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1. More and More Women Taking the Lead in Wisconsin Artisan Cheesemaking

As more Wisconsin cheesemakers increasingly move into the arena of crafting artisan and farmstead products, a promising trend is taking shape in the Heartland: more and more women are taking the lead. Of the 1,222 currently active licensed cheesemakers in Wisconsin, less than 40, or 3 percent, are female.

In the past three years, however, that trend has spiked upward – with a half dozen women earning their licenses and opening their own farmstead cheeseries. While working as a cheesemaker is by no means new for women – historically many women made cheese in their kitchens and a handful worked in cheese factories – a definite trend is developing of more women starting their own cheesemaking operations. And instead of hiring a cheesemaker, women are taking classes and completing apprenticeships themselves.



Diana Murphy, DreamFarm

Wisconsin artisan cheesemaker pioneers such as Anne Topham of Fantome Farm, Ridgeway and Mary Falk of Lovetree Farmstead Cheese, Grantsburg, have made artisan cheeses for decades. Others, including Julie Hook, of Hook's Cheese in Mineral Point, was the first woman cheesemaker to earn the title of World Championship Cheese in 1982, while Carie Wagner was the first woman to earn the title of Master Cheesemaker in 2001. But in the past three years, more women than ever have decided to start their own artisan cheese businesses and earn cheesemaker licenses, including:

- **Diana Murphy, Dreamfarm, Cross Plains.** Murphy built her own farmstead cheese plant in 2004. She handcrafts fresh goat cheese and successfully sells out of production each year to Community Supported Agriculture groups and local chefs.
- **Brenda Jensen, Hidden Springs Creamery, Westby.** Jensen is in the process of building her own farmstead cheese plant and has been crafting fresh sheep's milk cheese since last fall. Her "Driftless" cheeses are already in demand in the Twin Cities market.
- **Marieke Penterman, Hollands Family Cheese, Thorp.** Penterman, who with her husband and family moved from the Netherlands to Wisconsin in 2003 to operate a 480-Holstein dairy farm, is now using her new cheesemakers license to craft true Dutch Gouda. The Pentermans built a farmstead cheese plant in 2005.

- **Vicky Simpkins, Shepherd's Ridge Farm, St. Croix Falls.** Simpkins is nearing completion on her own farmstead cheese plant, where she plans to craft sheep's milk cheese this spring.
- **Ethel Jensen, Terra Winds Farmstead, Mt. Horeb.** Jensen milks cows, sheep and goats at her family farm and is currently building a farmstead cheeserie, where she plans to craft artisan cheeses using blended milks.

More young women are also considering a future in cheesemaking. Kara Kasten, 22, a senior at UW-Madison with a double major in dairy science and life sciences communications, is watching the growing trend of artisan cheesemaking in Wisconsin. She decided a year ago to work for her cheesemaker's license while attending college and expects to write the cheesemaking test before the end of 2007. She says: "I'm not entirely sure where my life path is taking me, but I do know that I want to make cheese, and I want to make it in Wisconsin."

For more information on how to become a Wisconsin artisan cheesemaker, visit www.WisconsinDairyArtisan.org or call Jeanne Carpenter at 608-358-7837.

2. DBIC Team Member Monthly Message



This month we hear from **Kate Arding**, DBIC Farmhouse Cheese Specialist. Kate addresses the subject of "**Raw Milk Cheese.**"

A nice looking woman of about 30 approaches the cheese counter. "Are any of these made from raw milk?" she asks. Since the tone of her voice belies nothing, I study her face for a moment, trying to read whether she is on a quest to find raw milk cheeses or avoid them.

This is a situation that has become familiar to many cheese purveyors over the last decade. Food and health issues have become inextricably linked and thus cheese purchasing decisions are largely influenced by politics and media. To complicate matters further, it has become increasingly difficult to answer a relatively simple customer inquiry about raw milk cheese in a concise and accurate way.

