

# Cheese CONNOISSEUR

Summer 2026  
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**AMERICAN  
CHEESE SOCIETY**  
SUPPORT AND  
CELEBRATE CHEESE

**CHEESE RETAILER**  
FROM PASSION TO  
PLATE: ANTONELLI'S  
CHEESE SHOP

**FEATURE**  
**BRIE: THE KING  
OF CHEESES**

**CHEESE TRAIL**  
OREGON IS KNOWN FOR  
ITS DIVERSE CREAMERIES  
AND CHEESES

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# Cheese CONNOISSEUR

Summer 2026



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SCAN  
TO LEARN MORE

# Support and Celebrate American Cheese



BY TARA HOLMES

**E**very May, the American artisan cheese community comes together to celebrate American Cheese Month. From farmstead creameries and busy retail counters to distributors and devoted consumers, this is a moment to elevate American cheese, support the people

behind it, and invest in the future of the industry.

And if this issue reaches you after the month of May has passed, we hope you'll still find inspiration in these ideas to help you start planning to have an even bigger impact next year!

At the American Cheese Society (ACS), we see firsthand how deeply connected this community is. Cheesemakers, retailers, distributors, educators, and enthusiasts all play a role in shaping this community that values craftsmanship, innovation and education. American Cheese Month is our collective opportunity to amplify those values and invite more people into the story.

If you're part of the cheese industry, there's no better time to deepen that connection than by joining us at the ACS Annual Conference, *Stitched Together by Cheese*, July 7-10 in Louisville, KY. With planning in the home stretch and excitement building for another incredible gathering, now is the time to register.

## WHY AMERICAN CHEESE MATTERS

The American artisan cheese industry continues to evolve in exciting ways. Producers are experimenting with milk types, aging techniques, and regional expressions that rival the most storied traditions in the world. At the same time, the industry faces real challenges from rising production costs, economic uncertainty, and the need for ongoing education and workforce development.

That's why community support is so important. When you choose cheese made in America, you're not just buying a product; you're supporting an entire network of skilled professionals.

## SUPPORT THE FUTURE

One of the most meaningful ways to participate in American Cheese Month is by supporting the American Cheese Education Foundation (ACEF), the arm of the ACS, dedicated to advancing cheese education and professional development across the cheese community. Through scholarships, fundraising, and industry support, ACEF is helping cultivate the next generation.

Your tax-deductible donation directly contributes to expanding access to cheese education through ACS Conference scholarships. Whether you're an industry veteran or a passionate consumer, contributing to ACEF is a direct investment in the long-term vitality of American cheese.

## HOW TO GET INVOLVED

American Cheese Month thrives on participation, and there are many ways to engage, no matter your role in the industry. The only limit is your own creativity!

### For Retailers

Retailers are uniquely positioned to tell the story of American

cheese. Consider giving a percentage of sales to ACEF in conjunction with any of these ideas:

- Curated American Cheese Flights
- In-Store Tastings or Meet-the-Maker Events
- Storytelling Displays: Feature cheesemaker profiles
- Social Media Spotlights: Share cheese features

Small touches like labeling cheeses with their origin stories or pairing suggestions can transform a purchase into a storytelling opportunity. ACS has created shelf-talkers for all of our Judging and Competition award winners, and our retailer members have exclusive access. Just reach out to us if you'd like more information.

### For Distributors

Distributors play a critical role in connecting producers with markets. This month is a chance to:

- Highlight American producers in catalogs and promotions
- Offer incentives or discounts on cheeses from the Americas
- Educate retail partners
- Collaborate with producers

By prioritizing American cheese in your outreach, you help expand visibility and awareness across the supply chain.

### For Cheesemakers

Producers can lean into storytelling and connection:

- Host virtual creamery tours or live Q&A sessions
- Share the seasonal rhythms of cheesemaking on social media
- Partner with retailers for featured promotions or events
- Spotlight the people behind the cheese

### For Consumers

If you love cheese, you're already part of this movement. Your curiosity and enthusiasm are powerful drivers of demand and awareness.

Consider:

- Trying a new American cheese each week
- Asking your local cheese counter for recommendations
- Hosting a cheese tasting with friends focused on American producers
- Sharing your favorites on social media using #AmericanCheeseMonth
- Making a donation, large or small, to ACEF

## A COLLECTIVE CELEBRATION

American Cheese Month isn't just about recognition; it's about celebration. It's about ensuring that the next generation of cheesemakers, mongers, and industry leaders has the resources, education, and support they need to thrive.

At ACS, we believe that cheese brings people together in meaningful ways. It connects us to place, to tradition, and to one another. We invite you to celebrate that connection. Taste something new, share a story, support education, and champion the extraordinary work in the industry.

Because when we support American cheese, we're not just celebrating what's on the plate, we're investing in everything and everyone involved in getting it there.

