese festival next year.

We couldn't have done this without two dozen Americans and a few Italians who rolled up their sleeves and worked hard (the Mercato opened at 10 AM and closed at 11 PM). We laughed and cried at the funny and compassionate moments, like how much bread we went through and espresso (the orders went from singles to doubles). Gregory and Jeff discovered a new diet — lots of espresso and for lunch, anchovy sandwiches made by Saro Di Liberto, Patrick's father-in-law. It was insanity as we almost shoveled cheese to people as they stood patiently, sometimes six to eight people deep, while we prepared their tasting plate. Sometimes I felt as if we took this wonderful "slow" food event and gave it a "fast food"

twist! Oh yes, the Italians assigned a plainclothes security team to ensure our safety.

The four sold-out workshops were positively received. We told stories about America's artisan food heritage, the people who make cheese and their commitment to land, animals, sustainable agriculture and local communities. The workshops were cathartic as they allowed us to connect in spite of hardship and to tell stories. New Yorkers Rob Kauffelt, owner of Murray's Cheese Shop, and Peter Kindel of Artisanal Restaurant gave wonderful presentations in their three sessions. Garrett Oliver of the Brooklyn Brewery, Ben Watson, author of *Cider Hard and Sweet*, and Luca Currado, owner of Vietti Vineyards, Castiglione Falletto, Italy, provided the beverage counterpoints. In the "Old World, New World" session, I took over the presentation task with Garrett. We compared American artisan cheese and beers to their French counterparts and celebrated historic traditions and new interpretations.

Many people contributed to the success of the event. We acknowledge generous sponsorship from: Bandon Cheese-Bandon Coast Foods, Inc.; Cabot Creamery; California Milk Advisory Board; Capriole Inc.; Crystal Food Import Corporation; Grafton Village Cheese Company; The Great Cheeses of New England; Vermont Butter & Cheese Company; Vermont Cheese Council; the Vermont Dairy Promotion Council; and generous contributions from Slow Food USA members and many of the 65 convivia around the country. We appreciate deeply the support from cheese producers and the U.S. Embassy staff in

Rome (several of whom worked the Mercato stand), and the American ex-pats working with Slow Food International.

A special salute and thanks to Karen and Chuck Evans (Rollingstone Chèvre, Idaho), Caitlin and Brad Hunter and their daughter Fiona (Appleton Creamery, Maine), and Liz and Tom Parnell (Fromagerie Belle Chèvre, Alabama), cheese producers who not only donated product but still came and joined the American team.

Thanks to the sale of cheese tastings and donations made by visitors, Slow Food USA raised over \$2,000 for the New York Police and Firemen Widow's and Children's Benefit Fund. We thank the staff from Pasticceria Cavour, where we recharged our batteries with great espresso, who dug into their pockets and gave 100,000 Lire. We thank the school children of the Barolo hilltown of La Morra (a few hundred people) who contributed 50,000 Lire.

Perhaps the enduring memory belongs to Gregory. He will forever remember a pair of young boys, age 12 or so, who walked up to the stand on Friday within a few minutes of opening. They thrust two 10,000 Lire (\$5 each) banknotes into his hand and said "niente, per New York City" (no tastes, only for New York). Mind you these were not isolated incidents; they happened every few minutes with each of the two dozen Americans who staffed the stand. They occurred from opening gong to closing sigh!

Grazie mille Americanos e Italianos!

For further information, please call Jeff Roberts at 802-223-0248 or e-mail cowcreek@attglobal.net.

NEW!

The ACS is starting a new series, and each newsletter will feature an insert such as this one, focusing on a specific cheese. Remove these from the newsletters and keep them on file for reference!

DESCRIPTION

Classification:	Hard Aged
Appearance:	Dense, light yellow cheese with characteristic dark brown rind
Flavor:	Full flavored with a slight bite and sweet, nutty qualities. Flavor becomes deeper, more pungent with age.
Age:	Typically 6 months to 2 years. Also available at 2–4 years.
Size:	8-lb. wheels
Moisture Content:	Not more than 34%
Fat Content:	Not less than 50%

ORIGIN/HERITAGE

This aged variation of Monterey Jack is a whole milk cheese first produced by cheese wholesalers in San Francisco during World War I as a substitute for the Italian grating cheeses unavailable during the war. Dry Jack quickly became popular and found a market across the country. Today, it is considered one of the great original American cheeses and a signature cheese of California's specialty cheese industry. In the early part of this century as many as 60 California cheese makers produced this cheese. Today, only a few California cheesemakers continue to offer it.

