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Renaissance of a Cheesemaker

By Liz Campbell

What do you do when you're a successful cheesemaker and your landlord raises the rent? You set out to find new premises, of course. So you approach the bank for a loan to set yourself up.

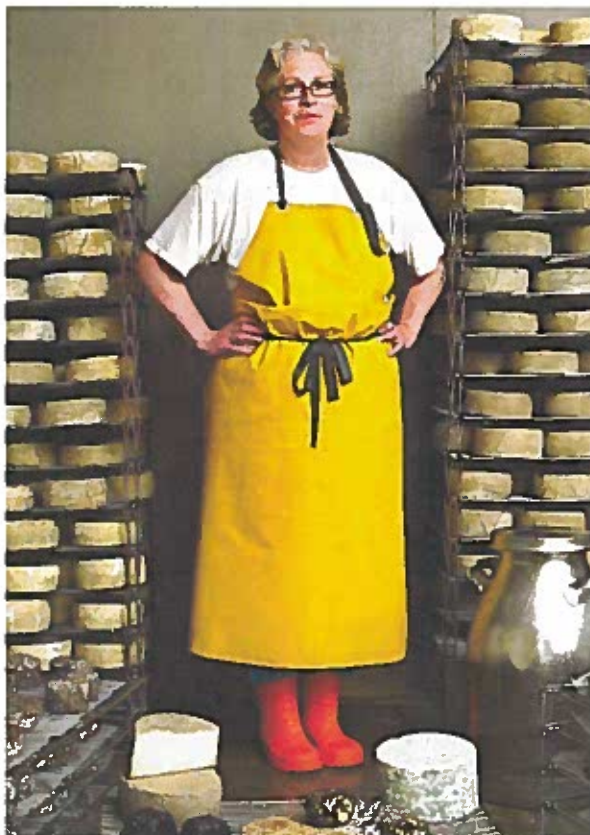
But alas! You find that despite sales of almost one million dollars the previous year, the bank is unwilling to support you. Now what?

If you're an innovative thinker like Ruth Klahsen, you go to the people who have a vested interest in keeping up the supplies of your cheese. The owner and lead cheesemaker at Monforte Cheese in Millbank, Ontario, Canada, went to her customers, many of whom are leading chefs.

She offered them a unique deal. Give her \$500 or \$1000 now and in return, they would get \$750 or \$1500 in cheese over the next five years. The result? There's already \$165,000 in the bank and more coming in daily. "And guess what," laughs Ruth. "Now the bank is interested in talking to me!"

What's more exciting is watching the swell of a grass roots movement that didn't want to see a wonderful cheesemaker go down. "I got the idea when a friend, Mark Trealtot, who is a chicken farmer, was having a problem a few years ago," she explains. "I gave him \$500 and said, pay me back in chickens when you're up and running." When she found herself in the same predicament, she thought she would try the same approach.

But she's gone a step further. At a town hall meeting in Stratford, dozens of supporters gathered to hear her plans and cheer her on. And many who hadn't yet subscribed, joined the growing number who want to be part of the process. In Vermont, Ruth had visited the wonderful aging facility that Jasper Hill has built and the ideas really started popping. Why couldn't she build an affinage facility?



Ruth Klahsen poses with her cheeses. The innovative cheesemaker has found a unique solution to her need for financing.

Her plan is to move into a 20,000 sq. ft. building in Stratford, Ontario, adding 7000 sq. ft. of cheesemaking room onto it. It's actually cheaper to do this from scratch than to try to refurbish existing space, she explains. In Ruth's five-year plan, the 20,000 sq. ft. will ultimately become an affinage center. While she will initially be renting the space, she will have the ability to buy it in five years for \$900,000.

"We don't have the money to go completely green," she laments. "But we're trying to be as efficient as possible. We only use one liter of water per liter of milk (most use closer to ten). And we use cornstarch based containers and paper for packaging. We're looking into glass and ceramics in the future."

In Canada, milk quota is carefully monitored so Monforte applied for quota for five cow milk cheeses as well as the existing goat, sheep. To her surprise, she

got the milk for all five! And now, Ruth and her team will also be making water buffalo milk cheese. She has already picked the dairy farmers (two cow, two water buffalo, and a dozen each of sheep and goat farmers) with whom she will be working, most of whom are local Amish farmers.

Milk will be seasonal from pasture-raised animals only, with no hormones or sparging involved. "It allows the animals to live naturally and it gives both the animals and the cheesemaker a chance to rest up. And I believe there's a real demand for pastured milk cheeses," she says. "My benchmark for farmers is that they can afford piano lessons for their children." She's determined to protect sustainable farming practices and support the farmers engaged in them.

A graduate of the prestigious Stratford Chef School, Ruth acknowledges that she learned one important

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American Cheese Society

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A message from the president....