*Tara Holmes is the executive director of the American Cheese Society. CC*

## COVER STORY

# LaClare Creamery: Redefining Goat Cheese

This Wisconsin creamery is transforming perceptions and expanding the appeal of goat cheese across the U.S.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

PHOTOS COURTESY LACLARE CREAMERY

**I**t sometimes begins with hesitation: A diner pauses over a slice of goat cheese, unsure what to expect. Then comes the surprise: a clean, balanced finish that challenges perception. Moments like this are becoming more common as American consumers reconsider goat milk cheese.

At LaClare, a game-changing creamery located in Malone, WI, innovation and consistency go hand in hand. From flavor-infused chèvre to hard cheeses, like its signature goat cheddar, LaClare has earned more than 60 awards since 2012.

Behind the creamery's growth and success lies a deliberate, team-driven process, from farm-focused milk quality to precision cheesemaking and packaging, all designed to deliver a polished, approachable expression of goat milk that not only meets rising demand but also helps shape it.

### A TWO-GOAT START

The story of LaClare Creamery didn't start with a business plan, but with a farm and two goats. In 1978, Larry and Clara Hedrich purchased a small property outside Chilton, WI, to raise their growing family. The goats were intended simply as 4-H show animals for their children.

This direction shifted after the couple traveled to Denmark and the Netherlands, where they were inspired by a more advanced goat product market, and saw a need in the U.S. market for high-quality goat cheese. From there, their farm-to-champion trajectory was straight up: expanding their herd, then shipping the milk, and later building a cheesemaking production base.

"In 2008, LaClare Creamery, named after Larry and Clara, was formed and produced its first hard goat cheese," says Nola Krueger, marketing director. "The creamery's 41,000-square-foot hard cheese production facility was built in Malone, WI, in 2012, along with the café and visitor center. Soft goat cheese operations began in 2017, with the purchase of chèvre-making equipment. In 2019, we doubled our operational footprint with the 28,000-square-foot addition. The new addition focused on chèvre and included investments in French cheese presses, packaging equipment, specialized air-handling equipment, and other technology to create the perfect chèvre-making environment."

### FROM MILK TO CHEESE

Producing an award-winning cheese always starts with exceptional milk.



Pictured (L-R): Nathan Beattie, Eric Casper, Dylan Woods

"When first stepping into the world of goat cheese, the focus was to define what quality goat milk was in the U.S.," says Greg Hedrich, director of facilities and capital projects, and the LaClare founder's son. "By working with a Master Cheesemaker and a team of industry experts, LaClare maintained a continuous feedback loop, helping us refine our approach and advance toward a clear vision for our cheeses. This collaborative approach not only strengthened our cheesemaking processes but also helped shape on-farm practices, guiding farmers on the standards needed to produce great milk."

Everything on the farms begins with careful animal care, nutrition, and consistency, which lays the foundation for quality.

"Goat milk is incredibly expressive, and our job is to respect and guide it, rather than overpower it," says Nathan Beattie, the chèvre packaging supervisor, who was born and raised in Kiel,



WI, where agriculture is woven into his everyday life. “From there, the process becomes a balance of science, data, and intuition.”

After a stint swinging a sledgehammer at a foundry, Beattie found his way back to the industry, fascinated by how small decisions, for example, temperature changes, cultures, and timing, could influence a cheese’s flavor and texture. He came to LaClare two years ago, drawn by the creamery’s commitment to fresh goat milk, its respect for tradition, and its willingness to innovate.

An award-winning cheese is never the result of one person’s work alone, Beattie adds. “Our cheesemakers, quality team, packaging crew, and leadership all contribute their expertise. For example, a recent award-winning cheese required precise moisture control during production and strategic packaging decisions that preserved freshness, while visually showcasing the product.”

Beattie adds, “We never produce a special make for our contest cheese; it is pulled right off the line and sent in, so it’s the same cheese that the consumer gets. By the time the cheese reaches the consumer, it represents dozens of thoughtful decisions made along the way. That behind-the-scenes work is what transforms goat milk into something truly special.”

At LaClare Creamery, fresh chèvre is offered in more than a dozen distinct flavor profiles, underscoring both versatility and consumer appeal. There’s Garlic & Herb, Mediterranean, and Truffle, as well as Fig & Honey, Maple Bourbon, Pumpkin, Lemon Bar, and Blueberry Vanilla.

“As new flavor ideas are proposed, our research and development and supply chain teams work together to source the right ingredients,” says Dylan Woods, weekend chèvre packaging supervisor, who watched LaClare’s cheesemaking facility take shape as he passed by en route to school each day. “Then comes the fun part of perfecting the ratios to achieve the ideal balance. As we work to develop new flavor combinations for our chèvre, samples are placed in the break room for employees to try. This often becomes a main topic of conversation among the teams for days as everyone shares feedback and excitement.”

After working at another creamery, where he started on the production floor, Woods’ desire to make a larger impact and be part of something special led him to LaClare.