PRODUCTION

Today's Dry Jack producers use a process essentially unchanged from that used in the 1920s. Production of Dry Jack is very similar to that of Monterey Jack through the stage when the cheese is pressed.

The milk is pasteurized and then placed in vat where starter is added and then the milk is heated to 88°F. Chymosin (Rennin) is added to coagulate the milk. (An early step, no longer followed, is to cover the vat with canvas or cloth at this point.) When the curd has set properly, it is cut by hand and then stirred and the temperature is gradually increased to reach 102–104°F. The whey is then drained and rinsed and the temperature of the curd is reduced to 86°F. The curd is then salted.

Dry Jack producers continue the hand-rolled method of making Jack that has been used by California cheesemakers for generations. Salted curds are scooped into 3-foot squares of muslin that are gathered and rolled against the

Dry Monterey Jack



side of the vat. This shapes the curds into a ball and removes the whey. The balls are then tied with a string and stacked under pressure overnight. The pressure forces the knotted string into the cheese giving the bottom of the wheel an indentation — or “navel” — that is a characteristic of handmade Monterey Jack. It is at this stage that the make process changes for Dry Jack compared with Monterey Jack.

Dry Jack wheels are floated in a brine solution for several days — a step not used for Monterey Jack. This adds additional salt to the cheese and also creates a thin rind. The cheese is then air dried for a period ranging from several weeks to a couple of months. Dry Jack is then hand-rubbed with a unique mixture of unsweetened cocoa power, pepper and oil that gives the wheel its characteristic dark brown rind. The cheese is regularly turned during aging and the coating is reapplied periodically.

USES

Dry Jack is one of those rare cheeses that are as impressive in the kitchen as they are on the table. Chefs prize it both for its excellent melting properties and for its ability to “finish” a dish. Chefs also appreciate its long shelf-life and that it does not have an overly salty flavor. The more aged versions can be shaved or grated for sauces, salads or as a garnish on pastas, soups and stews. Dry Jack also is an excellent table cheese that can be used for snacking or light meals, such as with cured meats, fruit and bread. It also has been increasingly appearing in restaurant cheese courses where its nutty sweetness provides a good bridge between the creamier soft-ripened cheeses and much sharper aged cheeses.

Dry Jack – A Versatile And Distinctive Cheese

From a retailer's perspective, Dry Jack is considered the classic American cheese from California and should be a staple in the cheese case. Many customers know it and ask for it by name. It serves as a grating cheese and alternative to Reggiano, as well as the perfect addition to a cheese plate since it is aged and hard, but not too pungent. It serves as a good bridge between milder cheeses and even more pungent aged cheeses. It also has good shelf life and is easy to cut. Some stores carry both the six to nine months aged and an older 1- to 2-year version.

When Dry Jack is ready to be shipped to market, it is packed in cryovac and can remain there indefinitely. It

won't significantly age further in the cryovac, but the flavor and texture will remain excellent. Optimally, the cheese should be stored at 50 degrees and turned regularly if kept for any period of time. Once cut, only the cut surfaces should be covered to deter mold from forming on the paste. Handling Dry Jack for most retailers is easy since it requires little fussing.

Occasionally the rind will develop a light green mold which cheesemaker Ig Vella says comes from the unsweetened cocoa used to coat the rind. The mold is easily removed with a little water or vegetable oil and a soft brush. Retailers who cut and wrap the cheese in advance often find that a 4-ounce piece sells best.

Dry Jack Cooking Suggestions

California chefs have long appreciated Dry Jack's versatility and distinctive flavor. Younger versions (6–12 months) have a slight bite balanced with a sweet, nutty flavor. As it ages, the cheese becomes more pungent and the nutty quality also develops and becomes richer. Chefs also appreciate the fact that Dry Jack has only a mild saltiness that enhances the flavors of other ingredients.

Dry Jack melts well and is an excellent way to finish dishes, such as sauces and cooked dishes like risotto. More aged versions grate well and can be used in everything from salads to casseroles.

Dry Jack is a cheese that easily makes its way from bar menus through first courses and salads, pastas and main dishes, fruit fillings and flaky pastries. Many chefs opt for truly aged Dry Jack (upwards of two years or more) for their cheese course.

