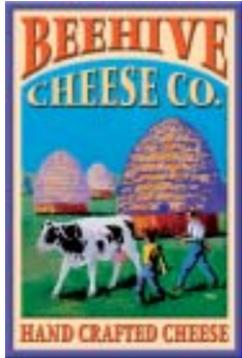


Utah's Beehive Cheese Company Breaks Into Specialty Market With Barely Buzzed Cheddar

Uintah, UT—With counsel and guidance from Utah State University, the Beehive Cheese Company has secured its place in the Cheddar market, and found success with some imaginative, surface-flavored specialties.

Partners Tim Welsh, Pat Ford and Stew Christensen began seriously exploring the idea of starting a cheese company in 2004.

A good description of the trio's background in cheesemaking and microbiology would be "absolutely none," Welsh said. Rather, the men's experience lay in finance, software, sales and real estate.



The initial desire to enter specialty cheesemaking came in 1999 after reading Steven Jenkin's "Cheese Primer," Welsh said.

"I had two partners in the software business and I told them I was going to make cheese, and they laughed pretty hard," he said.

The partners enrolled in cheesemaking short courses at Utah State University, Oregon State University and Sonoma, CA. They began experimenting with cheese production at Utah State's creamery.

"When we started, we wanted to do something very European and esoteric, but the more we thought about the reasons we were opening a small creamery, the more we decided we wanted to make a cheese that used to be available locally but no longer was – because all the small creameries are gone," Welsh said.

"And that cheese for us was Cheddar and cheese curds," he continued. Utah State approached us and wanted us to use its make recipes for Cheddar and Parmesan, Welsh said.

A 5,000 square-foot facility was selected in spring 2005, and the first batch of cheese was made the following September.

With design help from Utah State, the "shell of a warehouse" was turned into a micro-cheese plant.

During the design phase of the plant, Welsh travelled across the country visiting small cheese makers, gathering information and inquiring about the "biggest mistakes" made before eventually achieving success.



Beehive Cheese Company's award-winning Barely Buzzed Cheddar is hand-rubbed with a mixture of Turkish coffee grounds and French lavender, pressed into the cheese with canola oil. The cheese is then aged on Utah Blue Spruce aging racks in the company's humidity-controlled caves.

Many cheese makers admitted they built their plants too small to begin with, Welsh said. Last year, we produced at about 18 percent of capacity; this year, we'll be at about 35 percent.

Milk for the cheese plant is shipped from a single Jersey dairy in West Ogden, UT, about 10 miles from the facility. Production for 2008 is slated for about 100,000 pounds – sales are roughly equal for Cheddar and specialty varieties, Welsh said.

"At first, we weren't sure the market here would take specialty cheese, so we started selling in San Francisco," Welsh said. "We're still working with our original distributor in the Bay Area, and we're selling a lot of cheese in the Pacific Northwest."

Beehive Cheese is also selling its products in Texas, Chicago, New York, and the local Utah market is "growing quite nicely, too," Welsh said.

Folks Buzzing About 'Barely Buzzed' One of the most sought-after cheese varieties offered by Beehive Cheese Company's is Barely Buzzed – Cheddar hand-rubbed with Turkish coffee grounds and French lavender, pressed with canola oil.

The cheese is aged on Utah Blue Spruce aging racks in the company's humidity-controlled caves, and moved to different temperatures during the aging process to develop texture and flavor.

"To satisfy our craving for esoteric cheese, we started doing crazy things with Cheddar," Welsh said. "Kind of different from what you would expect from a flavored Cheddar, in that we're surface-treating the cheese with flavor."

"Instead of throwing jalapenos in the cheese and mixing it all together, we're working on rubs," he said.

In 2006, Beehive Cheese took its last pound of Barely Buzzed to the American Cheese Society (ACS) conference in Portland, OR.

"We popped it out one day between seminars, and a cheese buyer from Central Market ordered up 4,000 pounds," Welsh said.

Other flavored Cheddars include Smoked Apple Walnut, Sweet Basil/Parsley, Habanero, and Rose-

mary & Hungarian Paprika. Flavors are limited to the supply on-hand at any particular moment.

Beehive Cheese also makes an American-style Parmesan called "Aggi" AnoParmesan, using a recipe courtesy of Utah State University.

Other varieties include Uintah Jack, Promontory Cheddar, "Full-Moon" Raw Milk Cheese, Squeaky Bee Curds in flavored and plain styles, and Emigrant – a Beehive Cheese original reminiscent of a full-flavored aged cheese "with the pineapple nose of a good Parmesan."

Importance Of Local Branding

We named our cheese company "Beehive Cheese" after Utah, which is the "Beehive State," and a lot of our cheeses are named after local things – to brand ourselves locally and with Utah, Welsh said.

Aged Cheddar from Beehive Cheese is called Promontory Cheddar, after Promontory Point – the train which runs to that location comes right through the canyon behind our cheese plant, he said.

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Tim Welsh, Beehive Cheese

Besides the sheer amount of work involved in starting a cheese plant, finding the right used equipment also proved to be challenging.

Considering the age of our equipment – even before we started making cheese – we have more than 275 years of experience, Welsh said.

For more information, contact the Beehive Cheese Company at (801) 476-0900 or visit www.beehivecheese.com.



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