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1. Nordic Creamery Debuts New Goat and Mixed Milk Cheeses

Award-winning Wisconsin cheesemaker Al Bekkum has launched a line of aged goat and unique mixed milk cheeses under a new brand: Nordic Creamery. Named after the Norwegian heritage of both he and his wife, Sarah, Nordic Creamery features aged goat cheddars, smoked cheddars, as well as a signature, mixed milk cheese: Capriko, a semi-hard goat's and cow's milk cheese featuring cumin and clove that Bekkum describes as "rich and full-flavored."

Bekkum crafts his Nordic Creamery cheeses in traditional small batches at Cedar Grove Cheese in Plain. The cheeses are made from hormone-free milk and are naturally aged in curing cellars. Bekkum expects his first line of Nordic Creamery varieties to be ready for the retail market in late February and has several more recipes in development.

"Al Bekkum's dedication to crafting exceptional cheese has consistently been rewarded with blue ribbons in the past, and we are proud and excited that he chose to continue his future in Wisconsin," said Dan Carter, DBIC Founder and Chairman.

"Consumer demand for American goat's milk and mixed milk cheese is only growing, and Nordic Creamery is an excellent addition to Wisconsin's line-up of high-quality specialty cheeses."

Congratulations to Nordic Creamery from the DBIC and its partners. For more information about Nordic Creamery, contact Bekkum at 608-606-2585 or email abekkum@mwt.net.



2. DBIC Team Member Monthly Message: Tom Johnson



Tom Johnson, DBIC Artisan Business & Market Strategy Analyst, advises, **“Planning a new product? Do your research first!”**

Introducing new products to the marketplace is among the most exciting and gratifying aspects of operating a cheese company. Amid the excitement, however, a critical detail is often overlooked: in order for your cheese to find a spot in the retailer's case, somebody else's product must go.

Despite the camaraderie of the cheesemaking community, it's a competitive world out there. Many cheesemakers don't take the time to candidly assess the strengths and weaknesses of their competitors' products -- or their own. Unfortunately, this is where products often succeed or fail. You can improve your chances of earning a spot in the retail case by studying the market in advance, and identifying the products you plan to out-compete.

Ideally, research should begin before your first test batches are run, but it's never too late to study the market. Begin by asking yourself the following questions:

- Is there a demand for the product I plan to produce?
- Is the market for this product already saturated?
- Who are my primary competitors?
- Can I out-compete my competitors on price, quality or some other attribute?
- Can I produce my product at a price point that customers are willing to pay?
- If I plan to charge more for my product, is my price justified by quality considerations?
- Will my product require more customer education and marketing than I can afford?

An inexpensive method for analyzing the market is to visit several stores in the regions you wish to compete, and purchase every product in the class you have targeted. Then, sit down with a group of colleagues whose opinions you trust, and evaluate each competing product on the following attributes: quality, flavor, packaging type, labeling, marketing statements, unit size, and price.

As you gather information, enter your findings into a spreadsheet to allow for meaningful comparisons. Use the data to help formulate questions about the category. Is there a correlation between quality and price? Are all the products in your class the same size and shape? Why? The information collected will help you craft a marketing strategy that will guide your product launch.

A word of caution: don't use the data to irrationally support your biases. The fact that nobody uses your distinctive packaging might not mean that your product will stand out amongst your competitors. Instead, it may mean that no one will know what your product is. Likewise, the fact that your niche is unfilled may tell you as much about potential demand as potential opportunity. (Is America really ready for yak milk yogurt?)

Honestly assessing how your product stacks up against the competition will not only help you create a realistic and effective marketing strategy -- it will help you with packaging decisions and determining a price point. In a competitive world, anything you can do to better understand your market will increase your chances of success.

3. Hidden Springs Sees Success with Ocooch Mountain Cheese

A new raw-milk, cave-aged sheep's milk cheese crafted by Brenda Jensen, of Hidden Springs Creamery, is already a popular hit with retail shops and chefs throughout the Midwest.

Ocooch Mountain Cheese, named for the Jensens' hilly terrain in western Wisconsin's Driftless area, is nearly out of stock, but Jensen expects her next set of 1- and 2-pound wheels to be ready in about 30 days. Last week, Jensen was sampling her last wheels of the washed-rind mountain-style cheese at Fromagination, an artisanal cheese shop in Madison, Wis. The past two months have been extremely busy for the Jensens, as Brenda and her husband Dean are caring for more than 300 baby lambs born already this year. The Jensens milk 140 ewes and "have lost count" of how many other sheep they raise, Brenda says with a grin. Most of her ewes have twins, with triplets and quadruplets also common.



Jensen has also created a specialty just in time for Valentine's Day – a fresh sheep's milk chocolate truffle – which consists of hand-formed balls of her natural Driftless cheese dipped in dark chocolate. The truffles will also be available on a custom-order basis year round. For more information, visit <http://www.hiddenspringscreamery.com>.

