

In This Issue:

1. LaClare Farms Wins U.S Championship Cheese Title; Wisconsin Sweeps Top Three
2. Team Column: An Artisan's Success Cycle
3. Ten Things to Consider from the GrassWorks Grazing Conference
4. John Lucey Named Director of WI Center for Dairy Research
5. The Last Word with the DBIC's Norm Monsen: Think Spring

1. LaClare Farms Evalon Wins U.S Championship Cheese in WI Sweep

A farm-based artisan goat's milk cheese crafted by a 25-year-old cheesemaker was named the 2011 U.S. Championship Cheese by a national panel of expert judges last week.

Katie Hedrich, of LaClare Farms in Chilton, Wis., took top honors out of 1,604 entries from 30 states for Evalon, a hard goat's milk cheese, made from the milk of her family farm's goat herd. Out of a possible 100 points, Evalon scored 99.06 in the final round

of judging, during which judges re-evaluated all gold-winning cheeses to determine the champion at the U.S. Championship Cheese Contest in Green Bay.

Hedrich is the youngest cheesemaker to ever earn the honor, and is only the second woman in the history of the contest to be named U.S. Champion. After learning of her win at last week's contest, she was momentarily speechless. But then a broad smile appeared on her face, and she immediately started thanking her family and everyone who had helped her begin making cheese.

"Our family is so very excited and honored to receive this award," Hedrich said. "As you can imagine, we never imagined this happening. We thought winning our class was a true blessing, but to go all the way is unbelievable."

Katie and her family hope to break ground this year on their own farmstead creamery. Until then, Evalon will continue to be crafted at nearby Saxon Homestead Creamery in Cleveland, Wis. "We want to give a special thank you to all the folks at Saxon for enabling us to make our cheese at their facility from the very beginning," Hedrich said.



LaClare Farms says production of Evalon will ramp up in the coming months, in part due to the recent addition of 183 dairy goats to the family herd. Current inventory of the small-batch, award-winning cheese is limited, and the Hedrichs thank customers for their patience.

Hedrich was not the only Wisconsin cheesemaker pleased with the outcome at the U.S. Championship Cheese Contest, as Wisconsin cheesemakers swept the top three places. First runner-up, with a score of 98.97, was Parmesan, made by Sartori in Plymouth. Second runner-up was Aged Gouda, made by Holland's Family Cheese, of Thorp, which scored 98.95. Cheesemaker Marieke Penterman had three different Goudas enter the final round of judging.

Capturing the most gold medals was Wisconsin, with 42 of the total 76 categories judged. California came in second among the states, with nine golds. Vermont had five gold medals, Idaho had four golds, while New Jersey, New York and Ohio all took three. Oregon and Pennsylvania won two gold medals, and Kentucky, Michigan and Utah each captured one apiece.

The United States Championship Cheese Contest is the largest cheese and butter competition in the country and is rooted in more than 120 years of history, beginning when the Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association held its first cheese contest in 1891. In recent years, the event has flourished, more than doubling in size since 2001. This year, more than 30,000 pounds of cheese were entered into the contest.

For more information on the contest, as well as complete results for all 76 entry classes and contest photos, visit www.uschampioncheese.org.

2. Team Column: An Artisan's Success Cycle



This month, we hear from **Phillip Molina**, DBIC Business Development and Marketing Consultant. Phil guides popular multimillion-dollar brands, turns around regional businesses and launches thriving entrepreneurial ventures. Through Windward Business Development and Marketing, he supports client needs related to Business Planning and Strategy, Consumer and Market Insights, New Product Development, Brand Management, Integrated Marketing Communications and Category Management/Trade Promotion Optimization. Molina holds a BA in Business from Kansas University and an MBA in Marketing from the University of St. Thomas. This month, Phil describes “**An Artisan's Success Cycle.**”

Wisconsin is “America's Dairyland”. In fact, according to the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board, Wisconsin is the largest producer of cheese in the country, generating more than one-quarter of all U.S. production. However, during the past 25 years, while total production has increased significantly, Wisconsin's share of production has been steadily falling. Specifically, in 1984, Wisconsin made 36 percent of all cheese produced in the U.S. Through 2009, Wisconsin's share of production fell ten points to 26 percent. (Source: Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board, 2009 Cheese Production Summary.) The bottom line is that the dairy industry is becoming more and more competitive.