Dear Friends,

I was told once you can discover a society's soul through its food. I have certainly found this to apply when tasting American cheese. American cheese reflects the passion, innovation, quality and commitment of its producers, makers, distributors, sellers and educators. It is now that time of year when we come together to celebrate and nourish our cheese interests. We take this opportunity to gather and reunite with colleagues, friends and sample many of our favorite cheeses. It is also a time for us to critically look at our industry, systems, regulatory pressures, economic challenges and opportunities.

I personally look forward to replenishing my cheese sensory memory bank. The tasting events – including meals, breakout sessions, receptions, festival and meet-the-cheesemaker events – will be unsurpassed. This conference, its speakers, topics, tasting sessions and events will enlighten us with relevant and timely ideas and models including: HACCP templates, accounting ledgers for cheesemakers, customer service techniques, crisis management resources and much much more. In addition, there is a very exciting roster of knowledgeable and primed speakers from the Americas and abroad to address these topics. They include: Jim Hightower, radio commentator, speaker & author; Dr. Robert Strong, The Steritech Group; Ari Weinzwieg, Zingerman's Delicatessen; and Marc Druart from the USA, and Hervé Mons and Ivan Larcher from France.

The ACS annual conference is just one significant component of membership. This year also marked a substantial departure in the way our society operates. The Board of Directors made a difficult but courageous decision to no longer be conference centric but to offer benefits year around. This idea initially surfaced at the 2006 Board of Directors meeting in Burlington, VT under Allison Hooper's guidance. It was defined and put into motion by the Board by developing strategic initiatives that you, the membership, requested and suggested through surveys, town hall meetings and volunteer efforts.

Today, I am happy to write that your Board is driving ACS's vision and mission everyday of the year. Thankfully, with an experienced team of volunteers and staff creating this year's annual conference, the Board purposely expanded its primary focus from the conference to include defining and developing membership inspired initiatives, building a volunteer committee structure, renegotiating a flexible association management contract and structure, detailing budget processes including report systems, audits and most importantly, expanding benefits year around.

Through the huge volume of work and commitment from board members, ACS volunteers and staff, whose effort I greatly appreciate and honor, we have been able to accomplish and put into motion many valuable all year around benefits for the members and industry.



The following is an abbreviated list of some of their accomplishments. Executive Committee: created budget audits, flexible management contract, by-law & ballot update and a BOD review process; Public Relations Committee: created a crisis PR plan and PR alliances; Alliances Committee/Membership Services Committee: developed an affiliate membership structure, advanced cheese education & certification; Marketing & Membership Services Committee: created monthly CheeseWire e-newsletter & web community and aligned ACS graphics with mission; Special Task Volunteer Committees: researched & recommended membership medical benefit plan, Competition & Judging Committee: defined origin of milk and curd guidelines for entries; Alliances Committee: develop HACCP template & certification with industry partners; Strategic Planning Committee: continued to develop cheesemaker industry accounting ledger, tax fact sheet for industry and evaluated strategic initiatives; 2009 Conference Planning Committee: planned and implemented our annual conference addressing issues facing industry today and tomorrow including economic, environmental, regulatory, food safety and milk; 2010 Conference Committee: solidified its location and theme; and the Cheese Education Foundation Committee: further developed the ACS Foundation. I am amazed at how much everyone has been able to accomplish this year.

Cheese and everyone passionately connected to it provided the inspiration and sustenance that allowed the volunteers and board members to make so much progress on these initiatives and projects, some of which were started years ago. We look forward to sharing detailed committee reports at the annual ACS luncheon and board meeting on August 7. I also look forward to our annual town hall meeting for the direction and inspiration the participants will provide for our industry and association.

I encourage all our members to join our new ACS CheeseWire web community, including anyone unable to attend the conference this year. This conference is sure to nourish the soul of this society and its members.

This is your association.

David Gremmels

From the Desk of the Executive Director.....

Dear Members,

In my four years as Executive Director of ACS, I have fielded questions from members and prospective members about group health insurance. Does ACS provide coverage? Are there health insurance benefits that ACS can provide to its small business members?

These are questions that have been top of mind for the ACS Board of Directors, volunteer taskforce committee and staff when analyzing the value we provide members. It is critical that we provide access to top notch education for all segments of membership via our Annual Conference and forums; via platforms for networking and collaboration through our social networking site, CheeseWire; and expert evaluation of member cheeses via the Annual Judging and Competition.

These are just a few of the undertakings in our goal of becoming a 52-week-a-year association. This is why we formed a task force to find a national solution for us to gain a leveraged advantage using the size of our membership to our members' benefit.

When asked about what it is we want

from our medical insurance most of us would say an excellent selection of providers, good service and great pricing. Unfortunately, for most of us, our plans fall short in one or more areas. No longer!

What does this mean to you? For the majority of our members, it means access to more affordable healthcare along with good service and excellent national provider selection.

How do you check the program out? Members simply log onto our home page and click on member benefits and follow the link for health insurance. It will direct you from there.

