

In This Issue:

1. Pleasant Ridge Reserve Cheese
2. Team Column: Brand Development
3. Wisconsin Cheese Originals Cheesemaking Scholarship
4. Upcoming Events
5. Babcock Hall and The Center for Dairy Research Celebrate Milestones
6. New Milk Quality Website Launched
7. World Championship Cheese Contest to be Held in March
8. The Last Word With the DBIC's Norm Monsen: Happy New Year to Dairy!

1. "Pleasant Ridge Reserve Cheese – One of Wisconsin's Best!"

Written by Ari Weinzwieg, Zingerman's Co-Founding Partner. Reprinted with permission.

Made for about a decade now at Uplands Cheese in Dodgeville (about an hour southwest of Madison), it has consistently been one of the states – and actually, the world's – best cheeses for years now. On the competitive front it's won a slew of awards. On the eating side... it truly is one of the most consistently delicious cheeses I've eaten over the last decade. It's had so much success – all well deserved I think – that it's got a bit of a thing going where... well, I heard one writer remark not long ago: "I'm sort of sick of Pleasant Ridge. It wins all those awards and it gets so much attention."

Everyone's entitled to their opinion but I'd say that's sort of like getting sick of winning the World Series, or of eating amazing chocolate, or of eating great heirloom tomatoes during their 10-week season at the end of the summer. Anyone who wants can, of course, be sick of whatever he or she wants to be sick of. (It reminds me of that oft-heard complaint about the Deli – "the line's so long no one goes there any more.") Having just retasted Pleasant Ridge a fair few times of late, I'll just say that I think it's really powerfully good cheese. I don't think I'll ever get sick of eating it! To the contrary, it's a cheese I could eat regularly for a long time to come.



Pleasant Ridge really is a special cheese on almost every level. Artisan cheese in Wisconsin is booming right now – there are great cheeses popping all over the place. That said, Uplands is pretty unique in the state. As Andy Hatch said, "We're not a typical Wisconsin cheese plant." In case you aren't from the state, that would likely mean a small, quality conscious dairy, buying milk from a series of local farms, more often than not with multi generational roots in the countryside. Uplands doesn't really fit any of that mold. Begun back in the last '90s by Mike and Carol Gingrich, they've passed the cheesemaking work on in the last couple years to Andy Hatch. Throughout, it really has been a fabulous cheese, special in pretty much every sense of the word. It's a farmstead cheese, made only from the milk of the herd at Uplands. The cheese is made – as cheese used to be 150 years ago – strictly seasonally. It's done only in the spring,

summer and autumn when the cows are out in the pasture grazing – the variety of the grasses makes for an exceptionally interesting set of flavors. The rotational grazing is also good for the soil – the pastures get a chance to replenish themselves and stay healthy.

Most cheesemakers begin their work with a particular cheese in mind. Often it's simply the cheese that's been made for centuries in their area. In the case of late 19th and early 20th century cheese plants, it was often the cheese that had been made by their parents in their homeland before they came to North America. Or, in modern times it might be the cheese that marketing experts have argued will be THE cheese trend to get on top of. Uplands, Andy explained, is a bit different. "We started with the type of milk that we had available from the herd here. And we asked ourselves, 'What type of cheese would have evolved from this sort of pasture raised animals? The answer: the cheeses of the Alps.'" In the Alps, the cows are taken up into the high mountain pastures in the summer – so much like they are at Uplands, they're on fresh pasture most of the year.

At Uplands the cows are all on the same cycle. They all calve in May. And as soon as the grass is good to go, they're out in the pastures and the cheesemaking commences. This year that was April 29. From there the cheesemaking is a seven day a week activity, that continues until the height of the summer heat puts things on hold for a few weeks. When it's too hot the cows drink so much water that the milk becomes watery and the cheese suboptimal. During those weeks, as they do during the winter, the folks at Uplands simply sell their milk off for others to use. It's still very good milk – just not what they want for making their own cheese.