So, how can we remain successful in this highly competitive environment?

I have had the pleasure of looking after popular brands in large multinational food businesses, turning around a regional food business and even launching a handful of thriving entrepreneurial start-ups. And the answer with each of these radically different scales of businesses is always the same: thoughtful planning followed by crisp execution. While there is no one “right” way to implement strategic planning, the below illustration outlines one approach, “**An Artisan’s Success Cycle**”:

Thoughtfully consider your reality

We’ve all heard the old adage, “can’t see the forest for the trees.” This step takes us up and out of our day-to-day work “amongst the trees” and helps us view the “forest” from several angles. Note that it is easy for this step to become short-changed or even overlooked altogether. However, this step is literally the foundation upon which your planning will be built; the better the inputs, the better the outputs will be for your plan. Invest fully in this step.



When considering your reality, think both internally as well as externally. For example, consider your capabilities: staffing, operational, financial, et al. What are we good at? What are we not so good at? Externally, how do we stack up against other alternatives from which our customers and/or consumers have to choose? How well do we know those who buy our products? When addressing these types of questions, use objective data where possible. For example, rather than saying “our product tastes better” (because you, the owner believe it to be true), having quantitative data from a simple sensory study that cuts your product against alternatives will carry much more validity.

Determine your sweet spot

Next, sort through all of this data and distill it down into its essence. Ultimately your goal is to determine what it is that provides your business a *distinct and sustainable competitive advantage* in the marketplace. This is your sweet spot. One helpful tool is called a SWOT Analysis. A SWOT Analysis consists of reviewing all of your work in the step above and making four lists: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. Although it sounds simple, this approach can be very helpful in ensuring we are seeing that proverbial forest from amongst the trees.

Brainstorm creative approaches

By this point in your process, you will have a good grasp of where your company stands and where you desire to take it. This step is all about how to get there. It is your marketing strategy. Marketing school teaches the “4 P’s” of the Marketing Mix: Product, Price, Promotion and Place (Distribution). Very simply, brainstorm creative ways to execute against each of these four “P’s”. Consider each separately and fully, and leverage the learning derived from the work done in the first two steps above.

Monitor your activity and learn as you go

No plan is perfect and nobody executes a plan perfectly. Thus, make sure you measure your success and fine-tune as you go. Then, when you cycle back to step one again, you will have even more objective data from which to optimize your next cycle of success.

So there you have it, “An Artisan’s Success Cycle.” We work in a competitive industry that is getting more competitive every year. However, investing the time and energy into thoughtful planning and crisp execution can help us remain successful. Happy planning!

3. Ten Things to Consider from the GrassWorks Grazing Conference

DBIC team member Janet Ady attended the GrassWorks, Inc. Grazing Conference in the Wisconsin Dells on Feb. 14. She identified Ten Things to Think About from her day at the conference.



Market Opportunity Is There

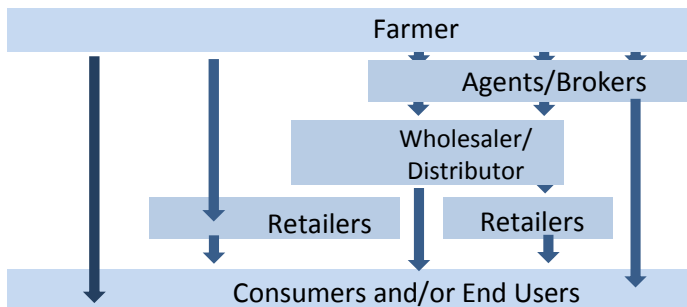
1. A third of consumers are looking for something different, and that's what's driving change in the food system. Sustainability, health and nutrition, will be key drivers. Direct marketing is the key way to communicate these values. Then price becomes second.
2. More uniqueness = more value.
3. It's about aggregation and disaggregation, not economics of scale (multi-farm coops, e.g. CSAs).
4. The market today for such foods is three times bigger than what's available.
(Based on the keynote by John Ikerd, who spoke on the Economics of Sustainable Farming)

