



State of Wisconsin  
Jim Doyle, Governor

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Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection  
Rod Nilsestuen, Secretary

## **Wisconsin increases specialty cheese production** *New statistics confirm the state's steady trend in crafting high-end cheese*

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MADISON-- State Agriculture Secretary Rod Nilsestuen today announced that Wisconsin cheesemakers continue to lead the nation in crafting innovative cheeses. Specialty cheese production in 2006 rose 7 percent above the previous year, totaling 387 million pounds and accounting for 16 percent of the state's total cheese production.

"I commend Wisconsin's cheesemakers for continuing to compete at the high end and for providing customers around the world with signature cheese," Nilsestuen said.

The study released today by the National Agricultural Statistics Service confirms the steady increase in Wisconsin's specialty cheese sector. Specialty cheeses, a value-added product, command a premium price for their unique qualities. In 2003 specialty cheese accounted for 12 percent of the total cheese produced in the state.

Wisconsin cheese makers now produce more than 600 styles and types of cheeses, and 80 of the 115 cheese plants in Wisconsin are today manufacturing at least one type of specialty cheese.

The most popular specialty cheeses continue to be Blue, Feta, Hispanic types, specialty Provolone, Parmesan Wheel and Asiago. In 2006, Hispanic types passed specialty Provolone to become the third most popular specialty cheese. Cheeses with an annual growth in production of 10 percent or more were specialty Cheddar, Parmesan wheel and Italian Fontina.

Nilsestuen commended the partners involved in the state's Value Added Dairy Initiative, formed in 2004 to reinvigorate the state's dairy industry by assisting producers and processors in modernizing and launching value-added dairy products, including specialty cheeses.

"I want to recognize the Dairy Business Innovation Center and the Grow Wisconsin Dairy Team for their work in helping to grow artisan and specialty dairy businesses," he said.

The state's dairies help to fuel the Wisconsin economy at the rate of more than \$39,000 per minute. Dairy contributes \$20.6 billion annually to Wisconsin's economy.

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*Agriculture generates \$51.5 billion for Wisconsin*

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