Don't be surprised if they tell you that your current plan is the best for you given your situation. Remember, the goal of the program is to not only give you great new plan options but more importantly, to give you solid advice as to what best meets your unique needs.

The providers offer individual major medical plans; guaranteed issued products if you have been unable to qualify for, or can't afford, major medical coverage; and a group medical plan for small businesses of 2-to-75 employees.

Please check out the programs online beginning the week of July 27. Also, stop by the conference registration desk area to speak to a Bollinger Insurance representative who will be present all day, on **Friday, August 7**, at the Hilton Austin during our Annual Conference. Savings are at hand for many!

See you in Austin!
Marci



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American Cheese Society

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Alexandra Alznauer
San Francisco, CA

Jean Andreasen
Saint Paul, MN

John Antonelli
The Grilled Cheese Club
Austin, TX

Steve Ballard
Ballard Cheese LLC
Gooding, ID

Travis Ballard
Ballard Cheese LLC
Gooding, ID

Brady Beckman
Tony's Fine Foods
West Sacramento, CA

John Biddinger
Carr Valley Cheese Co.
LaValle, WI

Marjo Biddinger
Carr Valley Cheese Co.
LaValle, WI

Bill Boersma
Bravo Farms Cheese
Traver, CA

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Market Girl Marketing
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Jeska Brodbeck
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Fresno, CA

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Blue Marble Brands / Mt.
Vikos
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The Cheese Lady
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Alice C. Clarno
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Stop & Shop Supermarkets
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Lori Cook
Tony's Fine Foods
West Sacramento, CA

Carl Cool
Principe Foods USA
Long Beach, CA

Wayne Cullen
Cherry Glen Farm
Boys, MD

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maxim there. "Pricing has to be 30/30/30 and 10 percent is profit." The three 30 percents represent ingredients, operating costs and labor.

The spin-off from her work goes well beyond the dozen or so staff. Some 30 farmers provide her milk for which she pays above the average cost. Last year Ruth sent Doctors Without Borders a cheque for \$10,500, ten percent of her profits. The whey from her operation goes to "a wonderful local Mennonite pig farmer, David Martin, who gets \$5.50 per pound for his meat compared to the standard market rate of \$1.23," says Ruth. "It completes the circle."

And all that wonderful pork? The plan is to make charcuterie from a facility in nearby Guelph. There's already a young chef enthusiastic about doing this.

But her plans don't stop there. She's developing an apprenticeship program in cheesemaking to train future cheesemakers. "In Europe, it's a craft and we need to recognize that here as well." She's already working with Neville McNaughton to produce the curriculum.

Neville explains that the Monforte Cheesemaking Program will be taught as two 12-week periods, a year apart, and will be an applied course where students will graduate with a grade. They will be tutored in the basics of cheesemaking, learning about techniques that define each cheese category; time will be spent in the classroom and on the floor of the Monforte facility. Canadian students will be working with a Canadian cheesemaker and attend

the school during the winter months when dairies, particularly seasonal dairies, can free up their cheesemakers to attend school. The goal is to cover all the basics from sanitation to cheese grading.

"There is a shortage of cheesemakers in both Canada and the USA, and no institutional training exists similar to that proposed," says Neville. "The craft of cheesemaking taught in a controlled environment that combines both art and technology will produce functional apprentices who are of great practical value to their future employers."

Upon completion, students may seek higher specialized training from institutions such as the Vermont Institute of Artisan Cheese, Center for Dairy Research and UWRF University of Wisconsin River Falls.

Her head is spinning but Ruth tries to keep her feet firmly on the ground. She still goes to farmers' markets to sell her cheese because she likes to get the direct feedback from her customers. "They're so important because they're about relationships. It shortens the chain of distribution, something Carlo Petrini (of Slow Food) keeps advocating."

Her approach to fundraising has certainly been a novel one but she's excited about the implications for others. "A little bit of me wants to tell the banks where to go but I recognize that we need them," she laughs. "But I'm hoping we're the first of a jillion businesses that can do this and perhaps get grass roots support to build themselves."

For more information, visit the website at www.monfortedairy.com.

Cheese Wire

Online social networking is a hot topic worldwide. And now ACS members and cheese enthusiasts have a site of their own!

As part of an ongoing effort to increase member dialogue and community-building throughout the year, ACS has launched a new online Social Network - CheeseWire. <http://cheesewire.cheesesociety.org>

The vision is that this site will provide a robust forum for sharing information as well as a job board, photo sharing, event postings, articles by – and live chat with – industry experts and exposure to the best blogs in the industry.



CheeseWire is the official network of the American Cheese Society and the best place for you to post your questions, join a group (or create your own!) and network with other ACS members and enthusiasts.

If you have any questions, please contact acs@hqtrs.com. Otherwise, we will see you at <http://cheesewire.cheesesociety.org>!