It's made only from raw milk, which means that the complexity of the "raw material" is preserved in the flavor of the final cheese. It's aged for over a year to bring the flavor of the milk and all the good work that Andy (and before him Mike) have done to turn fresh liquid milk into such a marvelous finished cheese. And then to seal the deal, each year Uplands sends us samples of some of what they feel are the previous year's cheeses and we get to choose the ones we want. While all the Pleasant Ridge Reserve is consistently excellent, the selection process means that we get our hands (and hence yours as well) onto the wheels that are truly the best of the best. If you've not yet tried it... Pleasant Ridge's flavor is sort of simultaneously exceptional and accessible. It's one of those cheeses that almost always appeal to both aficionados and those aren't always up for anything out of the mainstream. How to describe it? It's nutty for sure, a tiny touch of a 'nose' akin to what you'd get with a good Gruyere, a butteriness that I love, a close texture that you might find with a well aged mountain cheese or even in a way a good cheddar, a bit of sweetness, high complexity and a long finish. What more can I say? If you like cheese, try this one – if you need hit a critical situation, Pleasant Ridge is pretty sure to come through every time.

Just to seal the deal, you should know that the Pleasant Ridge we have here comes from two particular days of production – May 16 and May 21 of 2010. With a farmstead cheese like Pleasant Ridge, every day's production is just a bit different. Each year Andy and Mike send us samples from a few good days of production and then we taste and select. We now take two whole days worth of cheese. Having just visited Uplands, I saw our cheese on the racks in the maturing rooms (I have photos if you need visual evidence). It's now about 18 months old and particularly delicious. While I was there we tasted a fair few days of production, but the ones we chose really stood out as some of the best – meaty, savory, what Andy Hatch calls "brothy," mouth watering, marvelous. A bit of a nose of a mountain cheese, a bit of the close texture of say a Pyrenees sheep cheese, some of the nuttiness of maybe a Dry Jack. Right now it'd be great with all the pears and apples on the market, or with some of those really great organic hazelnuts coming in from the folks at Freddy Guys in Oregon.

PS: Stay tuned for the imminent arrival of Uplands other cheese – the rich, creamy, mushroomy and extremely delicious Rush Creek Reserve.

2. Brand Development – A Critical Business Process



This month, we hear from **Andrea Neu**, DBIC Client Services & Brand Positioning.

Since 2004 the DBIC has helped more than 120 Wisconsin dairy companies with the development of new brands for their innovative dairy product lines. This has always included the market positioning for the company and product lines, which has translated into brand logo designs, label/package designs, and extensions of that image into marketing materials. At least four DBIC clients have won Progressive Grocer Packaging Awards since working with DBIC on package designs and all have invested in differentiating their brands in the marketplace.

A critical part of this brand development process included assisting over 40 clients with consumer focus group research – interactive consumer panels that provided feedback on new product concepts, tastings and label/packaging evaluations when the product and packaging was in prototype stage. This helped clients to understand consumer reactions to the products, brands and packaging, and would allow them to make any necessary changes before moving to the next stages of their business planning and marketing plans.

Branding – A Process with Principles

The process of creating a durable, long-term brand is not something that entrepreneurs can afford to put off, and the early business planning stage is the critical time to start. Creating a brand comes before the marketing plan, as it needs to be the foundation or focal point of your plan. Your marketing plan then grows from that because it drives whom you will be communicating with, what and how you communicate, and how you spend your marketing budget.

The value and equity built with a brand that truly reflects the image and quality of a product line, as well as its creator/manufacturer, is the basis for a successful and sustainable value-added product business. The brand name and image carries the story that will be associated with all elements of your food business long-term, and will be the asset that builds your business' value and profitability over time. Note the following quote from an interesting online source (www.allaboutbranding.com).

