

**In This Issue:**

1. "Taste of Place" Provides Another Tool in Differentiating Wisconsin Cheese
2. Team Column: Wisconsin's Growing Dairy Goat Industry
3. Wisconsin Cheesemaker Scholarship Applications Due March 7
4. Industry News
5. The Last Word with the DBIC's Norm Monsen: Taking Care of the Team

---

**1. "Taste of Place" Another Tool in Differentiating Wisconsin Cheese**

By David Tenenbaum, Courtesy of University of Wisconsin-Madison News  
<http://www.news.wisc.edu/18935>

The culture, geography and biology of a place give unique flavors to local food products, a concept that could help a group of small Wisconsin cheesemakers in its search to carve out a niche in the crowded marketplace for cheese. The concept of terroir, or "taste of place," could help the cheesemakers promote products from a specific region — such as the driftless region in southwestern Wisconsin, experts say.

Cheesemakers met Feb. 3 in Potosi at a seminar sponsored by the Driftless Food and Farming Project, a collaboration of the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems and Dairy Business Innovation Center.

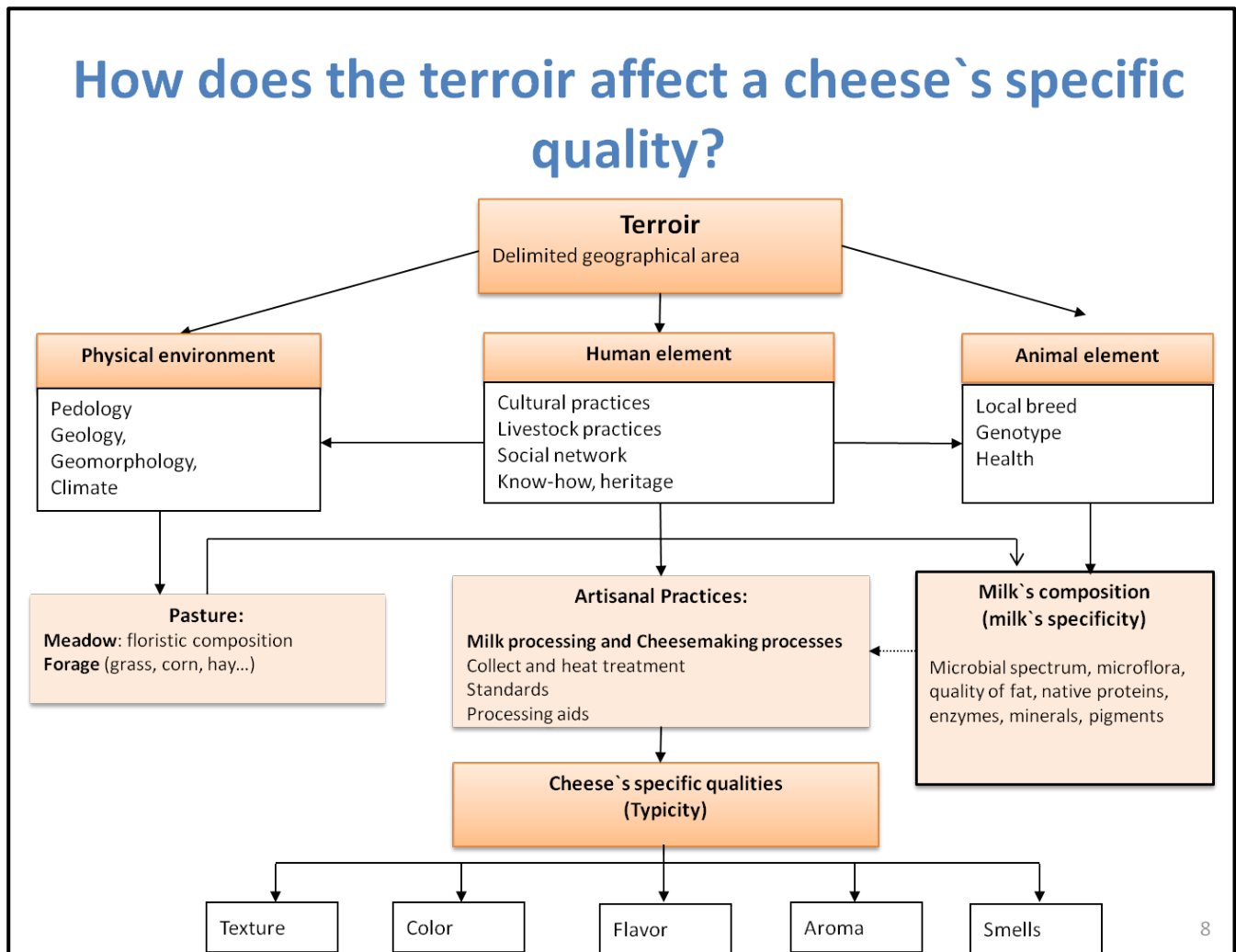
The driftless region, named for the absence of terrain-flattening glaciers during recent ice ages, reaches 57 counties in Wisconsin, Illinois, Minnesota and Iowa. With hilly terrain that is more conducive to grazing than row crops, the driftless region accounts for 70 percent of small-producer Wisconsin cheese and has other organic farms and artisanal businesses, says Michelle Miller, associate director of the Center for Integrated Agriculture Systems at UW-Madison. "The driftless is a separate bioregion, with a separate set of opportunities and challenges," she said.



