



Harmony Valley Farm

Cheese Plate Newsletter

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CHEESE SELECTIONS OF THE WEEK

If you are a Harmony Valley Farm Cheese share member, then this is a good week for you! We have some interesting selections for you this week. Since we are officially into summer now, we want to bask in all the glory summer has to offer...including the beauty of grass in the form of cheese. Dairy cows are really energy converters. Animals that are raised by rotationally grazing on nutrient-rich pastures capture the energy from the sun that is converted into food by the plants the cows eat. The energy and nutrients from the plants are then used to produce milk. We either drink the milk or eat the cheese and thus the energy is then converted in us. So, essentially we are eating grass! Cheese that is made from milk produced during spring and summer months when cows are grazing in the pastures is very different than cheese that is made with milk produced during the winter months when the cows are eating alfalfa and stored forage instead of grazing. You can notice a difference in color and taste. Spring and summer milk usually has a golden or yellow hue to it. This is caused by the pigments in beta carotene (Vitamin A) that are found in the pasture grasses. You can also notice differences in flavor in cheeses made in the spring or summer versus other parts of the year.

This week we have 2 selections that really do exemplify this phenomenon of grass-based milk making cheese taste and look different. Take time to really taste the **OTTER CREEK SUMMER CHEDDAR**. You will have an opportunity to taste Otter Creek Dairy's different seasonal cheddars throughout the remainder of the season. Pay attention to the color and flavor of this cheese so you can make note about which cheeses you like more or less. (Heat-Treated)

You can also see the impact grass has had on the **SOGNE** selection from **PASTURELAND COOP**. All of their cheese is made solely with spring and summer milk, as you can see evidence of in their cheese and butter. The Sogne is the second of the Alpine Sisters selections (remember the amazing Thoten?) (Raw milk, aged over 60 days)

If you are looking for a nice cheese to use for a simpler preparation such as burgers, tacos or pizza, then try the **MONTEREY JACK FROM CEDAR GROVE**. (Pasteurized)

Coming Soon!
Ramp Cheddar
It's Amazing!!

PastureLand Dairy Cooperative

This week we are introducing PastureLand's Alpine Sister #2, Sogne. This is the first year we have worked with Pastureland Cooperative, and it has been interesting learning about this group of producers. From the responses I've heard thus far, it seems that most cheese share members enjoyed PastureLand's first cheese selection, Thoten.

Pastureland Cooperative was founded in 1998 by a unique group of farmers who shared a similar commitment to grass-based farming using a whole farm approach.

"Our job is to manage solar energy. We harvest it in the form of grass, using animals. The healthier the system is, the healthier our product is going to be."—Dan French, PastureLand founding member and board chair.

We invited PastureLand to participate in our cheese share program because their products meet the criteria we are looking for—grass-based milk production, certified organic, identifiable milk sources, and tasty cheeses.

The cooperative is comprised of 4 families. Dan and Muriel French farm near Dodge Center, Minnesota where they manage a herd of Holstein and Jersey crosses. Roger and Michelle Benrud farm in Goodhue, Minnesota. Dennis and Ronda Stelling farm on Dennis's family farm near Millville, Minnesota. The fourth farm is managed by Dave and Florence Minar who also sell their products under the Cedar Summit Farm label. All 4 farms are certified organic and Food Alliance certified. The milk they produce is not just any milk. They feed their animals by rotationally grazing them on nutrient rich pastures. They only produce cheese and butter with milk produced during the spring and summer months when the animals are grazing the

PastureLand Dairy Cooperative, continued

pastures, which truly makes it a superior and unique product. During the winter months, many of the cows are not even milked until they calve again in the spring. This means a more manageable lifestyle for the farming family, and this is a more natural cycle for the animals. As you experience their cheeses, you may notice that they all have a characteristic creamy yellow color. What you are experiencing is the effect of nutrient transfer from the grass to the milk and thus the cheese—specifically beta carotene that gives the cheese a different color. If you compare cheese made from milk from the same herd of cows but produced at different times of the year, the difference in color and flavors can be dramatic. This is what makes their milk and cheese so special.

