

get YOUR GOAT

Artisan goat cheeses from top-notch farms are a chef favorite.

By Kathryn Kjarsgaard



Quality Dairy Goat Co-op

POSSIBLY one of the first dairy products ever made, goat cheese has been crafted for thousands of years. It was during the 1970s and 1980s, however, that it rose to popularity in the U.S. Today, it is a chef favorite and a staple on restaurant menus across the country.

Jennifer Bice, owner of Redwood Hill Farm, Sebastopol, Calif., credits chefs for the specialty's rise in popularity. "When I give

tours of my farm, I tell people the reason goat products have enjoyed so much popularity is thanks to chefs. Back in the '70s and '80s, chefs went to Europe and had goat cheese, then brought it to their menus here."

And while chefs are drawn to the taste and quality of the goat cheese they use, the way the animals are treated and the conditions of the farms are of top priority in their selection of a purveyor.

Shaun Garcia, chef de cuisine at Soby's in Greenville, S.C., has been a loyal user of Anderson, S.C.-based Split Creek Farm goat cheese since 2006. "The owners (Evin Evans and Patricia Bell) personally have a relationship with the animals," Garcia says. "There are more than 200 animals, and they know all their names. I figure if they take care of the animals that well, then I know they are taking care of the product. I wanted to use a local,

Opposite page: LaClare Farms' Evalon aged goat's milk cheese won "best of show" in the 2011 U.S. Championship Cheese Contest, giving cheesemaker Katie Hedrich a double honor: second female and second goat cheese to win the title.

sustainable and traceable product, and the farm is 30 minutes down the road. Plus, they have a whole portfolio, including goat feta and French-style chevre."

Volt chef/owner Bryan Voltaggio agrees that passion and dedication are key to making a good product. His Frederick, Md.-based restaurant has used goat cheeses from Cherry Glen Goat Cheese Co., Boyds, Md., since opening in 2008. "I first met Diane Kirsch (farm owner) and Wayne Cullen (general manager) three or four months before opening Volt," he says. "The farm started to raise goats for show, and they kind of fell into cheesemaking with the extra milk. Then, they became obsessed with it. You can tell their passion behind it.

"I think some of the best farmers get started like this. Their production was low and small in the beginning but now has really grown, but they have not sacrificed quality. That really shows their commitment."

FROM FARM TO FORK

LaClare Farms, Chilton, Wis., is one of many farms producing goat cheese in America's Dairyland state. The farm's Evalon aged goat's milk cheese won "best of show" out of 1,604 cheeses at the U.S. Championship Cheese Contest in Green Bay, Wis., March 8-10.

"I was only the second female to win, and this was the second goat cheese to win the overall title," says Katie Hedrich, cheesemaker/marketer for LaClare Farms. "We created Evalon because people in the industry were saying there was no good aged goat's milk cheese made in the U.S. We patterned it after a Gouda-style

cheese, and it actually becomes more like a Parmesan. It's aged for five months."

Hedrich's parents, Larry and Clara Hedrich, opened the farm in 1978 as a hobby farm and a place to bring up a family. As the children got older and became more involved, they started making cheese. Today, LaClare Farms is milking about 350 goats and has a full-time staff of three, including Katie's father and brother Greg.

"My dad spoke with cheesemakers in Wisconsin, and they said you need great goat's milk to make great cheese. They taught him about sanitation, the care of the animals, what they should eat and milk handling. Animals should be comfortable and relaxed."

Other goat's milk cheeses made at LaClare Farms include Evalon with fenugreek, Evalon with cumin, fresh chevre and Fondy Jack, which is patterned after Monterey Jack cow's milk cheese.

"A lot of chefs use our fresh chevre, as it's more of a cooking cheese," Hedrich says. "They use Evalon more for a cheese plate to savor as a treat. Some chefs have been asking us for a Crottin and other special items. But what they really want is quality over quantity. They want the quality to shine through in the cheese."

Harley Farms Goat Dairy, Pescadero, Calif., has a small staff that milks and cares for its 100-plus goat herd. Owner Dee Harley took over the farm 15 years ago.

According to Adriana Guzman, office manager/special events for Harley Farms,



Jennifer Bice, owner of Redwood Hill Farm, has been inducted into the American Cheese Society's Academy of Cheese for her work as a pioneer in goat cheese.

the farm supplies goat cheeses to many restaurants in northern California, including Navio at The Ritz-Carlton, Half Moon Bay, which uses Harley Farms ricotta. Spago Beverly Hills uses the farm's chevre.

"We try to stay local with the restaurants we supply," says Guzman. "Chefs like the cheese because it has a real fresh taste and not a real goaty taste. A judge at a cheese competition said he could tell our farm was on the coast because he could taste the salt in the cheese."

Harley Farms also makes a garlic/herb fromage blanc, and the farm grows edible flowers, which are used to decorate some of the chevre cheeses.

Redwood Hill Farm has a staff of 50, including cheesemakers, sales staff, and those who milk and take care of the farm's 300-350 goats and their kids. Owner Bice, who was recently inducted into the

FEATURES

American Cheese Society's 2011 Academy of Cheese for her work as a pioneer in goat cheese, and earned the 2011 4-H Club Alumni Recognition Award from the 4-H Foundation of Sonoma County, is the oldest of 10 children. She took over the business from her parents in 1978.