Cheesemakers are central to the regional economy, Miller said. "What does this bioregion produce well, and how can it sustainably feed into the global market and provide rural income to maintain people on the land? That's the importance of cheesemakers to the region, given that the ideal crop is growing grass on hilly slopes," she said.

Soil is the origin of terroir, said Monique Jamet Hooker, a chef and writer living in western Wisconsin. "This is part of the whole phenomenon of coming back to the land, and that's what terroir is, going back to where you came from. What is the food like? What is the earth like?"

Terroir was originally applied to local French wines such as Champagne or Burgundy, which by law must come from specific regions, said Gersende Cazaux, a French graduate student doing her fieldwork through the Dairy Business Innovation Center in Madison. "Terroir is a French concept, but each country has its own values. What is done in France can't be done in other countries, and what is being done here is to adapt terroir to the concept of a 'taste of place.'"



Graph Developed by Gersende Cazaux for the Dairy Business Innovation Center, ©2011

"Taste of place" is being used in Vermont, for example, to promote maple syrup.

Via computer linkup, Ivan Larcher, a French technical consultant to cheesemakers, discussed how biology affects the taste of cheese. The identity of the dozens of types of bacteria, yeasts and molds that enter milk before and during the cheesemaking process, "is different on different farms, even if they are only one mile apart," Larcher said. "Each farm has its own spectrum ... and the dream of every cheesemaker is to develop their own spectrum of bacteria, to make a personal signature. The spectrum is

directly related to the place you live, and this is the concept of terroir, to make something different based on where you are."

"Ivan is telling us something we have known for a long time," said Chris Roelli, a fourth-generation Wisconsin cheesemaker from Roelli Cheese Haus in Shullsburg, "and it has started to gain traction in this business." Microbes from the air, water and soil all play a role, he added. "I am a firm believer that what is in the air, the water and the earth in your particular area greatly influences the flavor of cheese. The minerals in the earth are in the grass that's eaten by the cow, and we take her milk and make it into cheese, and that taste progresses from the ground to the consumer."

The discussion, at the National Brewery Museum, moved to the challenge of bringing that value to the marketplace. "It's interesting to be ahead of the consumer," said one participant. "There is a lot of education needed in the market. We are starting from scratch on a 50-year project."

But terroir offers something that consumers want, said Cazaux. "There is this shared value in the driftless region; it's about sustaining community, about grazing instead of row cropping, and when you associate the driftless name to the cheese, you are associating your product with these values."

