



## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Renaissance cheesemaker: faint of heart need not apply *Second in a series profiling the resurgence of America's Dairyland***

MADISON – As Wisconsin becomes home to a growing number of award-winning farmstead and artisan dairies, its cheesemakers - the rock stars of the dairy world – are taking on a more prominent role in the business side of their operations.

Today, Wisconsin cheesemakers not only craft some 600 types of signature cheeses - many cheesemakers are also undertaking much more due diligence in their business plans, stepping up to personally market their product, and also managing multiple retail operations.

“The faint of heart need not apply for the job of renaissance cheesemaker,” says Jim Gage, manager of the Dairy Business Innovation Center, an organization assisting with value-added dairy start-ups and expansions. “It’s beyond a full-time job – it’s more of a calling. The folks who take this on truly are some of the most passionate cheesemakers and business savvy people in the world.”

Just ask Sid Cook, perhaps Wisconsin’s most highly-decorated cheesemaker. Cook and his team at Carr Valley Cheese have won 150 national and international awards in the past four years for their signature artisan cheeses – including more than 20 unique American Originals.

Cook has found himself increasingly busy with marketing and managing his company’s growth. He currently manages three cheese plants in Fennimore, LaValle and Mauston, and will soon have seven – yes, seven – retail cheese stores dotting the state.

“Between 20-25 percent of our cheese sales are through our own stores and the Internet,” Cook said. “This past year, we also began offering cooking classes at our new Carr Valley Cooking School at the Sauk City store. We’ve seen great success with attracting both consumers and chefs to our cheeses.”

Start-up cheesemakers are increasingly asking successful companies such as Carr Valley Cheese better questions, and doing more market research before they launch their businesses, Gage said.

“More cheesemakers seem to understand the importance of market planning and the implementation process. They understand that if they don’t conduct due diligence, they will fail,” Gage said. “It’s encouraging to see more opportunities emerging for these entrepreneurs to learn about innovations in dairy on all aspects – technical, marketing and products.”

In the past four years, the Dairy Business Innovation Center has launched a number of business planning and support services for emerging and expanding dairy businesses, including numerous specialized training sessions and events.

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In 2006, the DBIC established the Dairy Innovators Peer Group, where cheesemakers and other dairy industry business owners gather monthly in a small-group setting to address common issues as well as offer ideas and support fellow members' goals.

Brenda Jensen, owner of Hidden Springs Creamery in Westby, Wis., has been a member of the peer group since its inception. She began making fresh sheep's milk cheeses a year ago, just opened her own farmstead plant, and recently won gold and silver medals at the U.S. Championship Cheese Contest.

"Being able to discuss common issues and help solve each other's problems in a non-competitive atmosphere has been great," Jensen said. "It's exactly what start-up cheesemakers need."

The DBIC's efforts support a host of current business and technical programs organized by its partners, including the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board, Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association and the University of Wisconsin system.

For more information or story leads about additional Wisconsin artisan cheesemakers, email Jeanne Carpenter, DBIC Communications Director, at [jeanne@wordartisanllc.com](mailto:jeanne@wordartisanllc.com) or call 608-358-7837. For more information about the DBIC, visit [www.dbicusa.org](http://www.dbicusa.org)

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