MEMBER NEWS

After 16 years in its historic creamery, **Laura Chenel's Chèvre** has announced plans to build a new 30,000 sq ft Sonoma Valley creamery. The new facility, scheduled to begin operation by early 2011, will allow the company to add new artisan goat's milk cheeses to the existing Laura Chenel line.

Peggy Smith and Sue Conley, co-owners of **Cowgirl Creamery** and **Tomales Bay Foods** of California, have three additions to their team: **Debra Dickerson**, **Diana Solari** and **Kristin Sande**. Dickerson and Solari, founders of the Bay Area-based sales and marketing firm, 3D Cheese Company, have established themselves as knowledgeable and enthusiastic proponents of artisan and farmstead cheese. They will be concentrating on building sales for small cheesemakers at the Cowgirl Creamery shops and through

Tomales Bay Foods' wholesale accounts. Though the bulk of Sande's week will be devoted to selling cheese through Tomales Bay Foods, she will not give up her Saturday shift at her family's specialty food shop, Valley Cheese and Wine in Henderson, Nevada.

James Norton of the webzine, *The Heavy Table* featured **Faribault Dairies** of Minnesota in a webzine article laden with great pictures of the dairy and president (and enthusiastic ACS member) **Jeff Jirik**. Check it out at: <http://heavytable.com/the-cheese-caves-of-faribault/>



Jeff Jirik is featured in the webzine, *The Heavy Table*.

Fiscalini Farms' new Guascor engine is running solely on biogas generated from the dairy farm. They expect the generator to begin functioning shortly, which will put them in the electrical power business. In addition, Fiscalini's fresh mozzarella products are now available.

Cheesemakers, **Mariano Gonzalez** and **Rick Machado** are making three sizes including bocconcini, ovolini and ciliegini. Another new product, Scamorza, smoked mozzarella, is waxed after being naturally smoked over cherry wood.

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) in San Francisco has named **Mary Keehn** the Small Business Person of the Year. Since their start in 1983, the owner of **Cypress Grove Chevre** in Arcata has put American cheesemaking on the national (and international) map. The SBA award's criteria are not simply for

Cont'd on Page 9

New Members Cont'd

- John Dannerbeck**
Maytag Dairy Farms
Newton, IA
- Colin Dennison**
Evansdale Cheese
Otago,
- Gianfranco DiCarlo Jr.**
Giant Eagle, Inc.
Harmony, PA
- Joyce Doxey**
ABC Provisions
Houston, TX
- Bradford Dube**
Forever Cheese
Long Island City, NY
- Christina Dumaine**
Gardner's Market
Palmetto Bay, FL
- Helen Duran**
Dallas, TX
- Rebecca Durkin**
Brazos Valley Cheese
Waco, TX
- Jeanette Erickson**
Boat Street Pickles
Seattle, WA
- Deb Feo**
Austin, TX
- Antonio Galati**
La Panzanella, LLC
Tukwila, WA
- John Gilbert**
Ames, IA
- Steven Grandjean**
Grand Imports
Alhambra, CA
- Kathleen Haigh-Trodden**
Longfellow's Creamery LLC
Avon, ME
- William Hardman III**
Persimmon Creek Vineyards
Clayton, GA
- Beth Hawkey**
Wakefern Food Corp.
Elizabeth, NJ
- Scott Heard**
Seward Community Co-op
Minneapolis, MN
- Cheré Hedges**
Tony's Fine Foods
West Sacramento, CA
- Kert and Kerry Henning**
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For more information and Registration, please contact Sheana Davis
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Decatur, GA

Joanne Kendall
Brenham, TX

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Cherry Glen Farm
Boys, MD

Sandra Kourik
San Diego, CA

Marc Kuehl
Brazos Valley Cheese
Waco, TX

Christina LaBarba
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Dallas, TX

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Luke & McKenna
Hingham, MA

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Emily Mattson
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Portland, OR

Charles McCauley
Market on Sixth LLC
Marshfield, WI

Joel McKee
San Antonio, TX

Ana Medina
Cedar Park, TX

Erin Millford
Tastings Gourmet Mkt &
Artisanal Cheese
Annapolis, MD

Alberto Minardi
Principe Foods USA
Long Beach, CA

Adam Moskowitz
Larkin
Long Island City, NY

Megan Mulhern
Redd Restaurant
Napa, CA

Robert Nectow
Ahold USA
Assonet, MA

Kathy Obringer
Ancient Heritage Dairy
Scio, OR

Why North American Artisan Cheese?

By Liz Campbell

Carlos Yescas trained at Murray's Cheese in New York and learned cheesemaking at Corleggy Cheese in Ireland. He has been a consultant and instructor for private retailers, the government of Mexico and at Murray's. He recently spoke at the Ontario Cheese Society's annual meeting about the future of artisan cheese.

"We need to think of this very new artisan movement in North America, as similar in all three countries – Canada, the US and Mexico. We can learn so much from each other without the burden of doing things 'wrong.' There's room to expand and markets to conquer, even the European market!"