---

## 2. Team Column: Wisconsin's Growing Dairy Goat Industry



This month, we hear from **Jeanne Meier**, DBIC Dairy Goat Specialist. Jeanne brings a stellar and varied skill set to the DBIC. With a bachelor's degree in education and a law degree from UW-Madison, she boasts a varied career that has included teaching, farming and practicing law. She served five years in the Peace Corps in Colombia and Ecuador and is fluent in Spanish. She also spent many years as the Director of the Farm Center at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, leading a team to provide services to Wisconsin farmers and agribusinesses.

Currently, Jeanne serves on the DBIC Management Team and coordinates the DBIC Dairy Goat Project. This month, she talks about **"Wisconsin's Growing Dairy Goat Industry."**

The first time I tasted goat cheese was a memorable event if only because I resolved never to eat it again. It was horrible. It was years before I touched another bite of goat cheese, and then only to be polite because a friend brought it to a picnic. The second time, it was delicious. Now, my refrigerator is never without some goat cheese in the cheese drawer.

I thought back to that first experience a couple of years ago when my then 4-year-old granddaughter pulled some goat cheese out of the refrigerator and wanted to try it. I didn't tell her it was goat cheese, but I expected her to reject it. She loved it, so I told her what it was and now she asks for goat cheese before any other kind. She is not particularly fond of chevre, preferring stronger cheeses, including blue, her favorite.

I suspect the difference between her first experience and mine can be attributed to the incredible care that today's producers and processors use in handling goat milk. While a small number of dairy goat producers have been around for more than 50 years in Wisconsin, today's industry is really only a couple of decades old. I have been in many goat barns, milk houses, and plants in the last five years and can

testify to the hard work that goes into producing quality goat milk and quality goat milk cheeses and other products.

Goat producers are such a special group of people. They generously share information and ideas with each other and with anyone else who will listen. They network more than any other group of farmers I know, in part, I would guess, because they constitute such a small group of dairy farmers when compared with the large numbers of dairy cow farmers in the state. The amazing thing is they have grown their industry almost entirely by themselves, without the vast resources available to dairy cow farmers through a century of research and education led by the University of Wisconsin. The cow milk check-off system generates millions of dollars to fund research and marketing of Wisconsin's cow milk products. If a similar system were it to be set up for dairy goat farmers, it would provide only a few thousand dollars a year, insufficient to do much to fund either research or marketing efforts.

So goat producers look for alternative ways to grow their businesses. Some have expanded their herds so that today a number of herds have 700 or more milking goats. Many strive to produce milk of high quality with high milk solids to take advantage of premiums paid by the plants. Several producers have on-farm plants and process their own milk and market it, adding value to their milk. By testing their milk and using test information to breed for higher production and higher milk solids, a number of producers have developed the reputation of producing excellent breeding stock which can be sold to add another income stream to the farm.

With more than 600 dairy goat producers in the five-state region of Wisconsin, Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, and Iowa, the Upper Midwest can boast that it constitutes the heart of dairy goat production in the United States and, while those producers struggle to deal with high feed and other input costs just like their dairy cow producers, most are optimistic about the future. Clearly, the industry is here to stay, due in no large part to the commitment and passion most producers and processors have for this tiny star in the dairy galaxy.

---

### 3. Wisconsin Cheesemaker Scholarship Applications Due March 7

Wisconsin Cheese Originals will again award a \$2,500 scholarship this year to help one aspiring cheesemaker make farmstead, artisan or specialty cheeses. Applicants must be a Wisconsin resident and be willing to pursue a Wisconsin Cheesemaker License, a complex process that can take 18 months, requires the attendance at five university courses, and 240 hours of apprenticeship with an existing Wisconsin cheesemaker.

Last year's recipient, Katie Hedrich, pictured at right, is currently working with her family to develop farmstead goat cheeses. Read about her family's journey and the difference the scholarship made in her life in this Jan. 13, 2011 [Wisconsin State Farmer article](#).