“Once a flavor is refined,” adds Woods, “we focus on understanding how the new flavor or format will fit into our packaging operations. When everything aligns, and consumers respond positively to the product, our make and packaging teams come together to produce it at volume and deliver it to our customers.”

Today, LaClare’s lineup includes fresh, tangy chèvres, which account for approximately 80% of production. The creamery also

produces a selection of firm cheeses that are great for snacking or melting, including Aged Goat Cheddar, Goat Jack, Goat Mozzarella and Goat Feta. There is also a mixed-milk cheese, Chandoka, a fruity, cheddar-style cheese made with 70% cow’s milk and 30% goat’s milk.

Choosing a favorite cheese is a tough question, says Woods. “With so many great flavors, it feels unfair to pick just one, so I like to break it down by flavor profile. For something traditional, I love our Original chèvre served on bruschetta.”

He says when he is in the mood for something savory, his go-to is Garlic & Herb chèvre.

“For something sweet, I cannot choose between two favorites. Our Orange Cranberry Goat Cheese is fantastic when made into a cheesecake, while the Lemon Bar chèvre is perfect spread on vanilla wafer cookies for a simple but flavorful treat.”

## GOAT GAINS GROUND: WHAT’S NEXT?

Goat cheeses are enjoying a greater seat at the table.

“Years ago, anyone I would speak to about goat cheese didn’t seem very interested, and I heard a lot of criticism,” says Eric Casper, assistant supervisor to the chèvre making team, assisting with how the day flows with scheduling of taking down presses and what flavors are produced. “Since working with goat cheese, I have had friends and family try LaClare’s products, and they have all changed their opinion of goat cheese. I believe you will see that trend continue.”

Social media has played a role in elevating goat cheese’s popularity, says Daniela Benitez, a packaging operator who moved to Wisconsin at 18 and began her career as a packer, steadily refining her skills. “We can showcase our products and let people see our work — highlighting our team and the passion behind what we do.”

One of the most exciting trends in goat cheese today is a growing appreciation for complexity and craftsmanship.

“Consumers are becoming more curious,” says Beattie. “They want to understand how cheese is made, where it comes from, and why it tastes the way it does. We’re also seeing increased interest in approachable, but elevated, flavors. People want cheeses that feel special, yet fit easily into everyday meals. From a production standpoint, there is a stronger focus on consistency, sustainability and transparency.”

Looking ahead, adds Beattie, “I believe goat cheese will continue to gain traction beyond traditional categories. Expect to see more innovation in formats and flavor combinations, along with continued demand for high-quality, responsibly made products.”

CC

## CHEESE RETAILER



Kendall and John Antonelli

# From Passion to Plate: Antonelli's Cheese Shop

Defined by storytelling, and a commitment to doing things right.

BY KEITH LORIA

PHOTOS COURTESY ANTONELLI'S CHEESE SHOP

Sixteen years after opening in Austin, TX, Kendall and John Antonelli still talk about their business with the same mix of humility and wonder that defined its earliest days.

"Every single year we have to re-evaluate our model, make tweaks, simplify, pivot and have the courage to say goodbye to whatever isn't working," says Kendall Antonelli. "It's still a passion project to this day; fortunately, we just have a lot of passionate people helping us problem solve."

That mindset has allowed Antonelli's Cheese Shop to evolve into one of the country's most respected specialty cheese destinations. Still, the road has been anything but straightforward.

### LEARNING THE HARD WAY

From the outside, the story of Antonelli's may look like a romantic leap into entrepreneurship. In reality, it required a rapid education in what it truly means to run a business.

"Looking back, the biggest risk we underestimated was how much of the business would rely not just on passion, but on building the right systems and discipline behind the scenes," says Kendall. "We went into it with a deep love for cheese and a belief in creating meaningful experiences, but running a sustainable business requires constant attention."

That realization came early on, and the couple approached it with a fierce intensity.

"We knew it would be hard work, and we didn't get a single day off for the first eight months," she says. "But I also didn't anticipate how difficult it would be to be a good manager."

Even with a natural inclination toward people, leadership proved to be its own challenge.

"We're both 'people people'— turns out that does not make you a good manager," says Kendall. "People are clearly diverse and unique and have their own lived experiences and needs. It's challenging to navigate sometimes, making sure the needs of our team and our business are simultaneously met."

While others may have given up, the Antonellis leaned in and developed their leadership skills and surrounded themselves with individuals who could help fill the gaps.

### FROM IDEA TO ENDURANCE

While many businesses can point to a singular moment when everything clicked, Antonelli's growth has been more gradual, defined by a series of small, intentional decisions.

"Honestly, every single year, we have to re-evaluate our model," says Kendall. "It's still a passion project to this day."

Still, there were moments that forced the couple to think differently, particularly when they began considering their future beyond the shop.

"The first big milestone was when we wanted to start a family,

yet we couldn't fathom how either of us could get a day off, much less both of us take a maternity/paternity leave," she says. "So, we modeled it out, set hiring dates, and took a leap of faith, paying folks before the money was all the way there."