How do we educate people about American cheese? We have three things, says Yescas – uniqueness, our markets and our palates.

Uniqueness:

What makes North American cheese different?

History: The earliest settlers made cheese with little innovation at the beginning

Politics: Regulations around pasteurization and the industrialization of the food industry have meant that North American food has taken a very different direction from that of Europe

Terroir: While we don't have alpine slopes or Tuscan landscapes, we have green hills, plains and forests

Craftsmanship: North America's new cheesemakers are going back to the farm and incorporating old and new technologies in innovative ways

Marketing:

Cheese in North America needs to be commercialized in a different way than in Europe, suggests Yescas. "The reason is a lack of cheese eating culture as an everyday thing. Therefore, marketing should be both educational and commercial to increase consumption of cheese, and to educate the consumer on quality and ways of integrating cheese in a healthy diet. One of the ways marketing in North America works is by evoking European standards, but that diminishes the importance of national and local cheese. So, marketing should aim at increasing the awareness

of good Canadian, American and Mexican cheeses.

Yescas suggests the use of new quirky labels with "styles" that appeal to urbanites. And he proposes a truly North American feel to marketing, with support from our governments and food associations. Clear labels should educate and make the customer understand why artisan cheese is so good. He also suggests rich Web portals, with pictures of cows, stories, pairings (Cheesecupid.com) and smart packaging.

Finally, he recommends promoting the benefits: Artisan cheese is local and supported by Slow Food. Cheese also pushes a lot of hot buttons: sustainable farming, green operations, humane treatment with high yields, eco/gourmet tourism, transparency.

Enjoying cheese:

The wonderful taste of cheese blends well with so many different beverages and cheese is an easy, healthy meal. Cheese fits into the multiculturalism spectrum and

appeals to the cosmopolitan set.

Moving forward:

Yescas points out that the future of artisan cheese depends on everyone in the chain. "I encourage cheesemakers to submit their cheeses to international cheese competitions," says Yescas, "to partner with cheesemakers in other regions, and to think of yourselves as the avant garde of this movement."

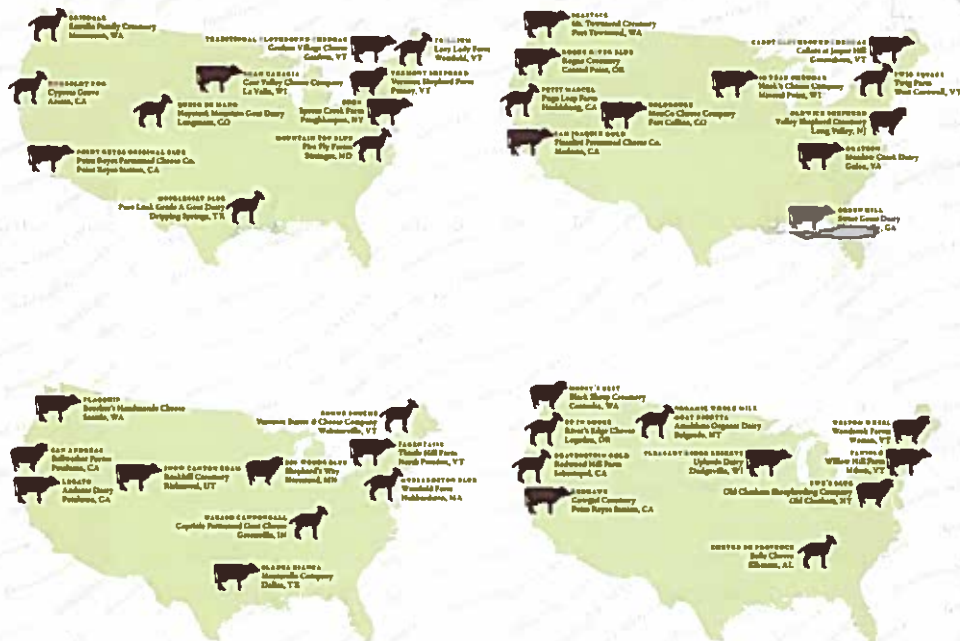
He has a message for retailers as well. "They need to think of themselves as custodians of knowledge and a craft, but also of stories of success. You are responsible for moving us to the next stage," he says. "We know that the market is out there, but cheesemakers cannot curd milk and prepare a Power Point presentation. Adopt a farmer, not just for profits, but because your profits will be better if you have a better product, commit to buy inventories – share in the risk.

There's even a message for cheese enthusiasts. "Eat more cheese, become groupies and bring cheese to the next family party. Educate yourselves and others."