The 2011 Wisconsin Licensed Cheesemaker Scholarship application is due to Wisconsin Cheese Originals before 5 p.m. on March 7, with the recipient chosen by a review committee and notified by April 1. Learn more about the requirements of obtaining a Wisconsin Cheesemaker License, and download the scholarship application at <http://www.wisconsincheeseoriginals.com/>. Questions? Contact Jeanne Carpenter at 608-358-7837.

---

---

## 4. Industry News

- **Wisconsin Dairy Industry Gets Super Bowl Boost From ESPN**

A promotional package developed by ESPN highlighting Wisconsin's dairy industry aired Sunday during the network's Super Bowl XLV coverage. The segment chronicled the manufacturing of foam Cheeseheads in Wisconsin, visited Pagel's Ponderosa Dairy, and Krohn Dairy Store in Luxemburg, where Master Cheesemaker Roger Krohn was interviewed. An excerpt from Sunday's broadcast said: "Today, Pagel's Ponderosa Dairy is the largest family-owned dairy in Wisconsin, with 4,600 cows. Last week, 400 of them were lined up in one of John Pagel's barns, which is the length of three football fields. While the cows were munching on a home-grown mixture of corn, alfalfa, soybean and hay, vapor streamed in plumes from their nostrils, reminiscent of those terrific NFL Films shots of the Packers on the sideline at Lambeau Field."



- **Grass-Based Dairy Products and the Latest Buzz Around Butter**

A recent article in the Wisconsin Center for Dairy Research's "Dairy Pipeline" provided an in-depth look at the state's burgeoning artisan butter industry. Editor Karen Paulus says: "Butter is simply following the model of artisanal cheeses and yogurts; unique value-added products that are made on a small scale, sometimes on the farm. Read the whole story here:

[http://www.cdr.wisc.edu/newsletter/pdf/2010/pipeline\\_2010\\_vol22\\_03.pdf](http://www.cdr.wisc.edu/newsletter/pdf/2010/pipeline_2010_vol22_03.pdf)

---

## 5. The Last Word with Norm Monsen: Taking Care of the Team



After the Green Bay Packers' Super Bowl victory on Sunday, I can't help but think about what makes a good team - whether it is a sports team that overcomes challenges, a government that addresses the needs of the people, or a dairy farm or dairy plant that innovates, takes advantage of opportunity, and grows.

Certainly a team needs discipline and training. A team needs knowledge and skill. A team needs loyalty and commitment.

What else makes a team? Lessons from the Packers show that after taking care of the above (commitment, training, and discipline), a step away from the day-to-day grind can make a difference.

I remember during the Super Bowl run in the 90's, Coach Holmgren would take the whole team out for bowling, and on one occasion, even had them ride through town on Harley Davidson motorcycles. A story from this year is Coach McCarthy - the night BEFORE the big game - had the Super Bowl ring maker come in and measure players for ring size. Not standard operating procedures, but you can't argue with the results...

We also know of instances in the dairy industry where employers sprinkle in some non-standard activities and opportunities, that in the end, helps both the business and team members grow. Some of the instances we know of:

- A Wisconsin cheese plant recently installed a workout room, even bringing in a personal trainer. Next up is to add massage sessions for plant employees.
- A retail store new to Wisconsin (already established in other parts of the country) bussed in employees from an out-of-state store to staff the Wisconsin location so that all employees of that store could make the annual Christmas party.
- A Wisconsin cheese plant paid all expenses for selected staff members to attend the recent American Cheese Society annual conference - including airfare, even though many had never flown before.
- A Wisconsin dairy company requires each employee to use up to one week of paid work time to participate in a training program that has absolutely nothing to do with the business. Some employees take voice lessons, have participated in survival training, taken scuba diving lessons, etc).

So there you have it – four non-standard ways of building a team - but like the Packers these (and other) companies have found that in the end the results are good. Go Pack, and On Wisconsin!

---

*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](http://www.dbicusa.org) or contact Jeanne Carpenter at 608-358-7837, email: [jeanne@wordartisanllc.com](mailto:jeanne@wordartisanllc.com).*

**This publication is made possible through tax-supported funding from USDA, Rural Development.**



Committed to the future of rural communities.