4. Industry News

- **Dairy Manufacturing Tax Credit:** The Wisconsin Department of Commerce is now accepting applications for the new Dairy Manufacturing Facility Investment Credit. Applicants need to submit a completed Commerce Prospect Data Sheet and a Department of Revenue Schedule DM. Applications are due March 31 for the first round of allocation. For more information, or to obtain a copy of the needed forms, contact Steve Sabatke, WI Dept of Commerce, 608-257-0762 or email steven.sabatke@wisconsin.gov.
 - **Wisconsin Again Leads Milk Goat Numbers:** The number of milk goat operations continues to increase in the U.S., with Wisconsin again leading the nation in total milk goat numbers, the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service reports. As of January 1, 2008, there were 33,000 milk goats in Wisconsin, unchanged from a year earlier. Wisconsin had 600 operations with milk goats last year, 50 more than in 2006, NASS figures show. Nationwide, 19,930 operations with milk goats dot the country. California is second with 30,000 milk goats and ranking third is Texas, with 25,000 head.
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5. WMMB Expands Demo Program, Increases Reimbursement

The Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board has expanded its demo support program -- increasing its reimbursement rate and the number of demos available per company. Companies with product that include the Pride Logo or Master's Mark are eligible to participate.



Demos may be conducted any time in any market. To receive up to \$60 in reimbursement per demo, as well as a demo sign and apron, companies should complete the WMMB Demo Support Program application prior to conducting demos and complete the necessary paperwork, including invoices from the demo agency or cheese company. Funds are limited, so apply now. For more information, contact Stan Woodworth, Cathy Hart or Amanda Ritchie at 800-383-9662.

6. Upcoming Important Dates

- **March 4–6: Sixth Annual Cheesemaking Opportunities & Challenges Conf. Sonoma, Calif.**
The theme of this year's conference, presented by Sheana Davis, of the Epicurean Connection, is "The Food Chain, From the Farm to the Table." Keynote speaker is Juliet Harbutt, Chairman of the British Cheese Awards, food writer, and author. Also leading sessions from Wisconsin will be Steve Ehlers of Larry's Market in Brown Deer, and Sid Cook of Carr Valley Cheese. Visit www.sheanadavis.com for registration information and a full list of guest speakers and panelists.
- **March 11: Wisconsin Grass Fed Program Pasture Talk. Lancaster, Wis.**
The third in a winter discussion series on pastures: "A Wisconsin Grass Fed Program: Are We Ready?" will be presented by Jeff Swenson, DATCP livestock marketing specialist and Laura Paine, DATCP grazing & organic specialist from 1 to 3 p.m. at the Lancaster Research Station conference room. Beef producers and others interested in this topic are invited to attend. There is no cost, but please pre-register with Rhonda Gildersleeve, Iowa County UW-Extension, at 608-935-0391, or Arin Crooks, Lancaster Research Station, at 608-723-2580 so adequate handout materials are available.
- **March 11–13: World Championship Cheese Contest. Madison, Wis.**
Cheesemakers and buttermakers from around the world are invited to compete in the 27th Biennial World Championship Cheese Contest, hosted by the Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association with assistance from dozens of industry volunteers. Since its inception in 1957, the World Championship Cheese Contest has grown rapidly and is now the largest international cheese and butter competition in the world. The most recent Contest in 2006 drew a record-breaking 1,795 entries from 18 nations. The competition is open to public viewing. Key contest dates include:
 - Entries Delivered - March 5
 - Contest Judging - March 11-13
 - Awards Banquet - April 24Download registration forms or learn more at: <http://www.wischeesemakersassn.org>

- **April 22–24: International Cheese Technology Exposition. Madison, Wis.**
The Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association and Wisconsin Center for Dairy Research will host cheese manufacturers and suppliers from across the nation and world at this biennial event. An intensive combination of morning seminars combined with two full afternoons of Expo trade show and evening events, it is the world's largest gathering devoted solely to the multi-billion dollar market for cheese and related dairy products. To learn more, visit: <http://www.wischeesemakersassn.org>
- **May 5–8: The World of Cheese from Pasture to Plate. Madison, Wis.**
This four-day short course offered at the Center for Dairy Research is for culinary professionals, end users, distributors, retailers, and marketers. The course will cover aspects of cheesemaking, cheese handling, packaging and sensory evaluation. For more information, contact Dean Sommer, 608-265-6469 or visit <http://www.cdr.wisc.edu/courses/>
- **July 15–17: Farm Technology Days. Brown County, Wis.**
Wisconsin Farm Technology Days is the state's largest outdoor agricultural show. The annual three-day event showcases the latest improvements in production agriculture, including practical applications of recent research findings and technological developments. The 2008 Show will be held at Country Aire Farms located in southern Brown County. Budd and Lone Gerrits along with their sons, Mike and Tom and their families, will host this event. For more information, visit www.wifarmtechnologydays.com.
- **July 23–26: American Cheese Society 25th Annual Conference. Chicago, Ill.**
Save these dates for the 25th annual ACS conference and a world-renowned cheese competition, which culminates in the annual the Festival of Cheese. Watch for registration and conference information at: <http://www.cheesesociety.org/index.cfm>

*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 at 608-358-7837.*