“It is not news that your Brand is one of the most valuable assets of your company. When your Brand is correctly built and promoted, it has immense financial value and commands higher prices while keeping customers loyal. A Brand built early and implemented properly assures shareholders growth in company value that increases over time. This is significant – enough so that the Brand can be sold for the best price when the owner retires or passes on the business. A business that must build wealth, like a manufacturing company or boutique product/services firm needs Brand development.”

More than Products...It's the Value Offered

When starting a new or restructured food business, it is not enough to just have an idea of something you want to and can produce. From the beginning, it is important to think about what that product will contribute to the lives of target consumers you want to sell to – why will they want to purchase and use it, and what about your products and brand will be different or valuable to them that they can't already find in the marketplace? Researching and understanding the marketplace is critical to creating a brand and product category.

That's where the brand development starts! It is crucial in your planning to develop – in writing – a "positioning statement" for your business defining how you are going to differentiate your brand and products. Your "value proposition" will clearly state those points-of-difference and is what will make your brand and products unique.

Building Your Food Business on Core Values

Building a brand image on your "core values" and how those values will flow through your new business is very important when starting out, especially in the food business and local market's distribution. The reality is that your new venture will probably not change the world, but rather fill a niche in the local markets or regional specialty markets that will contribute to a more sustainable food system in your agricultural region. That means your core values will most likely reflect your passion for the products you grow or craft, your commitment to consistently deliver the highest quality foods to the customers/consumers who need to trust your brand and respect you and the integrity of your employees (whether family members, friends or contracted workers), who are a critical component of your business.

According to market analysts, with a strong core value system represented in a brand, businesses can gradually retool their products, services and marketing programs to meet changes in the marketplace. Businesses that are established on a core value system tend to endure through product innovation, compete with previous product and service reputation, and outlive pricing competition.

If you would like to learn more about why brand building is important and how to begin the process, read the Upcoming Events section for information on the *Branding: It's Not Just About Logos* regional workshops coming up at the end of this month and in February.

3. Wisconsin Cheese Originals Offers \$2,500 Cheesemaking Scholarship

For the third year in a row, Wisconsin Cheese Originals is offering a \$2,500 scholarship to help one aspiring cheesemaker earn his or her license and make farmstead, artisan or specialty cheeses. Applications are due March 1.

Applicants must be a resident of the State of Wisconsin, and must demonstrate ambition to pursue and obtain a Wisconsin Cheesemaker License, a lengthy process that can take as long as 18 months, requires the attendance at five cheesemaking courses, and 240 hours of apprenticeship with an existing licensed Wisconsin cheesemaker.

"During the last decade, Wisconsin has become home to more than 60 artisan and specialty cheesemakers, many of whom choose the dairy state because of its reputation for quality, innovation and infrastructure," said Jeanne Carpenter, Executive Director of Wisconsin Cheese Originals. "At the same time, we know many aspiring cheesemakers are waiting in the wings. This scholarship aims to help one new Wisconsin artisan cheesemaker earn his or her license every year."

The 2012 Wisconsin Licensed Cheesemaker Scholarship application is due to Wisconsin Cheese Originals on March 1, with the recipient chosen by a review committee and notified by April 1. Applications may be downloaded from www.wisconsincheeseoriginals.com. To learn more, contact Carpenter at 608-358-7837.

4. Upcoming Events

- **Jan. 20: Making Money With Sheep and Goats in Northern Wisconsin – Spooner, Wis.**

Claire Mikolayunas, UW-Extension small-ruminant specialist, will explore this topic on Friday, Jan. 20, at 10:30 a.m. at the Spooner Ag Research Station as part of the Northern Safari Series. Mikolayunas will discuss ways to keep production costs low, while taking advantage of market opportunities for lambs and goat kids, how to feed sheep and goats to maintain great growth while keeping costs as low as possible, and low-cost feeds and how they can be used to increase farm profit.

