

Dupont Cheese Celebrates 48 Years; Thriving On Traditional Colby Longhorn Production

Marion, WI—Dupont Cheese celebrated its 48th anniversary of operation early last month, but the tradition of cheesemaking goes back a lot further.

Fred Laack describes himself as the caboose, that being the youngest of brothers to make cheese and the son of cheese maker, Harry Laack. But the rich tradition goes back to his grandfather Leon's days making cheese in Greenleaf, WI.

Today, Fred is joined by his son, Jon, and his grandson, Trevor, making this a five-generation family of cheese makers.

"I grew up in the cheese factory and had a chance to go do something else, but I guess cheesemaking is in my blood," said Fred Laack, owner of Dupont Cheese.

In 1970, Laack purchased the current cheese plant that first made cheese in 1910.

"We had three conventional vats with about 35,000 pounds of milk a day," Laack said. "We started at 6:00 in the morning and we were done by 1:00 in the afternoon".

Today, things are far more efficient and organized but for whatever reason, Laack and his son Jon and his grandson, Trevor, work harder and longer hours.

"Now we start at 2:30 in the morning and the last worker leaves at 6:30 at night," said Jon Laack, who co-owns Dupont Cheese with his father.

Fred said the growth of the company has been gradual.

"Today we run about 170,000 pounds of milk and can go up to 200,000 pounds when things get busy," Fred Laack said. "We're making six days a week about five vats a day. We probably make

17,000 pounds of cheese a day on the average."

Colby Longhorns

One of the reasons the Laacks are working longer days is the popularity of the company's Colby Longhorns. It's a product that is a Laack family tradition.

"We've always made horns here," Fred Laack said. "My dad made horns and my grandfather made Colby."

Fred Laack said that while the making of longhorns is far more efficient, the longhorn manufacturing segment isn't necessarily getting better.

He described the standard Colby Longhorn as four or six inches in diameter and 13 inches long. For slicing operations, Dupont makes the same diameters but the length can be 26 inches.

"There are about five or six plants that are really making a good, traditional Colby Longhorn," Fred Laack said. "There are others out there that are still punching a horn out of a 640."

He said traditional Colby Longhorn manufacture is far too labor intensive and costly for bigger companies who will take a 640 pound Colby block and punch out traditional longhorn shapes.

"A traditional longhorn has better flavor," Laack said. "The whey gets out of the cheese faster because you have a smaller piece of cheese. It still is a good business, but the bigger buyers aren't looking for the same product that we manufacture here."

And the fresher the better, says Jon Laack.

"We'll get buyers in here or we'll demo a fresh Colby, maybe made the same day and packaged the



Jon, Fred and Trevor are the fourth, third and fifth (respectively) generation of cheese makers in the Laack family. They recently celebrated 48 years of making cheese at Dupont Cheese.

same day, and they'll go crazy for it. The next time it may be a week old and they'll look at us and say it wasn't as good as the last time," Jon Laack said.

Today, Dupont's cheese production is 90 percent Colby and Rainbow or a mixed Colby Jack. Just before the weekend, vats of Cheddar curd will be made.

"I think the Colby Jack has really grown," Jon Laack said. "And the longhorn business is a specialty product that has the eye of traditional cheese buyers."

Dupont does make a small batch of Colby in block form, but most of it is cut into one-and-a-half pound chubs for retail.

Other flavored Colby varieties include Bacon; Bacon and Onion; Cajun; Caraway; Dill; Garlic; Garlic and Onion; Onion; Pepper, Smoked; Taco; and Vegetable.

The company has both private and branded label programs available for retailers.

"We have markets along the East coast," Jon Laack said. "We do well in Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin of course, Missouri and Texas as well."

Over the past few years, Dupont has introduced a Gouda in four-inch diameter. They also offer that in a smoked variety.

"We'll see where the Gouda and the flavors go," Jon Laack said. "Pepper has always been the biggest flavored seller for us. Some of the flavors really haven't taken off but we are seeing pretty good growth in a few of the others. We do better when we demo the products, where we can tell our story."

Dupont buys their milk from 60 nearby patrons, the largest shipping about 23,000 pounds a day.

In his of business, Fred Laack says a lot of things have changed.

"Convenience is the thing today. The quality of milk is far superior, the farmers are larger and the standards of identity are better," he said. "But the one thing I see is people want to go back to quality. It may not have always been this way, but I'm seeing more people are willing to pay a little more for it."

For more on Dupont Cheese, visit www.dupontcheese.com; call 1-800-895-2873; or email: office@DupontCheeseInc.com.



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