In America, there are now 'raw milk cheese' producers who are pasteurizing their milk and then adding a bucket of raw milk afterwards. There are also 'raw milk cheese' producers who are heat-treating their milk. And then there are, in my view, the true raw milk cheese producers who are using entirely raw milk for their process. In other words, in some circles, the term 'raw milk cheese' is perceived as superior and has thus become a marketing tool.

In my view, there is a tremendous danger associated with over-romanticizing raw milk. I do believe that it's possible to obtain a wider spectrum of flavors within a raw milk cheese. However, over the years I have had the privilege of tasting some jaw-droppingly wonderful pasteurized cheeses - Stilton being a good example. I have also been rendered speechless by superlative raw milk cheeses. By the same token, there have been occasions upon tasting both raw and pasteurized, that they have rapidly found their way in any direction other than down my throat.

To summarize, my personal feeling is that it's impossible to categorize all raw milk cheeses as being safe and delicious, just as it would be to categorize all pasteurized cheeses as safe and delicious. There is a tremendous responsibility attached to the production of either - both in terms of food safety and flavor. This responsibility must rest with the cheese maker to control and maintain the highest quality of milk and use exemplary production methods – preferably with the implementation of HACCP plans, since this is

one of the few benchmarks available. It is only if this is consistently achieved that we can begin to prove what many people want to believe, that raw milk cheeses are healthier, have 'terroir' and hopefully the ability to render one speechless with pleasure.

3. DBIC Consumer Focus Group Gives Thumbs Up to Juustoleipa

If it seems "foodies" are familiar with all types of cheeses, Juustoleipa just may be the exception. In two recent DBIC Consumer Focus Groups held in Minneapolis in conjunction with Voltedge, Inc., a marketing communications firm, focus group participants were introduced to Juustoleipa. While not a new cheese, most of the participants knew little or nothing about this traditional Scandinavian cheese.

About five manufacturers currently produce Juustoleipa in Wisconsin and one donated samples for the groups to examine and taste. Juustoleipa's sections of the focus groups consisted of concept and taste tests. As a group, participants were very receptive to the concept and idea of Juustoleipa, and very much appreciated the serving suggestions for breakfast and appetizers. Participants were also intrigued that the cheese had the ability to be served warm and that brought about a discussion for a number of other serving possibilities, such as a vegetarian alternative for summer barbecues.



During the taste test, participants felt the cheese fulfilled its positioning and some even suggested it went beyond what they had expected upon initial introduction to the concept. The overall consensus was that part of Juustoleipa's allure was its Scandinavian background and history. While the name may be difficult to pronounce, they felt it gave homage to its roots and recommended the name should remain to reflect its Scandinavian heritage.



DBIC and Voltedge regularly conduct focus groups for clients wishing to have consumers evaluate their concepts, labels and/or products. DBIC clients can request copies of the Juustoleipa reports from their DBIC client manager.

4. Industry News

- **Two New Cheese Books to Hit Shelves:** With the increased interest in American artisan cheeses, two new books are set to hit store shelves. Paula Lambert's *Cheese, Glorious Cheese*, with 75 recipes for cheese lovers, was released this week and is available at the Mozzarella Company website: <http://www.mozzco.com/>. A new book by Jeffrey Roberts: *The Atlas of American Artisan Cheese*, highlights more than 350 of the best small-scale cheese makers in the United States. The book is due out in June, but advance orders may be placed at: <http://www.chelseagreen.com/2007/items/artisancheese>
 - **Wisconsin Leads Nation in Milk Goats:** A study released this month by the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service reports that Wisconsin is growing its dairy goat industry faster than any other state. With 33,000 milk goats, Wisconsin has the most milk goats in the nation; California and Texas are tied for second with 30,000 milk goats each. Nationwide numbers total 296,000 head, a 2 percent increase compared to last year.
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6. Upcoming Important Dates

- **February 28: Marion Street Cheese Market presents "Living on the Wedge" Film Screening. Oak Park, Ill.**