The talk will provide Safari attendees with the tools they need to make the right decisions on their farms to make more money with sheep or goats. For more information, contact 715-635-3506 or ltoman@wisc.edu.

- **Jan. 23: Goat Health Webinar**

Dr. Joan Dean Rowe will present an educational webinar on goat health on Jan. 23 from 8-9 p.m. Dr. Rowe will discuss the importance of testing for and strategies to manage herd diseases such as Caseous Lymphadenitis (CL), Caprine Arthritis Encephalitis Virus (CAEV) and Mycoplasma.

Dr. Rowe is an associate professor in the Department of Population Health and Reproduction at University of California, Davis School of Veterinary Medicine. She holds DVM, MPVM, and Ph.D. degrees from the University of California, Davis. She raises Toggenburg dairy goats and is a licensed dairy goat judge and on the American Dairy Goat Association Board of Directors. Dr. Rowe has current research interests in CAEV, infectious abortion, reproductive performance and small ruminant drug approvals.

The program will be broadcast at various county extension and technical college locations throughout the state. If you are interested in attending, contact your local county extension office or technical college. There is no cost for the program. If you need assistance finding a broadcast location, contact Claire Mikolayunas at mikolayunas@wisc.edu or 608-890-3802.

- **Jan. 25, Jan. 30, Feb. 1, and Feb. 3: “Branding: It’s not just about logos!” Workshops**

Branding helps set your products apart and connects buyers with the story of your farm. The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) encourages local food producers to attend one of the four Buy Local, Buy Wisconsin Regional Workshops titled, “Branding: It’s not just about logos!”

Andrea Neu, owner of Image Maker marketing communications, will be the speaker for the workshops. She has more than 36 years of experience in Integrated Marketing Communications, focusing her expertise in the food industry. As a member of the DBIC team, Neu has worked with Wisconsin cheesemakers/marketers, farmstead, and artisan dairy producers to assist with their brand development. At the workshop, attendees will learn more about brand development through examples of successful branding projects. They will also learn about local food trends and the 12 steps to successful packaging. Attendees are welcome to bring promotional materials or packaging to the workshop to receive feedback.

Each workshop will be held from 9 a.m. – 2 p.m. Dates and locations include:

- Jan. 25: Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center, 29270 Highway G, Ashland, Wis.
- Jan. 30: Viroqua Area Medical Clinic, 407 S Main Street, Viroqua, Wis.
- Feb. 1: James P Coughlin Center, 625 E County Road Y, Oshkosh, Wis.
- Feb. 3: DATCP, 2811 Agriculture Drive, Madison, Wis. (*Free webinar also available*)

The cost to attend is \$30 for the first registration, and \$15 for any additional registrations of the same farm, family or organization. Lunch is included. The registration deadline is Wednesday, Jan. 18.

Space for each workshop is limited. To register or for more information, visit datcp.wi.gov/Business/Buy_Local_Buy_Wisconsin or contact Theresa Feiner at theresa.feiner@wi.gov or 608-224-5112.

5. Babcock Hall and The Center for Dairy Research Celebrate Milestones

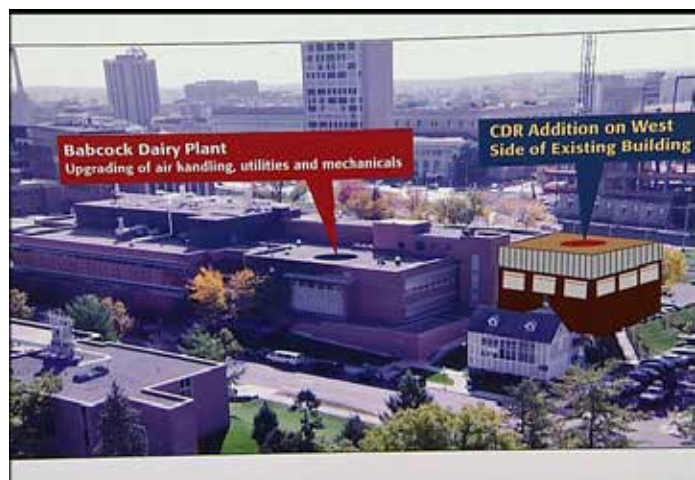
Wisconsin has proudly held the title of America's Dairyland, and now two supporting reasons for this title are celebrating milestones. Babcock Hall, on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus, was built in the early 1950s and is celebrating 60 years as a training ground for dairy leaders. The building houses the University of Wisconsin Food Science Department, the Wisconsin Center for Dairy Research (CDR) and the Babcock Dairy Plant and Store.