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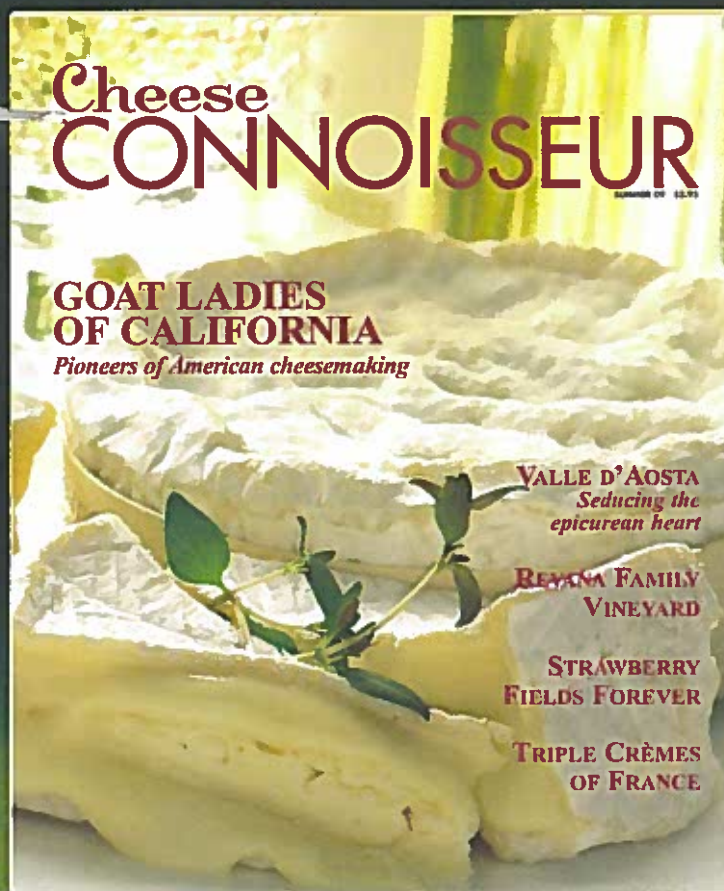
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developing an outstanding business but one that also makes a contribution to the community. Keehn has served in leadership roles in a number of industry associations and was also the first chairman of the Humboldt Harvest, an incubator group formed to help small food businesses become successful. She also serves on the President's Advisory Board of Humboldt University.

Tumalo Farms' flagship cheese, Tumalo Classico, took first place in its category and First Runner Up at the 2009 U.S. Championship Cheese Contest in Madison, WI. Tumalo Classico is the first Oregon cheese – and the first goat cheese – to garner this top award in the Wisconsin competition. Owner **Flavio DeCastilhos** is building an additional plant and aging facility on the current premises

where he will develop new, original cow's milk cheeses with organic cow's milk supplied by a neighboring dairy. The new plant and aging facility will open in summer 2009.

The **Wisconsin Center for Dairy Research** and the University of Wisconsin-Madison Food Science Department will hold an artisan short course on the production of naturally flavored cheese products September 15-17, 2009 in Madison, WI. The course will cover milk flavors, enzymes, cultures, ingredient or flavor addition, and application procedures to produce unique flavored cheeses to meet market demands. It will include sensory evaluation of unique flavored cheeses and a roundtable discussion on the future potential for natural flavored cheese products. Visit http://www.cdr.wisc.edu/courses/pdf/culture_products_09.pdf.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Alliances Committee

....has an Affiliate Member partnership with ADSA (American Dairy Science Association) allowing ACS members to join ADSA at a 50% discounted rate. We are also staying on top of the food safety bill currently before the US Congress. Much of food safety responsibilities are being transferred from the USDA to the FDA. As a result, ACS members can expect more inspections.

Conference Planning Committee

....has been working tirelessly to ensure that we host a balanced conference with top notch education including new features such as HAACP training for cheesemakers and retailers, Zing Train for retailers, a merchandising competition, three scholars-in-residence, professional PR to gain outstanding exposure for the artisanal cheese industry in the Americas, and much more. Conference registrations are tracking slightly higher than in 2008.

Scholarship Committee

The Scholarship Committee had a busy spring reviewing scholarship applications. It was a difficult task of narrowing down the seven recipients – four full and three partials. Please take some time to seek out the recipients at conference and introduce yourselves.

Sponsorship Committee

....has had a hugely successful year acquiring sponsorships from our industry. We have surpassed our goal, reached out to new sponsors and have now focused on fulfilling our sponsorship

agreements. Our goal is to provide our sponsors – those who make our annual conference possible – with outstanding customer service and benefits.

Judging/Competition Committee

....is preparing for the largest competition in ACS history. We have about 1,300 entries in the 2009 competition and are focused on the storage, judging and ensuring the overall well being of our members' entries. You can be sure they will be handled with great care. We have increased our judging teams to accommodate the large volume and have solicited some of the most expert individuals in our industry to provide detailed feedback on the cheeses.

Executive & Finance Committees

....continue to meet on a monthly basis to ensure that all board and committee endeavors and finances stay on track, and ensure that our bylaws are up-to-date and modernized. We have diversified our accounts in banking institutions to make sure they are covered by FDIC protection and have introduced controls to further protect our accounts.