That decision marked a turning point, not just for the business, but for the Antonellis personally.

"Now, looking back, we always said, 'Let's give it a go for a couple of years; then we'll go back to our day jobs,'" she says. "Fortunately, those first two years have now turned into 16. It astonishes us to this day that we're still here."

## CURATING WITH PURPOSE

In the early days, the couple faced the challenge of access and needed to convince producers to trust a new shop.

"We actually had to prove ourselves to convince artisans to let us feature their products," says Kendall. "They want to make sure their foods go to wholesalers and retailers who will take care of them, representing the cheeses at their ideal states."

At the same time, the shop had to navigate logistical hurdles in sourcing.

"We also didn't have much artisanal cheese coming into our market, so part of early sourcing was what we could get and who would actually give it to us," she says.

That's no longer the case, and the shop's history has actually turned up some new challenges concerning sourcing.

"Great artisans pop up daily, and we find ourselves saying 'no' more than we want," says Kendall. "But we're a small shop and we're long-term relationship people — meaning that, if we pick up a new product, it often means we have to kick something else off the shelves."

## LETTING THE EXPERIENCE LEAD

At Antonelli's, the experience of cheese is just as important as the product itself. That philosophy shapes everything from the retail case to the shop's popular tasting events.

"In the shop, guests can taste anything they want, and we let their taste buds guide them," says Kendall. "We sell what our cheesemongers are excited about."

For those seeking something different, Antonelli's offers a range of curated experiences, from cheese clubs to guided tastings.

"For those who want new, unique and surprising finds, we recommend our monthly cheese club," she says.

But it is the in-person tastings that have become the heart of the business.

"The best experience of cheese we offer is through our Signature Tasting Experience, a ticketed, two-hour guided tasting of seven cheeses, seven pairings and other goodies," says Kendall. "With eight public tastings and at least four private events weekly, we're hosting over 12,000 folks yearly."

Those experiences helped define Antonelli's identity. "That's where we've found our sweet spot, not only educating customers, but also truly living what it is to be in the hospitality industry and bring folks together over a shared experience," says Kendall.

As the business has evolved, so too has the couple's philosophy around cheese itself.

"When we first opened Antonelli's Cheese, our definition of 'great cheese' centered heavily on craftsmanship, and we often equated greatness with how hard it was to get in our area," she says. "Today, we still deeply value quality and craft, but we also define great cheese by the experience it creates."



## LEARNING FROM MISTAKES

As Antonelli's expanded, the Antonellis embraced new opportunities, including wholesale distribution and a second concept that ultimately didn't succeed.

"One of the biggest inflection points for us was realizing that we were not just selling cheese, we were creating experiences," says Kendall. "Another key moment was expanding into wholesale and broader distribution."

Not every move worked.

"I'd be remiss if I didn't mention our big failure of opening a second concept that included a kitchen, which we opened in January 2018 and closed it that December," she says.

Still, those setbacks proved valuable.

## STAYING CONNECTED

As the business has grown, maintaining a sense of intimacy has remained a priority.

"Whether someone is walking into our shop, attending a class or receiving a shipped box, we want it to feel personal," says Kendall.

That commitment extends to how the company engages with feedback.

"We literally read every review, and we respond to every negative one — often inviting guests for a coffee to discuss more," she says.

At its core, Antonelli's is guided by a simple but powerful belief: "Do good, eat good."

"That's not just a tagline for us, it is a filter for how we operate every day," says Kendall.

That philosophy is also evident in the company's actions.

"We've barely broken even the past two years, but we still managed to support over 400 local nonprofits last year," she says. "We always say that if we can't be in the business the way we want to — supporting our community — then it's not worth being in business."

## THE ROAD AHEAD

Even after more than a decade in business, the Antonellis remain optimistic about the future of cheese.

"What's so exciting is that the American cheese industry continues to attract some amazing people and create some delicious cheese," she says.

She feels inspired and hopeful that folks keep falling in love with new-to-them cheeses.

"Ultimately, through cheese, our goal is to continue creating joyful, meaningful experiences that invite more people into that world," she says.

CC

## FEATURE

# Brie: The King of Cheeses

Retailers are expanding premium, flavored and imported selections.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

**W**alk into the cheese department at Jungle Jim's International Market in Fairfield, Ohio, and discover what feels like a treasure trove of brie. The landmark supermarket carries more than 1,400 cheeses. Of these, French imports of brie, domestic brie, triple creams, goat milk brie, and flavored varieties fill the case, inviting shoppers to compare styles side by side.

"We keep brie and brie-style cheeses together and organize them by brand and country of origin so that customers can compare them side by side," says Christopher Black, assistant cheese shop manager at the over 4.5-acre specialty grocer often described as a "foodie theme park." "Within that, we group by richness, so double- and triple-cream cheeses are easily identifiable. Flavored bries are kept separate, and Camemberts are in their own section to maintain clarity, as they visually resemble each other but differ in flavor."