Here are some ideas from chefs that showcase Dry Jack's versatility:

- Thinly shaved Dry Jack layered with crisp-fried root vegetable shavings, piled haystack-style. Chef Bill Briwa, CIA Greystone.
- Caramelized pears stuffed with Dry Jack and sautéed onions, wrapped in phyllo. Chef Anne Kearney, Peristyle, New Orleans.
- Savory biscotti made with Dry Jack, chili pepper and pecans. Laura Werlin, author, *The New American Cheese*.
- Hearts of romaine salad with garlic croutons and shaved Dry Jack. Dan Berman, Mixx Restaurant.
- Fresh roasted red pepper and Dry Jack tapenade on sweet baguette. Sheana Davis, Sonoma specialty cheese sales.
- Dry Jack and roasted garlic sourdough bread. Sharon Ponsford, Artisan Bakers, Sonoma.

And from the Vella family archives, here is Ig Vella's favorite recipe:

Grated Dry Jack Cheese Puffs

These golden-brown puffs resemble cookies and are mouth-watering appetizers or accompaniments to soup or salad. (They also freeze well).

2½ T butter
3½ T flour
Pinch of salt
Cayenne pepper to taste
5 T grated Dry Jack
3 egg whites, stiffly beaten

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Melt the butter over medium heat and blend in the flour with a whisk. Remove the pan from the heat and blend in the salt, cayenne, and grated Dry Jack. Fold in the egg whites. Drop the batter from the tip of a small spoon onto a buttered cookie sheet, leaving one inch between spoonfuls.

Bake until toasty brown, 12–15 minutes.
Yields 15 puffs.

News & Notes

A cheesemaking trip to France is being planned by Ricki Carroll of New England Cheesemaking Supply Company with the cooperation of Ali Haidar of Alliance Pastorale. There is limited participation, so for more information contact Ricki at New England Cheesemaking Supply Company, 413-628-3808 or at www.cheesemaking.com.

Early in 2001, about a dozen cheesemakers from North Carolina and Virginia formed the Southern Cheesemakers' Guild. Three meetings were held during the year at Goat Lady Dairy, Shelton Winery and Cheese and at the ACS Conference in Louisville. The next meeting is tentatively planned for Winter 2002 at Celebrity Dairy.

The group is open to cheesemakers in any "southern" state. Plans are in the works for a website and brochure featuring member cheesemakers. Most communication takes place via an e-mail discussion group. Members who don't have computers are notified by letter or phone. To be on the mailing list or be part of the e-mail discussion group, please contact Karen Mickler at Yellow Branch Farm, phone 828-479-6710 or send e-mail to mail@yellowbranch.com.

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Perhaps it is just an irony of history that this acclaimed aged version of Jack, known mainly to true cheese lovers today, was originally far more popular than its younger cousin. A report published in 1919 by the University of California credits Dry Jack with first making Monterey Jack popular outside of the region — Monterey and then San Francisco — where it was developed. It was the Dry Jack form that introduced many Americans to this popular California cheese.

Today, the situation is reversed — most Americans know Monterey Jack and relatively few know the classic Dry Jack version, although its popularity is again on the upswing. Increasingly, Dry Jack can be found in cheese shops and specialty food stores, and even some supermarkets in many cities across the country. 🍷



California Cheese Showcased at Wine Country Event

Celebrity chef Emeril Lagasse (left) and Fetzer Vineyards' Culinary Director John Ash participated in Fetzer's fall "Fun in the Harvest Sun" festival, an event that showcased an award-winning array of 15 California cow's milk cheeses, six of them winners at the 2001 American Cheese Society competition. Nearly 600 consumers sampled California artisan and specialty cow's milk cheeses paired with Fetzer wines at educational booths throughout vineyard gardens. The event also featured food and wine pairings, barrel tastings and cooking demonstrations by Lagasse and Ash.

Photo by John Birchard

ACS has a new address!!

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Contact: Barry King

e-mail: bking@hqtrs.com

ACS Calendar

March 4-7, 2002

Washington State University's

17th Annual Cheesemaking Short Course

Pullman, Wash. For information, call Marc Bates at 509-595-8652 or e-mail at cheeseguy@pullman.com.

March 5-7, 2002

Utah State University/Western Dairy Center

Cheesemaking Short Course

Logan, UT. For information, call Carl Brothersen at 435-797-8700 or e-mail at WCD-PRT@cc.usu.edu.

April 23-25, 2002

International Cheese Technology Exposition

Co-sponsored by Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association and Wisconsin Center for Dairy Research. Alliant Energy Center, Madison, Wis. For information, call 608-255-2027.

August 1-3, 2002

19th Annual American Cheese Society Conference

Capitol Hill Hilton, Washington, D.C.
Cathy Strange, Conference Chair: 707-527-7367 or e-mail: cathy.strange@wholefood.com.
Contact Cathy with conference suggestions.