Insurance Task Force

....has investigated providers who could broker health insurance as a member benefit. After months of meetings and research, the Bollinger Insurance Services Company was selected. We are pleased to announce this offering in July and plan to have a representative of the company at the annual conference on Friday, August 7.

Marketing Committee

Since publishing the ACS Consumer/Membership brochure, they have focused on ACS merchandise to be sold

at the conference: ACS t-shirts, men's and women's polo shirts, aprons and reusable aluminum water bottles and ACS window stickers for office doors and windows, retail display cases and cars.

Social Networking Committee

....launched CheeseWire, ACS's social networking site in early June. Already 158 members and eight groups are collaborating, networking and knowledge sharing daily.

PR Committee

....has been working on a crisis management plan that ACS members can use as a tool to create their own, including how to identify you are in a crisis, what to do in the first 24 hours and much more. We hope to launch to members soon after conference.

Member Services Committee

....has been busy prospecting and processing membership applications. During March, April, and May, a total of 86 new members joined ACS. Many of these joined in anticipation of the conference. We look forward to welcoming these new members at the New Member/ First Time Attendee Welcome Reception at the conference. ACS leaders will be on hand to answer questions, share ways to become actively involved in the Society and network with those in attendance.

Strategic Planning Committee

....continues to meet on a monthly basis to evaluate our performance against the strategic plan developed in 2006 and to build a strategic planning session for Fall 2009. We will be working with the board to ensure our goals are timely and hitting the mark.

NEW MEMBER

Brazos Valley Cheese

By Liz Campbell

New Members Cont'd

Susana Partida
Salute
Dallas, TX

John Pearson
Ahold USA
Assonet, MA

Judith Polan
Caldwell, WV

Douglas Powell
Atlanta, GA

Tom Purtill

The Big Cheese at Yorkshire
House LLC
New York, NY

**Annie Laurie Rester-
Thompson**
Baton Rouge, LA

Jerry Ricardo
DCI Cheese Company
Carlstadt, NJ

Kay Schmitz
Henning Cheese, Inc.
Kiel, WI

Jeff Schultz
California Wine and Cheese
Monrovia, CA

Torben Siggaard
Tholstrup Cheese USA Inc
Muskegon, MI

William Simon
Texas Cheese House
Lorena, TX

David Smith
Smith's Country Cheese, Inc.
Winchendon, MA

Cheryl Sullivan
Atalanta Corporation
Nashua, NH

Alessandra Trompeo
La Casa dei Fromaggi
Durham, NC

Robert Troyer
Bunker Hill Cheese Co., Inc.
Millersburg, OH

Ecima Trujillo
Forest Park, IL

Bill Williams
Seward Community Group
Minneapolis, MN

Sarah Zaborowski
New York, NY

Sherrie Zebrasky
Principe Foods USA
Long Beach, CA

Ask Marc Kuehl about how he got into cheesemaking, and he'll tell you his life story. And it's quite a story – drugs, alcohol, violence and jail.

In 2005, just out of jail in his hometown of Denver, Col., he went to visit his family, including 16 cousins, in Texas. They live and work on Homestead Heritage, a 510-acre homesteading community in Waco.

A restored barn, forge, grist mill and farm form the backdrop for pottery- and furniture-making, weaving, blacksmithing and other homestead crafts. The farm serves as a teaching and research facility to teach homesteading and related essential skills (www.cfeeschool.com). Although they have cars, cell phones, and other modern conveniences, they value efforts to make things slowly, by hand, and in tune with the natural environment.

Here, Marc took a job restoring old buildings and got to know his cousin, Rebecca Durkin. The little community uses the milk produced by their Brown Swiss cows, but there was always plenty left over. Rebecca hated to see the waste so she had begun to experiment with this excess to make cheese. Her brothers built her a makeshift Dutch press and an old refrigerator was used for aging the cheese. Family and friends loved her cheese but her dream, she told Marc, was to set up a proper cheesemaking facility.

Together the pair created Brazos Valley Cheese. Starting with 36 gallons of milk collected twice a week from a local farmer in four, 9-gallon containers, they began to make mozzarella, feta and other cheeses. Initially, this was sold through the deli on the site, but it wasn't long before restaurateurs in Austin and Dallas began to ask for their cheese.

Last August, they installed a 200-gallon stainless steel vat and the pair began producing cheese twice a week, 200 gallons at a time. This has steadily grown to meet the demand and is now up to 800 gallons per week.

All their cheeses are made with unpasteurized Jersey/Holstein cow's milk



Rebecca and Marc pose in front of a deli case filled with their cheeses.

and vegetable rennet. The 20 varieties include havarti (an organic blueberry flavored havarti wheel is a huge favorite), gouda, feta (marinated feta with olive oil, tomatoes, basil and garlic is a hot seller), cheddar (Marc's favorite is Mediterranean cheddar flavored with Kalamata olives, basil, oregano and dried tomatoes), Muenster, blue cheese and mozzarella.