The CDR is also celebrating a milestone – 25 years of training and research outreach. “Twenty-five years ago they created the Center for Dairy Research, housed within the Food Science Department and within Babcock Hall for good reason,” stated John Lucey, Director of the Wisconsin Center for Dairy Research.

Scott Rankin, Associate Professor and Chair of the Food Science Department at UW-Madison acknowledged what the facility offers. “There's no place in the world like it. We offer more training and programming in dairy food manufacturing than any place in the world, times ten,” he said.

The facility is not only for training future dairy and food scientists, it also serves dairy and food manufacturers outside of the University. “A lot of time plants will come here to make batches and try out new ideas here in our pilot plant, working with our staff. That's a core function of what we do,” said Lucey.

The Wisconsin Center for Dairy Research has been instrumental in helping Wisconsin's cheesemakers, and is helping more by giving back to the school with a \$500,000 pledge to help renovate the dairy plant's facilities. Babcock Hall is open to the public during regular business hours, and they encourage visitors to come in and see all that's happening and enjoy some Babcock ice cream (available in 70 different flavors)! To learn more, visit: <http://foodsci.wisc.edu/services/dairy>.



This diagram shows where the expansion of Babcock Hall will be.

6. New Milk Quality Website Launched

Two University of Wisconsin-Madison College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALs) professors have joined forces to help Wisconsin dairy producers improve milk quality. Pamela Ruegg, dairy science professor and Extension milk quality specialist, and Doug Reinemann, professor and director of the UW Milking Research and Instruction Lab, have launched a new website, <http://milkquality.wisc.edu>, offering updated information and decision-making tools to help farmers manage herd health and milking systems.

“Udder health and milking management have always been regarded as important factors in achieving high milk production, efficient milking and excellent milk quality,” said Reinemann. “When you have milk price premiums reported to be the largest financial opportunity related to milk quality, there are certainly incentives to manage for it every day in the parlor.”

This website is not just for farmers. Resources are also available for veterinarians, extension agents, researchers and industry representatives.

“Producing high-quality milk is not a one-person job. It takes a team-based approach to be able to evaluate, manage and meet milk quality goals. Including extension and agricultural professionals helps farmers achieve goals more rapidly and increase farm income,” said Ruegg.

Ruegg and Reinemann have previously collaborated to develop extension programs and publish academic papers focused on herd health and milking management – the UW Milk Quality Website represents the first time these resources are available in one place.

“This is an opportunity to share our research, as well as the latest science-based, peer-reviewed information on dairy production from around the world. We are responding to requests for better accessibility,” said Ruegg. “The website has now become a comprehensive resource for dairy producers to achieve milk quality success. It’s a one-stop-shop.”

The website will be updated weekly with featured articles and news releases covering various topics on milk quality. Spanish-translated educational materials will also be available.

7. World Championship Cheese Contest to be Held in March

The 2012 World Championship Cheese Contest, the world’s largest cheese and butter competition, will be held on March 5-7 in Madison, Wis. The goal of the contest is to showcase the excellence of cheesemaking and buttermaking from around the world with a fair, objective and technical assessment of entries.