Trends Favor Value-Added Agriculture

5. Added value – a very good idea if you are a farmer, or else you will be competing at a commodity level. This will also help even out sales over the growing period.
6. A panelist was asked what consumer needs she has been hearing from green market consumers; participants also jumped in. Some of the trends identified included:
 - Regional slaughter houses
 - Butchers
 - Appropriate regulation for size and scale
 - More middlemen
 - More producer co-ops
 - More research on production centers
 - More dry aging
 - More pasture eggs
 - Cured meats of all kinds
 - Better packaging
 - Chilled, not frozen*(Based on presentation by Nina Planck, who manages farmers markets)*

Distribution Is Key

7. Distribution is central to success as a producer today.
8. Make sure you understand your distribution choices.



9. There is no single solution that is the best for everyone. You have to think about your own situation and goals and make your decision based on that.
(Inspired by Rod Ofte, Willow Creek Ranch, Coon Valley, Wisconsin)

The Future of Agriculture in Wisconsin

10. There is a new generation of farmers who are choosing to farm early on in their careers. The future of Wisconsin agriculture is very promising.
(Inspired by Khatie Khallek and her husband, young farmers and owners of Living the Dream Farm.)
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4. John Lucey Named Director of WI Center for Dairy Research

John Lucey, professor of Food Science, University of Wisconsin-Madison, was named Director of the Wisconsin Center for Dairy Research on March 1. Lucey will provide leadership and vision for the world-recognized dairy research center that focuses on research, applications, outreach and education geared towards partnering with the Wisconsin and US dairy industries.

“We are pleased that John has accepted this position,” said Mark Johnson, CDR Interim Director. “He is an outstanding dairy researcher and professor with global experience and recognition. His expertise will help lead CDR to the next level.”



Lucey joined the UW-Madison Food Science department in 1999. During the past 20 years, he has worked in food science departments or research centers in four different countries, including Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and the United States, each with a strong dairy foods emphasis. Lucey's research interests cover a wide range of dairy technology and products including cheese texture/chemistry, gelation of milk, cultured products like yogurt, and the production/functionality of milk protein ingredients.

In 2001 he received the American Dairy Science Association Foundation Scholar award, and in 2005 the DSM award for Cheese and Cultured Products Research from ADSA.

Looking forward to this new position in CDR, Lucey said, “The staff at CDR has played a critical role in the development of a vibrant dairy industry in Wisconsin as well as in the US. I will strive to ensure that the CDR continues to have a major impact on our dairy industry, especially in an increasingly complex and challenging environment.”



5. The Last Word with Norm Mosen: Think Spring

Last week, a farmer came in for a visit. He seemed especially optimistic and cheerful. When I asked what was new, he reported that on his farm that morning, the first calf of the spring calving season had been born. It was a special day.

Since then, I've thought a lot about that short conversation. In it, I think is a message for all of us. After a long winter, spring gives us optimism and hope, and with it, renewed energy. Also, perhaps, a lesson. Like the farmer with his new calf, we need to recognize that spring is finally here. It's time to take a moment to slow down a little, watch trees bud, flowers bloom, and new growth happen. It is only

when we stop for a moment to witness the rebirth of nature that we can really capture the optimism, hope and energy the season gives us.

And since it's almost spring, it seems like a good time to provide a few updates on staffing and new faces in the dairy world. Here we go:

Center for Dairy Research

- The recent appointment of **John Lucey** to Director of the CDR heads the list of changes in personnel. (See more information on John earlier in the newsletter). Welcome, John!
- A new director at CDR means **Mark Johnson** is able to return to his full-time passion of working directly with cheese and cheesemakers. Mark served as interim director for almost one full year. The industry owes a big thank you to Mark.

Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection

- New Administrator of Division of Food Safety is **Steve Ingham**. Steve returns to this role, back to DATCP from UW Madison Food Science. Welcome back, Steve!
- New Administrator for Division of Agriculture Development- is **Mike Powers**. Mike brings experience in land conservation and sustainable agriculture and energy programs. (Mike's roots trace back to Green County, so he knows cheese).

University of Wisconsin-River Falls

- **Ranee May**, Dairy Plant Director at the univeristy, recently announced that 2011 will be the year she retires from that position. During Ranee's career, she has taught and mentored many of the next generation of Wisconsin cheesemakers. Thanks Ranee for the years of dedication and caring for Wisconsin dairy.

A hearty welcome to all of these new and returning faces from all of us at the DBIC.

*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, email: jeanne@wordartisanllc.com.*

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