One of their signature cheeses is Brazos Select – a brie painted with sorghum syrup (pressed in a horse-drawn press), then wrapped in mesquite bark. Once the mold has grown, it's wrapped and aged for 60 days. The syrup and bark produce "a wonderful woodsy, earthy brie," says Marc.

Most cheeses are aged for two to four months but Marc's hoping to age parmesan made with whole milk for a year.

Life is very different for the former tough guy. Marc married Rebecca's best friend and they have a new daughter. "I'm rich now though I have no money," he says. "I've found a meaning and purpose in my life."

You can meet Marc in Austin. Brazos Valley has ten cheeses entered in this year's competition and while they're hopeful, the more exciting aspect for them is going to be meeting everyone for the first time and being able to attend the sessions.

Ask Dr. Cheez

By Neville McNaughton

Not all contests are the same, the distinction between a Judging and a Contest is this.

Judging: Expect feedback from the Judges on what was good and not so good about your cheese

Contest: Expect no more than your score and placing in the contest

While it has become the norm to expect feedback on the two prominent contests that are run in the USA, the ACS and WCMA, feedback from the minor shows such as County Fairs is not so common. One other contest that focuses heavily on the feedback aspect is ADGA.

Put your best foot forward. Con-tests usually come at some expense to the participant; similarly they are not great revenue generators for the governing bodies. Typically they depend greatly on the generosity of judges who frequently pay their own expenses and receive no pay for their time other than from their employers, such as a university. (Expenses once on site are usually paid).

My point is that enthusiasm and passion are part of the judge's motivation for being there, and they appreciate effort on the part of the cheesemaker to present great cheese. So what should you send?

First, fill out the paperwork accurately, making every effort to put your cheese in the correct class. If you think there might be any ambiguity make this clear when you send in the entry forms. Many governing bodies will move a cheese to the perceived correct category if they think it better fits the class description. I have seen cheeses lose because they were entered in the wrong category.

Send a brief but clear description of the cheese. This should very simply state what it is intended to be. Do not send a paragraph; one line is adequate. It is assumed that every cheese in the competition is sold to some satisfied customer; while this is not easy to convey, it is key that the judges understand this. Each cheese should be judged against the goal the cheesemaker has set for himself.

Judge bias is a fact of life. Even the best need to remind themselves that judging is an exercise in objectivity. While the governing body can make this point prior to the commencement of judging, there is little they can do once the contest is under way.

Presentation: most judges will not see the carton or shipping container but in most contests they will see the packaging that touches the cheese. Make sure that what they see is absolutely the best you can do. Nothing less

is acceptable. Remember this judge is putting himself in the shoes of the consumer, the retailer. How is your cheese going to be perceived when it is put on display? Will it look inviting to the consumer? Presentation is powerful and while it will not win a contest, it may lose it.

Aesthetics can carry up to 50% of the points in some contests. This is not common but a reality nonetheless.

The Cheese: The cheese must stand on its merits when it comes to flavour and texture, the essence of cheese. Assume that your cheese is taking center place on the dining table of the most respected cheese lover. It must meet their every expectation.

Cheese has presence; play to this if your cheese has the finest attributes of the finest cheese – a rind. To my mind, a rind is the correct way to produce and present the best

cheese. Make sure the rind is in the correct condition and also take into account that many judges may not know what a good rind should look like. While a rindless 40# block of goat cheddar was Best of Show at the American Cheese Society contest in Chicago last year, it was unexpected. Rinded cheeses are taking many of the top honours in shows such as the WCMA contest. Rinds rule!

Flavour: There is a long history of cheese being judged for its lack of defects and this continues to be the case. What doesn't fly is: bitter, astringent, acid (except where appropriate, like Feta), sour, dirty, etc. These negative attributes should all be apparent when the cheese is being evaluated at your plant. Don't send them. If you get more than one of these in show cheese, judges tend to judge more harshly.

Texture: Textures and flavours are closely linked in the minds of Judges and rightly so. Give thought to how the flavour and texture of your cheese come together. Judges don't mind being pleasantly surprised to find a texture or flavour they did not anticipate, but finding a texture that detracts from great flavour becomes a let down. Remember that short and crumbly flavors go with aged cheeses, so don't send in young cheese with these attributes. Ammonia goes with aged and fully ripened cheeses, not with immature ones.

Put your best foot forward. Let this be the best gastronomic experience the judges have ever had.

Neville McNaughton is president of CheezSorce and a respected cheese consultant. He can be reached at neville@cheezsorce.com



Mark Johnson, senior scientist for the Wisconsin Center for Dairy Research, uses a cheese trier to sample a block of 3-year-old cheddar in the Applications Laboratory of Babcock Hall.

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