I recently spoke with Steve Youngburns, the sales director and Chief Operating Officer of the cooperative. We talked about the history of the co-op as well as the future of PastureLand. In our conversation, I found it interesting to learn about the impact big agribusiness is having on a small group of farmers in Minnesota. The difference between their way of farming and the conventional, large scale agribusiness way are so drastically different that you would think there is no way one could touch the other. Not the case. Recently PastureLand, who also sells their milk on a year round milk contract to Westby Creamery, was asked to decrease their production. Right now the cows are in the height of their glory—weather is good, pastures are lush, and production is up. It isn't that Westby creamery is not doing well, it's that they sell to a larger entity who sells to another larger entity who needs to cut back because market milk prices are low. Hence, the trickledown effect of the long arm of the large, conventional dairy world has reached down and touched four little farms in Minnesota.

So what do they do with the extra milk? Well, one option is to just let the cows dry up, thus decreasing production. Another alternative is to make more cheese. However, to turn milk into cheese requires an investment. Right now is a challenging time to get operating credit, which is necessary to invest milk into cheese. Since cheese is aged and stored, there is a significant investment to convert milk into cheese before you get a return on the product. The economics of the dairy industry can be complicated sometimes, even for a small organization.

One of the important facts to remember about our food system is that we are all in this together. Large, conventional agribusiness makes it challenging for small producers with a unique product to get a premium for the products they produce. We are glad to be supporting other local producers and hope you will continue to seek out their products with a willingness to pay the producer what their product is worth. Remember that the premium you pay is payment for time and investment the farmer or producer makes to make a quality product.

Cheese Fondue

I helped my Mom clean out her storage closet one time and had to laugh when she pulled out 3 fondue pots still in their original packaging - wedding presents from the 70's. Fondue actually originated many years ago in Switzerland as a way to enjoy preserved foods like cheese and crusty bread. Of course the 60's and 70's were a fun time to go dipping in a pot of olive or gold color filled with cheese, chocolate, oil etc. This timeless form of culinary entertainment is still fun and enjoyable today, thus we invite you to join us around the fondue pot.

The traditional recipe for Swiss cheese fondue usually includes two cheeses, Gruyere and Emmentaler. It's best to use at least two different cheeses so you get a more balanced flavor—not too sharp, not too bland. When you make it at home, be creative with your cheese selections---mix and match and see what you get. Another key ingredient is either flour, cornstarch, or potato starch to keep the fondue from separating. Of course, fondue is all about accentuating the flavors of the cheese, which is why it is important to add either wine, beer, lager, or kirsch. Traditionally kirsch, a cherry brandy, was used if the cheese was too young and the fondue needed more tartness. The liquid also helps to insulate the cheese so it doesn't burn or separate. If you want to play around further with flavor, you can add garlic, peppers, or any other flavoring you might like. Fondue was traditionally made in an earthenware pot called a caquelon. It's best to use a heavier pot when making fondue so you don't scorch the cheese mixture, and so it stays warm. When making the fondue, remember to keep the heat at low to medium and stir it frequently to keep it from scorching or getting too hot.

The pot of fondue is usually placed in the middle of the table either on a hot plate or over a candle or burner. Diners select their place around the pot and each person has a long handled fondue fork. While good crusty bread is a good dipper for cheese fondue, don't limit yourself. You can dip many other things in fondue including raw or blanched vegetables (zucchini, cherry tomatoes, roasted carrots, par-boiled potatoes, celery, roasted or raw cauliflower, broccoli, peas, green beans, asparagus, the green tops on carrots (no fork required). Do remember fondue etiquette—no double-dipping and don't put your mouth on the fork.

If you don't have a fondue pot and forks, improvise with what you have. Dinner forks or skewers will work fine. A small heavy bottomed saucepan can serve as the pot. Have fun!

Cheddar Beer Fondue

6 oz Monterey Jack cheese, shredded
4 oz PastureLand's Sogne cheese, Gruyere or other hard cheese, crumbled or shredded
4 oz sharp cheddar (Otter Creek's summer will work great), shredded
1 ½ tbsp all-purpose flour
1 cup lager beer, at room temperature
1 tsp dry mustard

In a bowl, combine cheeses and flour; mix well to coat cheese with flour. Set aside. In a large saucepan, bring beer to a simmer over medium heat. Reduce heat to medium low. Add cheese-flour mixture by handfuls to saucepan, stirring constantly after each addition with a wooden spoon in a figure-eight motion until cheese is melted. When cheese is nearly all melted, stir in dry mustard, mixing well. Transfer to fondue pot and serve immediately.

This recipe was adapted from the Gourmet Sleuth website. Visit this site for many more fondue recipe ideas. www.gourmetsleuth.com