Staff further personalize the experience by asking shoppers how they will serve, pair, or enjoy the cheese, transforming brie from a familiar specialty cheese into a ready-to-explore category defined by creativity and craftsmanship.

## THE KING OF CHEESES

In 1936, authentic French brie first arrived in the U.S. aboard the luxury ocean liner, *Île de France*, says Sebastien Lehembre, business development director for Savencia Cheese USA, in New Holland, PA. "Importer Alfred Schratte used the ship's advanced refrigeration system to transport the delicate cheese across the Atlantic without spoilage, introducing traditional brie to American consumers for the first time."

Savencia Fromage & Dairy, headquartered in Viroflay, France, later developed the *Île de France* brand as its ambassador for exporting French cheeses to international markets, helping further establish brie's popularity in the U.S. Today, the global dairy group makes and imports premium brie and soft-ripened cheese under brands, such as Supreme, Alouette, Saint André and La Bonne Vie.

The seeds were sown for domestically crafted brie on the U.S. West Coast in 1865, when the Marin French Cheese Company in Petaluma, CA, began making its signature Petite Breakfast Brie during the population boom of the Gold Rush era, when eggs were in short supply.

## BRIE BEYOND BORDERS

Brie is a great example of how cheesemaking and its history vary by location.

"In Europe, cheese can only be called brie, specifically, Brie de Meaux, if it's made with raw milk, in a certain location, using a specific process, and it's protected by an AOP (Appellation



d'Origine Protégée)," says Bonnie Kaufman, Marin's senior brand manager.

Brie de Meaux, regarded as France's definitive bloomy-rind cheese, is celebrated for its earthy mushroom and truffle notes, its buttery texture, and pungent, velvety, bloomy rind. Authentic versions cannot be sold in the U.S., as FDA regulations prohibit the import of raw-milk cheeses aged fewer than 60 days. Instead, American shops carry pasteurized export adaptations.

Inspired by the traditions of Brie de Meaux and Brie de Melun, another raw milk, AOC-designed brie that hails from the Île-de-France region, Ferme de la Tremblaye, a dairy farm and cheese producer in La Boissière-École, France, crafts a farmstead brie, or Brie Fermier, near Rambouillet, southwest of Paris.

"We are located close to the AOP areas of Brie de Meaux and Brie de Melun, although we are not officially within those designated zones. Therefore, we cannot label our cheese under those names," says Baptiste Carrouché. "The key difference in our brie lies in its 'fermier' (farmstead) character. Compared to AOP Brie, it offers a more distinctive, farm-driven identity. Compared to many U.S.-made bries, which can be milder and more standardized, our brie has a more pronounced and complex flavor profile."

Brie Fermier is available in select U.S. cheese shops and restaurants.

## FRESH TAKES ON A FRENCH CLASSIC

In the U.S., brie has no formal FDA Standard of Identity, giving domestic producers flexibility to craft a wide range of soft-ripened, bloomy-rind cheeses sold as brie or brie-style. As a result, American cheesemakers have expanded the category with different milk types, aging styles, and flavor profiles, while maintaining brie's signature creamy paste and velvety white rind.

In April, Point Reyes Farmstead Cheese Company, in Petaluma, CA, officially added its classic-style brie to its permanent, year-round lineup. This brie features a soft, edible white rind that delivers delicate notes of white mushroom with every bite. Beneath it, the paste is velvety and rich with buttery flavor, a hint of milky sweetness, and delicate notes of cooked cream.

"We wanted a brie that's sophisticated enough for cheese enthusiasts but approachable enough for someone just discovering soft-ripened cheeses. It's the kind of cheese that belongs in everyone's fridge," says Lynn Giacomini Stray, co-owner and chief operating officer.

Earlier this year, Reny Picot, produced by Old Europe Cheese in Benton Harbor, MI, expanded its lineup with Peppercorn Brie, promoted for its bold flavor and refined visual contrast, alongside Herbs & Garlic Brie, which blends traditional buttery brie notes with herbs and mild garlic for a creamy, earthy, and balanced flavor profile.

Flavors have gained popularity with producers across the pond as well. Last year, Fromagerie Guilloteau, headquartered in the Rhône-Alpes region of France, introduced its Peppercorn Blend brie under its flagship Fromager d'Affinois brand.

"The new Peppercorn Blend is an exciting addition because it isn't a brie flavor you see very often, but is a flavor Americans seem very excited about," says Charlotte Auriault, marketing manager Americas and sales manager LATAM. "The cheese is made with a blend of five peppercorns, which are blended into the cow's milk right at the start of production. The spicier flavor of the peppercorns is well balanced with the sweetness of the cow's milk, and the contrast makes you keep reaching for another bite."