"In the mid '60s, there was a big back-to-the-land movement. My parents moved us from LA to Sebastopol and got us tons of animals. The goats quickly became our favorites, since they have personalities like dogs. They can learn tricks, and we would dress them up and play with them. We were all in 4-H and showing goats, and ended up with all this milk. So, we started selling it to the new health-food stores that were cropping up. Then, we figured they would want cheese and yogurt if we made it."

Bice makes three families of goat's milk cheeses, the first being fresh chevre. "This is probably what most people think of when they think of goat cheese," she says. "I would venture to say it's a staple in restaurants, stuffed into chicken, rolled into fish and found in cheesecakes and on salads. Chefs usually use the traditional fresh chevre, but we also make chevre in garlic/chive, three-peppercorn and roasted chili flavors."

In the traditional cheese category, Bice makes goat's milk cheddar, smoked goat's milk cheddar and raw milk feta. "These can be used sliced or in recipes, and they are even better when melted into something. Feta is great crumbled into salads and it's great on pizzas because it just gets warm and not too melty. The cheddar is similar to a cow's milk cheddar."



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Beet Winter Garden, with goat cheese mousse, garden "soil," soil-roasted beets, hay-smoked baby carrots, balsamic fluid gel, orange powder and beet meringues, is one of the recipes in a new book by Bryan Voltaggio and Michael Voltaggio, *VOLT ink*. (Olive Press, 2011).

Redwood Hill Farm also makes a French-style rind-ripened category of goat cheeses. "These are Camembert-style semisoft goat's milk cheeses with the white, edible *penicillium candidum* rind," Bice says. "Our Cameo is covered with a variety of fresh herbs, and our Chef's Camellia comes without the herbs. The Bucheret is another cheese that is more dense and ideal for slicing. And our California Crottin has won numerous awards for its fluffy texture and earthy flavor. These cheeses are typically used by chefs on cheese plates."

ON THE MENU

Voltaggio, who wrote *VOLT ink: Recipes, Stories, Brothers* (Olive Press, 2011) with brother Michael, not only uses Cherry Glen Goat Cheese Co. products in his Cherry Glen Farm goat cheese ravioli, but he incorporates the ash from the ash rind on the cheese into the dish.

"The farm does cool things for me, like giving me the vegetable ash they use to make the ash-rind cheese," Voltaggio says. "I use the ash in the pasta I make for the ravioli, which I stuff with fresh goat ricotta and fresh chevre. The vegetables have been carbonized or burnt to the point where they become ash. This creates an anaerobic environment in which to age cheese. Using some of that ash in the pasta dough makes it black and flavors the dough with the ash. Having the ash pasta around the cheese mimics the goat cheese aging in the ash rind."

Volt's spring-garden salad features beets, carrots in hay, radish, coffee soil and Cherry Glen Farm fresh chevre and Monocacy Crottin, a more-firm aged goat cheese that is shaved over the salad.

At Soby's, Garcia uses Split Creek Farm chevre in a Southern pesto. "I serve it on a grouper dish in the summer. I wanted to do something fresher and not so heavy. It's served with a fresh potato salad with fennel. In the pesto I use pecans instead of pine nuts and parsley and rosemary instead of basil. I fold or whip in the goat cheese for a nice complexity. It's sometimes served on flatbread."

SOUTHERN GOAT CHEESE PESTO

Shaun Garcia, Chef de Cuisine
Soby's
Greenville, S.C.

1 cup flat parsley
1 garlic clove
2 T. chopped rosemary
½ cup toasted pecans
1 cup olive oil
¼ cup white wine vinegar
Salt and pepper, to taste
1 lb. Split Creek Farm chevre

Method: Combine parsley, garlic, rosemary, pecans, oil and vinegar in food processor until finely chopped and thoroughly combined. Season with salt and pepper, to taste. Fold into chevre until well-blended.

Harley Farms Goat Dairy's taster collection is a 1.5 oz. round of each of the farm's flavors, some of which are decorated with edible flowers grown on the farm.



Garcia uses Split Creek Farm goat feta on an arugula salad that includes golden beets and a cane syrup vinaigrette. He also makes goat cheese pimento cheese for special events in the summer. "You'd normally use cheddar for this, but I like to lighten it up for summer," he says. "I also try to use goat cheese where I'd usually use cream cheese."

"One thing I like about Split Creek Farm cheese is that it's milder and is a good entry-level goat cheese. It gets people on board and opens them up. It lets them acquire the taste and is more approachable than other goat cheeses."

GOAT CHEESE DESSERTS

Soby's carries Split Creek Farm goat milk fudge on its cheese plate. "It's phenomenal," says Garcia. "I decided to get funky and add this to the cheese plate instead of another goat cheese. People love it and ask for extra."

Teryi Youngblood, pastry chef at Soby's, makes a goat cheese pound cake with chevre from the farm. "Goat cheese is whipped into the batter and used instead of butter," Garcia says. "It has the same fat content and adds a nice body to the cake. It's served with South Carolina peaches."

The Volt menu also features goat cheese in desserts. "We use it in pastry, too. We make a cheesecake with chevre and white chocolate," says Voltaggio.

"We use goat cheese for the flavors and the tanginess. Goat cheese is more acidic than cream cheese. It counterbalances the intense sweetness of the white chocolate. They play off each other."

Kathryn Kjarsgaard is a freelance food writer based in Forest Park, Ill.

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