



AMERICAN CHEESE

It's Not What You Think



One thing we look forward to all year long is summer fare — from baby back ribs to blue crabs. What summer would be complete without a generous slice of sharp cheddar on your burger or crumbles of blue atop juicy wedges of tomato?

Sadly, the cheese industry has suffered the ill-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In a May survey administered by the American Cheese Society, 58 percent of the approximately 1,000 cheesemakers, cheesemongers, and other cheese-related respondents noted a decrease in overall sales. As nearly every restaurant offers a cheese board, antipasto, or other dish featuring artisanal cheeses, it comes as no surprise that cheesemakers reported a 51.5 percent loss of sales to the restaurant market. This plunge has been compounded by the loss of future orders, inventory loss, and supply chain disruption.¹

What can we do to help these craftspeople and their culinary art? What so many of us do so well — take out your laptop and order online. The American Cheese Society encourages us to “think small and buy locally from artisans and producers.” Consumers have been eager to help the cause as over half of cheesemakers surveyed have enjoyed an increase in e-commerce sales.

Vincent and I have already savored two cheese shipments from our favorite U.S. cheesemaker — Jasper Hill Farm in Greensboro, Vermont. On their mailing list after our online orders, we were invited to participate in a virtual interactive tasting entitled “Tasting Notes from the Underground.” This first of a lecture series was broadcast live from Jasper Hill’s cellars — a 22,000 square foot aging facility located 30 feet underground and comprising 7 vaults each set to a specific temperature and humidity level. Co-founder, Mateo Kehler, led the over 230 participants

on a tour of his cheese digs where he and his team ripen products from their own creamery as well as creations by neighboring producers.²

Mateo and his guest lecturers, microbiologists Rachel Dutton (Assistant Professor of Molecular Biology at UC San Diego) and Benjamin Wolfe (Associate Professor of Microbiology at Tufts University), described the role of microbes in the ripening process, opined on the purpose of the rind, and offered detailed tasting notes. The biggest lesson learned was the important role of the rind — aesthetics (form, shape, pigment), preservation, and, of course, taste.

As the experts spoke and nibbled, we circled around our own cheese board. The tasting kit of five cheeses (and a dry cured salami, another specialty of Jasper Hill) arrived a few days before the event and included registration for the class. Accompanying the webinar information were

helpful instructions on how to arrange our board.

This is a summary of what we enjoyed from the Jasper Hill cellars:

- **Moses Sleeper:** Similar to a Brie, this is a bloomy rind cow's milk cheese. Creamy and silky in texture, it has a toasty flavor and mushroomy scent.
- **Willoughby:** This washed rind pinky-orange cheese is buttery in texture. A funky, earthy flavor distinguishes this cow's milk cheese. The small wheel size is perfect for individual purchase.
- **Highlander:** A raw cow and goat washed rind cheese inspired by French and Swiss Raclette. Like Raclette, it would be ideal for melting over boiled potatoes, cured meats, and cornichons.
- **Landaff:** This raw cow natural rind cheese is similar in texture to a British crumbly cheese. It has a grassy scent and a slight cheddar-y tang.
- **Bayley Hazen Blue:** A cheese board requires a blue, of course. This raw cow's milk has the creamiest texture of any blue I have encountered. Many may prefer this to other blues as its pepperiness is much more mild.

In my descriptions, I made sure to incorporate the rind terminology we learned: 1) bloomy is the white cloudy rind that results from inoculation with mold; 2) washed rinds are rinsed with a salt brine solution; and 3) natural rinds look like a crust and are the result of doing very little. (I hope I get an A!)

If you feel like you missed out, don't. There will be more virtual tastings. Check out Jasper Hill's website for more information at www.jasperhillfarm.com

To further whet your palate and support cheese artisans, I encourage you to read about Victory Cheese, "a grassroots collective comprised of cheese professionals across the country on a mission to protect and fortify [their] industry as [they] weather the fallout of this crisis."³ You have likely read about the Victory Gardens of the 1940s when Americans planted their own fruit and vegetable seeds to support the war effort. While the vast majority of us are not in a position to become cheese "affineurs," we can support cheese producers and "stand up for domestically-produced cheese" by purchasing a Victory Cheese Box online at www.victorycheese.com/box. Think of the Victory Cheese consortium as a way of giving consumers the opportunity to buy from producers who could not otherwise offer their cheeses in the online marketplace.

I leave you with this thought from Victory Cheese... "These interdependent people and their businesses reflect decades of hard work, risk, passion and ingenuity. Cheese has helped immigrants find their way in a new world. Cheese has built businesses that keep land and jobs in agriculture. Cheese has inspired chefs and nourished families."

For you cheese-lovers out there, declare "Victory Cheese!" 

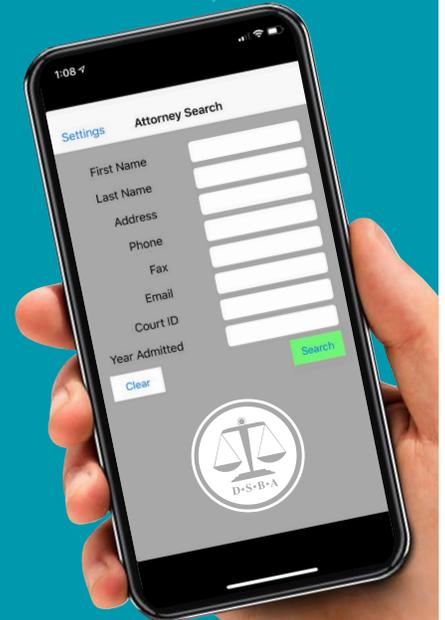
Notes:

1. Impact of COVID-19 on the American Cheese Industry. (n.d.). Retrieved July 03, 2020, from <https://www.cheesesociety.org/covid-19-impact-survey/>.
2. Jasper Hill Farm - A Taste of Place. (n.d.). Retrieved July 03, 2020, from <https://www.jasperhillfarm.com/>.
3. About Us: Victory Cheese. (n.d.). Retrieved July 03, 2020, from <https://www.victorycheese.com/our-story>.



Susan E. Poppiti serves as a math content expert for UPchieve, an ed-tech non-profit providing free, online STEM tutoring to high school students. She also provides cooking instruction through La Cucina di Poppiti, LLC. Susan can be reached at spoppiti@hotmail.com.

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