As for different forms, Cowgirl Creamery in Petaluma, CA, released its cut-and-wrap Triple Cream Brie last year, says Kaya Freiman, band manager. "This approximately 3-pound wheel's rind-to-paste ratio offers a decadent and delicious tasting experience with a stunning bloomy rind and buttery texture. Ideal for charcuterie boards, picnics, or elegant entertaining."

## SWEET, SAVORY & SPREADABLE

Brie paired with a variety of flavorful crackers at a tasting table, allowing guests to experiment with combinations and experience how the cheese's taste changes, is one way Jungle Jim's International Market's Black suggests enjoying brie. "For another option, prepare a small station with fig jam to accompany the brie, adding rich sweetness alongside its creamy texture. I also recommend serving brie simply with good crackers and a touch of honey after it comes to room temperature."

A round, log, or wee wedges of President-brand brie all star deliciously on a charcuterie board, according to Trevor Thomas, senior manager of retail merchandising and training for Lactalis USA, in Buffalo, NY, and part of the French-founded Lactalis Group, the world's largest dairy group as of 2026.

To accompany brie, Thomas suggests savory additions, such as stuffed blue cheese, pesto and pine nuts, smoked salmon and dill



## TRIPLE CREAM BRIE-STRAWBERRY BRUSCHETTA

*Cowgirl Creamery  
Petaluma, CA*

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound strawberries, diced
- 8 basil leaves, thinly chopped
- 1 tbsp honey
- 1 baguette, thinly sliced
- 8 oz Cowgirl Creamery Triple Cream Brie
- Balsamic glaze
- Basil leaves for garnish

### INSTRUCTIONS

Assemble strawberries: Preheat the oven to 425 F. While the oven preheats, dice the strawberries and place them in a mixing bowl with chopped basil and honey. Stir together to combine.

Toast baguette: Brush baguette slices with a thin layer of olive oil on one side, then place them on a baking sheet. Bake for 6-8 minutes, or until lightly golden and toasty.

Top with cheese and strawberries: Cut the Triple Cream Brie into long, thin slices, place one on each baguette slice, and top with 1 tbsp diced strawberries. Drizzle with balsamic glaze and garnish with fresh basil leaves. **CC**

and olive tapenade. For a taste of sweet, add dried apricots and preserved, dried or fresh figs and fig spread, candied pecans and honey, candied walnuts and caramel, blackberries or raspberries and preserves, and Medjool dates, pistachios and honey.

"People think of brie as only an entertaining cheese," adds Thomas. "Now, through social media, there are so many people realizing it's super versatile. Since brie is very mild and has a higher butter fat, it picks up and extends the flavor of anything mixed with it."

This summer, President Brie is participating in The Big Bite Tour, the 18th annual traveling festival series running May through August in 14 cities and serving as an official partner of America 250.

"We're showcasing hot applications for brie and introducing consumers to just how versatile it can be," says Debbie Seife, assistant director of marketing for the President brand, for Lactalis, USA. "Whether baked in a cast-iron skillet with honey, nuts, or fruit, or simply warmed on the grill and served with crusty bread or crackers, brie transforms into an easy, shareable dish perfect for summer entertaining and tailgating alike. These tours give us the chance to introduce brie to entirely new audiences." **CC**

## CHEESE TRAIL



# Following the Oregon Cheese Trail

The state is known for its diverse creameries and cheeses.

BY LISA WHITE

Although it may not have as many creameries as Wisconsin or California, what makes Oregon a standout state for cheese is its diverse cheesemakers. Each is unique in size, production and styles.

Approximately 20 of the state's commercial artisan cheesemakers are represented by the Oregon Cheese Guild. Founded in 2006, this nonprofit association is a collaborative effort to increase awareness of Oregon's artisanal cheeses, create educational opportunities, and provide a platform for cooperation and shared resources among Oregon cheesemakers.

According to Katie Bray, who became the guild's first executive director in 2015, "[Oregon cheesemakers are] extremely collaborative. The buzzword in the industry is 'precompetitive,' but I don't like that word because our cheesemakers are not really competitive. Each is unique, no matter if they're a homestead operation or buying milk from other farms."

Here, *CHEESE CONNOISSEUR* highlights a select Oregon artisan cheesemakers.

### ROGUE CREAMERY

CENTRAL POINT, OR

Operating in southern Oregon since 1933, Rogue Creamery is known for its blue cheese.

"In the '50s, our founder traveled to Roquefort to learn the art of cheesemaking," says Marguerite Merritt, senior brand manager. "He came back with plans for a factory to make a blue veined cheese."

Rogue Creamery has become well-known internationally. The company rebranded its flagship blue cheese, Oregon Blue

Veined Cheese, as simply, "Oregon Blue," in 2000.

"We use this as the base for many of our other blue cheeses, including Smokey Blue, which is cave-aged and cold-smoked over hazelnut shells and Alderwood," Merritt explains. "The flavor is akin to candied bacon, and we call it our gateway blue since it wins over blue cheese skeptics."

But probably its most well-known cheese is the award-winning Rogue River Blue, which debuted in 2001.