With 2,318 entries from 20 nations, the 2010 Contest broke all previous records. In 2012, the World Championship Cheese Contest expects to receive 2,500 cheese and butter entries from around the globe. Entry deadline is Feb. 8 with products due to the warehouse location by Friday, Feb. 24.

Today, all continents are represented at this mega-contest, held in even-numbered years. Cheeses and butters will arrive from: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Canada, Croatia, Denmark, England, Finland,

France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States.

Evaluating each one of these cheeses and butters falls to a team of 40 experts from 16 nations. A gold medal, silver medal and bronze medal are awarded to the three highest scoring entries in each class. Gold medal cheeses are tasted for a second time by all 40 judges to select a single World Champion Cheese and two runners-up. The top three champions receive hand-crafted trophies and the gold, silver and bronze medal winners receive their awards during the World Champions Banquet held on April 12 in Milwaukee, Wis. in conjunction with the International Cheese Technology Exposition.

The DBIC is pleased to announce that it will reimburse 50 percent of the contest entry fee for *new* goat and sheep milk cheese entries.

Contest entrants can utilize the unique MyEntries® feature for online entry. For more information, visit www.worldchampioncheese.org.

8. The Last Word with Norm Mosen: Happy New Year to Dairy!

The start of a new year offers the chance to make resolutions and bold predictions. Good 2012 Wisconsin predictions would include: The Packers will win the Super Bowl, Wisconsin will see snow in January (almost didn't happen), and Wisconsin cheese will continue to be the cheese of choice in the U.S.



So with the above in mind, we thought we should have some fun and take a chance and make some predictions for Dairy in 2012. One year from now we can check back and see how accurate these predictions are.

#1 – Wisconsin will see record investments in dairy plants: Dairy companies will be investing in new facilities and equipment – new, remodeling/updating, renovation. *Impact – more jobs, better efficiencies, new innovation, and greater demand and competition for milk.*

#2 – The floor price paid to farmers will move closer to \$20 per hundredweight. While predictions are calling for the mailbox price to be around \$18+ for 2012, the reality is that farmers will need \$20 per cwt. to maintain cash flow. New floors for sheep and goat milk will also be established. With corn prices over \$6 per bushel (not long ago \$3.50), soybean prices at \$11.50 per bushel (not long ago \$8), cash rent for farm land hitting \$225 per acre (not long ago \$125) and farmland selling for over \$7,000 per acre, the cost of making milk has dramatically increased. The challenge will be to move this increased cost of milk through the market channels. *Impact – all of Wisconsin will benefit – farm families, rural communities, the state's economy.*

#3 – Inspection and scrutiny of the dairy industry will increase. Federal agencies, advocate organizations, and individual and consumer groups will look for and demand more information regarding how dairy (and all foods) are processed and produced. Spot unannounced visits to plants and farms will increase. Those making the visits/inspections will have little appreciation for how things were done in the past. *Impact – dairy industry will need to make large financial investments in programs to insure proper documentation and procedures are in place.*

#4 – Continued growth in the next generation of the dairy community. The last few years have seen an

increased interest in careers in dairy – on the farm, in the plants, in the infrastructure. This new generation – farmers, cheesemakers, buttermakers, ice cream producers, journalists, etc. will continue to enter the industry. *Impact – Innovation and imagination in dairy will grow.*

#5 – Key dairy resources in Wisconsin that need answers for funding challenges will benefit from a groundswell of support from individuals, industry groups, and state resources. Specifically we predict that: #1 – The Babcock Hall dairy plant renovation will gain momentum and plans for groundbreaking of the remodel/renovation will be announced, #2 – The Babcock Institute for International Dairy Research and Development will build on its strong foundations, and #3 – funding programs for the Dairy Business Innovation Center will be secured. *Impact – Wisconsin will be able to continue to hold its position as a center for dairy.*

Happy and prosperous New Year to all,
Norm

*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 Kelsi Mayer at 608-290-5855, email: kelsimayer@gmail.com.*

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