



How Now Brown Cow? Brown Swiss Cheese Line Gets New Name, Logo

New Glarus, WI and Beloit, WI— Early next month, a unique line of cheeses created by the Brown Swiss Cattle Breeders Association of the U.S.A. (BSCBA) will sport new packaging, complete with a revamped logo and different name.

BSCBA members voted last month to change the name of its brand of cheese from “Exclusively Swiss” to “Braun Suisse Käse.”

Made with milk from registered Brown Swiss cows, its origins date back to a man named Howard Voegeli, a well-known ambassador for the dairy industry and the Brown Swiss breed who passed away earlier this year.

Voegeli’s great-grandfather, a Swiss immigrant, founded the family farm in Monticello, WI, in 1854. His grandfather introduced the first registered Brown Swiss cow to the herd in 1895.

Named Dairyman of the Year in 2000 at the World Dairy Expo, Howard Voegeli “lived and breathed Brown Swiss.” As part of the Chalet Cheese Co-op, Voegeli was instrumental in making Brown Swiss cheese up until three years ago.

“We’re looking to increase the demand for Brown Swiss milk by promoting Brown Swiss products, starting with Brown Swiss cheese.”

—David J. Kendall, executive secretary, BSCBA

At that time, Silvan Blum, plant manager of the Deppeler Cheese Factory in Monroe, WI, began making Swiss and Cheddar using Brown Swiss milk. Deppeler’s milk is supplied by patrons of the Chalet Cheese Co-op, which currently includes two herds of Brown Swiss cows.

Roughly one year ago, Blum approached Barb Kummerfeldt and Steve Wisdom, owners of the Maple Leaf Cheese and Chocolate Haus in New Glarus, with a proposal to stock the “Exclusively Swiss” line.

The Black Forest-style shop carries domestic cheeses from throughout Green County – including the Deppeler brand – along with imported cheeses, wine, premier chocolates and other specialty items.

When stepping through the door of Maple Leaf, customers get a crash

course in the finer points of local artisan cheesemaking. Kummerfeldt guides visitors from one cheese to the next, urging them to sample varieties made from Brown Swiss milk and their American counterparts to see if they can taste the difference.

Consumers have been delighted with the Brown Swiss styles, Kummerfeldt said, with sales running neck-and-neck with regular varieties. Impressive, since the former commands a more premium price.

“It’s definitely a specialty item, geared towards people who are looking for something different,” Blum said.

He characterized the Braun Suisse Käse Baby Swiss as having a distinctly European flavor.

“The way that it has been described to me, people that have been in the industry for a long time say it has a European, old-world flavor,” Blum said.

As for Brick and Cheddar made from Brown Swiss milk, Blum said they are firmer-bodied than the American styles.

“They start with a milder flavor and they’re going to age gracefully,” he said.

A More Inclusive Brand Name

Motivation behind the recent name change came from the assumption of customers that “Exclusively Swiss” meant just that – Swiss cheese.

“People had the unfortunate tendency to focus on the ‘Swiss’ and walk right past the other varieties,” Kummerfeldt said.

Under its new name, the brand will include Baby Swiss, Brick, Cheddar, Aged Brick and Aged Cheddar. About 5 percent of the cheese from Deppeler’s is made from Brown Swiss milk; Blum said he would eventually like it to be 25 percent.

The new label should be in stores by Dec. 1, 2003.

Currently, the line is available at specialty retail shops scattered throughout the Green County area. Distribution is handled by Hoch Enterprises, Inc., also owned by Wisdom. At present, he is concentrating on delivering Braun Suisse Käse to locations throughout Wisconsin, but has received inquiries from stores in Beverly Hills, New York and Las Vegas.

The cheese is packaged exclusively under the “Braun Suisse Käse” label. Wisdom said he hopes to go national in three to five years.

The cheese is intended for upscale

specialty stores, not necessarily the mainstream market. Emphasis will also be placed on retailer and consumer education.

“This cheese will probably never be a grocery store cheese,” Wisdom said. “It’s made for the discerning customer.”

Likewise, retailers will be protected with exclusivity. Only one retailer within a 50-mile radius will be able to carry the line. In urban areas, there will be one retail outlet for every 100,000 people.

Health Benefits Of Brown Swiss Milk

Though research is still in its preliminary stages, there is evidence that milk from registered Brown Swiss cows has higher levels of conjugated linoleic acid (CLA) and is naturally lower in triglycerides.

CLA is a fatty acid found in beef and dairy fats that may have potent cancer-fighting properties. In several animal studies, as little as one-half of one percent CLA in the diet reduced tumor size by more than 50 percent.

Triglycerides are the chemical form in which most fat exists in food as well as in the body. Elevated triglycerides are linked to the occurrence of coronary artery disease in some people.

This presents a marketing advantage and an opportunity to differentiate ourselves from the competition, said David J. Kendall, BSCBA executive secretary.

“The potential for this product is phenomenal,” he said.

Financial backing for the cheese is funded in part by a smallish checkoff program modeled after one established by the American Jersey Cattle Association. Kendall said BSCBA is looking to expand its checkoff program in the near future.

“We’re looking to increase the demand for Brown Swiss milk by promoting Brown Swiss products, starting with Brown Swiss cheese,” Kendall said.

The Brown Swiss Cattle Breeders Association of the USA was established in 1880 in Worcester, MA. Its primary goal was to establish an official herdbook for Brown Swiss cattle. Today, its main functions are the registry and transfer of Brown Swiss. In 2001, registrations totaled 9,957 and 5,056 cows were transferred.

In 2001, there were 942 active national members in the Association throughout the US. The largest concentration of Brown Swiss herds are in Wisconsin, Ohio and Iowa. In Wisconsin, there are between 65 and 70 Association members.

Howard’s son Bryan Voegeli now runs the family farm in Monticello and cares for a herd of 120 Brown Swiss cows. Milk from that herd is used to make “Braun Suisse Käse” cheese.

“They’re bred to produce a higher butterfat content, which makes it a richer, creamier product,” Voegeli said.

For more information on Braun Suisse Käse, contact Barb Kummerfeldt or Steve Wisdom at Hoch Enterprises at (800) 624-1675. •



From left: David J. Kendall, executive secretary, Brown Swiss Cattle Breeders Association of the U.S.A.; Bryan Voegeli, dairy farm owner and manager; Barb Kummerfeldt and Steve Wisdom, owners, Maple Leaf Cheese & Chocolate Haus; and Silvan Blum, plant manager, Deppeler’s Cheese.