"It undergoes various unique treatments over several months," notes Merritt. "This includes extended aging, as well as being wrapped in grape leaves."

She adds Oregon cheesemakers are driven by a sense of artisan craftsmanship, more so than any other U.S. state.

"Every cheesemaker in our state puts attention to detail and to the craft. They want to create something unique," says Merritt. "Oregon cheeses are often recognized for their superior quality, even while not having the same reach as Wisconsin or California."

Rogue Creamery has been leaning into R&D by developing innovative recipes to take its blue cheese to the next level.

"One that we're finalizing this year is blue cheese soaked in a plum shrub or sweetened plum vinegar," says Merritt. "The flavor combination is fantastic, as the plum augments the fruitiness."



The company has partnered with Wegmans to create a blue cheese infused with yuzu, similar to a grapefruit, called BluZu.

## FACE ROCK CREAMERY

BANDON, OR

Face Rock Creamery, in business for close to 15 years, is only 70 miles from the California border.

The company specializes in cheddar, both aged and flavored. It has carved out a unique niche, which includes its most popular cheese, Vampire Slayer Garlic Cheddar. Its award-winning cloth-bound cheddar and spicy three pepper cheddar, In Your Face, are also big sellers.

"We're not a farmstead creamery, but we purchase all our milk from local Oregon dairies," says Greg Drobot, president and chief executive. "This includes a third-generation farm."

Face Rock introduces new cheddar flavors each year. Its most recent has an onion and chive flavor, like a Cotswold.

"Our cheesemakers are like mad scientists coming up with new flavors," notes Drobot.

The company enters the American Cheese Society (ACS) competition every year and received a silver medal in 2025 for its peppercorn harvest curds.

"We have won 20 first-place ACS awards, along with a bunch of second and third place honors," notes Drobot.

He says Oregon cheesemakers benefit from the temperate environment.

"Grass grows great in Oregon, as it's not too hot or cold, and the animals are happy," says Drobot. "Farms in less desirable climates can't pasture as much; our cows can roam in moderate temperatures."

About 70% of Face Rock's business is wholesale.

"We sell through all of the main specialty distributors across the country, with our cheese available in Kroger, Whole Foods, Costco and Safeway," says Drobot. "We're mainly on the two coasts and trying to fill out stores in the Midwest."

## APPLEGOAT VALLEY FARM, HOME OF MAMA TERRA MICRO CREAMERY

JACKSONVILLE, OR



Applegoat Valley Farm is a family-run dairy with owner/operator, Sarah Kucera, her partner, Thomas McEiver, and their two young sons, Farmer, 6, and Maverick, 4. In addition to cheese, the farm produces grass-fed beef, goat meat and heritage pork.

However, the cheese operation is fairly new. In 2024, Applegoat Valley Farm was approached by Mama Terra Micro Creamery to see if there was a purchasing opportunity.

"Applegoat raises goats for dairy and meat, and Mama Terra's owners asked if I wanted to buy them and run the creamery," says Kucera. "There was a neighboring farm, By George Creamery, that was closed for about four years and was leasing the dairy. So we moved the business there."

After getting the dairy recertified, it was up and running.

"Mama Terra was sold to us in June, and we obtained our

license in October, so there was no lapse in production," Kucera notes. "We also bought their goats, combined our herds, and took over their equipment. It was like three farms combined into one."

She decided to retain the Mama Terra label for the farmstead goat cheese, which is all produced on-site.

This includes fresh chevre in three staple flavors, with a limited flavor of the week.

"Our core flavors are Plain with Sea Salt, Mediterranean Herb with local lavender, and Caramelized Garlic, which is our best-seller," says Kucera. "All are made on site in one place with local ingredients and are either organic or certified organic."

The flavor of the week is popular and based on seasonality.

"It's whatever is fresh and available, with some coming out of our herb garden, like thyme, oregano or rosemary," says Kucera. "In spring, we do garlic scapes cheese."

She is considering revamping Mama Terra's packaging and label, which have been retained.

"We're considering color coding the packaging to signify the flavors," Kucera explains.

The farm, which includes Nubian and Lamancha goats, is not high production.

"Our goats make mild cheese, and we concentrate on quality over quantity," Kucera explains. "We're looking for that best milk for our cheeses, so our goat cheese is not goaty tasting; people who don't like goat cheese like our cheese, which is very mild and fresh."

Cheese is made every other day and sold at the farmers market three times a week, 15 food co-ops and specialty stores.

"We are more farmers and ranchers than cheesemakers, since we have minimal and simple equipment," Kucera says. "It takes two days to get milk for one cheese batch."

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# CHEESE TRAIL



## UMAPINE CREAMERY MILTON-FREEWATER, OR

Umapine Creamery started as a dairy farm, but veered into cheesemaking to become more profitable.

"I'm a retired registered nurse, and I started cheese-making with a friend," says

Yvonne Carroll. "We have since sold the dairy to our son and daughter-in-law, and I buy milk from them."