Marion Street Cheese Market invites you to a special evening in Downtown Oak Park. The Lake Theatre will host a special screening of the film "Living on the Wedge: Wisconsin's Artisan Cheesemakers". This documentary leads you on an insider's tour of award-winning cheesemakers. Meet the host of the film, Mariana Coyne, and the director of the film, Gaylon Emerzian, as they share their take on the making of this film. After the movie, chat with the cheesemakers featured in the film as they present a wonderful sampling of their hand crafted artisan cheeses. Each cheese will be paired with a select wine to compliment their distinctive tastes. Everyone who attends will take home a complimentary wine glass. All proceeds from the event go to support the Oak Park Area Arts Council. Tickets are \$40 in advance or \$45 at the door. Contact Eric Larson for more information at 708-848-2088.



- **March 12-14: U.S. Championship Cheese Contest. Milwaukee, Wis.**

The nation's oldest and largest cheese and butter competition provides the opportunity to vie for prestigious awards in more than 50 classes. Gold, silver and bronze medals go to the top finishers with certificates to fourth and fifth place entries. A Championship Round evaluates gold medal cheeses to declare a United States Champion Cheese, as well as a First and Second Runner Up. Every maker and processor of cheese or butter in the United States is eligible and encouraged to compete. The cost to enter each product is \$60. Products must be shipped to arrive no later than March 7, 2007. Fifteen cheese and butter experts will evaluate entries during the conference and winners will be honored April 19, 2007, at a gala Awards Banquet during the Wisconsin Cheese Industry Conference in La Crosse. For more information, visit <http://www.wischeesemakersassn.org/>

- **March 19: Putting Your Farm on the Menu in Wisconsin. East Troy, Wis.**

Farmers and other individuals interested in connecting farmers and chefs are invited to attend this workshop March 19 from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute in East Troy. The workshop features a panel discussion with farmers who sell products to restaurants and chefs who purchase products from local farmers. Presenters include Scott Williams from Gardens to Be, Rink DaVee from Shooting Star Farm, Sue and Tony Renger from Willow Creek Farm, Tory Miller, co-owner and chef at L'Etoile Restaurant in Madison, and Jack Kaestner, executive chef at Oconomowoc Lake Club. Following the panel discussion will be a discussion of food safety considerations as they relate to selling to restaurants. For more information, or to request a brochure, please contact Deb Deacon, Southeast Wisconsin Farm and Food Network (SWFFN) Coordinator at 262-786-3837 or email ddeacon@wi.rr.com

- **March 19-20: Creating a Vision of Greatness Seminar. Milwaukee, Wis.**

Zingerman's co-founder and CEO Ari Weinzweig will partner with the DBIC to conduct a seminar entitled "Creating a Vision of Greatness," to be held at the Pfister Hotel in downtown Milwaukee on March 19-20. This two-day seminar will help participants create/refine a vision of success and then learn how to use it as a tool to evaluate various opportunities for business growth/direction. Special reception with Lucy Saunders (author and food historian on beer), included. Registration is limited. Contact Kara Kasten at 608-224-5083.



- **April 18-19: Wisconsin Cheese Industry Conference. LaCrosse, Wis.**

More than 1,200 cheese industry leaders from around the nation will gather to gain information about the latest in cheese technology, product marketing and dairy issues affecting our industry. The show opens with a joint seminar, followed by an afternoon "Tabletop Mini Exposition" and an evening auction of Champion Cheeses. Thursday consists of a full day of seminars and closes with the United States Championship Cheese Contest Awards Banquet, open to all attendees. The conference is co-sponsored by the Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association and the Wisconsin Center for Dairy Research. For more information, visit <http://www.wischeesemakersassn.org/>

The Dairy Business Innovation Center offers technical assistance to dairy producers and processors in developing value-added dairy products, business planning and market development. For more information, visit www.dbicusa.org or contact Jeanne Carpenter, 608-358-7837.