The two-person operation mainly sells cheeses at local farmers markets within 100 miles of the operation. It's the perfect place to taste test new varieties.

"We also have a small farm store where we sell Creamline Farms milk, butter, cream and my cheese," says Carroll. "One of the benefits of what we do is it allows us to help support other community projects, like the library and junior show."

It has also given Carroll and her husband time to travel.

"We have met other cheesemakers and dairymen to share stories, experiences, recipes, information, and lifestyles, discovering that we're not so different after all," she says.

Umapine primarily offers raw milk cheeses and is known for its flavored Gouda-style varieties.

Her favorite cheese is the Madam Gouda, a hard cheese that's aged for a year.

"It's rich, nutty and powerful," says Carroll. "Also, our Just Cheese is a farmstead cheese and the only one I wax now."

Umapine's Holy Cow cheese features tomatoes, ghost pepper and old Italian holy basil.

"The ghost peppers are latent in the cheese, so it has a delayed heat," Carroll explains.

Its newest popular variety is Angry Cats. "I was looking for a different hot sauce because the one we used wasn't available," says Carroll. "We met these guys at the Oregon Cheese Festival and decided to use their Hero sauce."

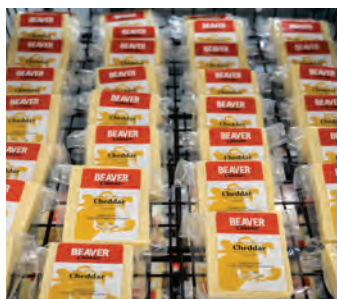
The creamery also offers Mexican cheeses, including one with mangos and ginger.

"My milk comes from cows on my farm, and you can't get much fresher than that," says Carroll. "We also have great grass throughout Oregon, which gives us a great product to make cheese with."

## OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY CORVALLIS, OR

In April, 2025, Oregon State University (OSU) opened an on-campus creamery that sells student-made cheese, ice cream and honey to the public.

The Beaver Classic Creamery produces Beaver Classic products made and grown by students in Oregon State's College of Agricultural Sciences.



## OREGON'S CHEESY EVENTS

- **Oregon Cheese Festival:** Created by cheese guru David Gremmels as a way to celebrate all cheeses made in the state, the festival is now a celebration of cheese and everything that goes with it. The two-day late-April event attracts cheesemakers from all over the country and Canada.
- **Oregon Cheese Trail:** Visitors can use a hard copy or digital version of a map to visit local cheesemakers.
- **Oregon Cheese Month:** In September, the guild celebrates Oregon's artisan cheesemakers and their wares at retailers, cheese shops, restaurants and farmers markets.
- **Wedge Festival:** The Wedge, held in September, celebrates cheese and everything that goes with it. Attendees can taste and buy hundreds of local artisan cheeses, specialty foods, beer, wine, spirits and cider.

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This is the second time OSU has operated a creamery from historic Withycombe Hall. The original creamery was completed in 1952 but closed in the late 1960s to make way for the OSU Theatre.

"There was a small revival of the creamery here in Withycombe Hall that existed from 2012 to 2022, which motivated the college to fundraise for the newest version, so this is really the third iteration," says former OSU food science student and current dairy pilot plant manager, Brandon Riesgaard.

Now, more than 50 years later, following a \$71 million renovation of the 81,000-square-foot Withycombe Hall, the creamery is back making Beaver Classic. The cheese is made with milk from cows in the Arbutnot Dairy Center.

"What started as updating the creamery and putting in a scoop shop turned into an entire renovation," says Riesgaard. "The creamery took over the theater."

After the three-year renovation, he came on as pilot manager.

"All employees are students, so I give them experiential learning to work in a cheese plant," says Riesgaard. "I work with many different partners, including Tillamook's management, to pinpoint skills students may not have out of college, then implement those. So if Tillamook hires one of my students, they are partially trained."

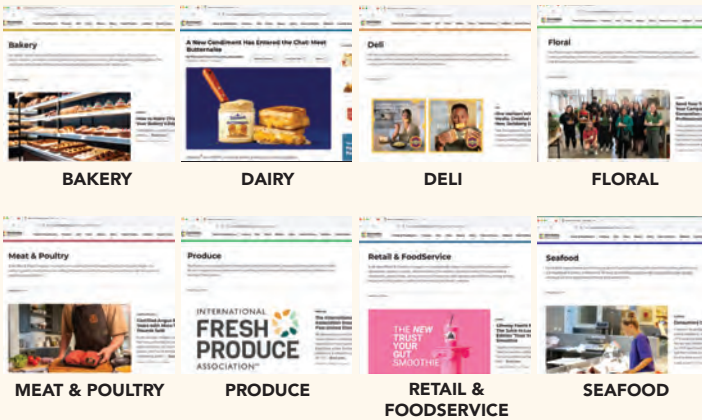
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