

The widely acclaimed **Cypress Grove Chevre** (707/825-1100) is best known for its Humboldt Fog a soft-ripened cheese with a creamy texture and a ribbon of edible ash in the center and outside.

Perfectly Patriotic Cheeses

Offering a well-rounded selection of outstanding American cheeses is a great way to please the most finicky lovers of fromage.

Now that artisanal cheese-making has gained a firm foothold in the American culinary scene, a few players stand out as having exceptional stories or stellar products. It's exciting to see fantastic cheese being made in all parts of the American landscape from the West Coast across the Midwest to down South. *Fancy Food* spoke to some of our favorite award-winning cheesemakers about the American cheese scene, the ideal cheese plate, and the best ways to keep cheese fresh.

Beecher's Handmade Cheese

www.beechershandmadecheese.com
206/322-1644

Founder Kurt Beecher Dammeier thought Seattle needed its own artisan cheese, so he rented a space in the famous Pike Place Market ... and then set about learning how to make cheese.

Best-known cheese: Flagship, a cross between a cheddar and a Gruyère

Newest cheese: Smoked Flagship and Flagship Reserve, the latter of which is aged in cheesecloth in the open air. "It loses quite a bit of moisture, and there's a mold on the outside of the cheesecloth that gives it a different character," says Kurt Beecher Dammeier, founder and owner.

Recent accolades: Flagship Reserve won First Place for Cheddar Aged 12 to 24 Months from the American Cheese Society last year, as well as the Second Place for Best in Show.

Point of distinction: "For our Flagship Program, we take 1 percent of all of our sales and use that money to create and teach a 2.5-hour curriculum about the evils of food additives to fifth graders throughout the Puget Sound," says Dammeier. "This year we will get to about 3,000 fifth graders."

Favorite American cheese trend: The fact that American cheeses are going toe-to-toe with international cheeses. "I'm also happy about the trend toward cooking with artisanal cheeses — such as in our World's Best Mac 'n Cheese." [The recipe can be found in Dammeier's book, "Pure Flavor: 125 Fresh All-American Recipes from the Pacific Northwest."]

Ideal cheese plate: Flagship Reserve with Rogue River Blue from

Rogue Creamery and Mt. Tam from Cowgirl Creamery, served with a fruit compote and Marcona almonds. "I like to do three cheeses on a cheese plate, because I like people to be able to eat more than just a little taste of it," says Dammeier.

Serving and storing tips: "People are always asking, 'How long should I keep cheese, and how do I store it?'" says Dammeier. "I say, don't store it — buy what you're going to eat. That's a good mantra for any type of food, to shop more often and buy smaller amounts. But if you do have to rewrap cheese, anything with a bloomy rind needs to be loosely wrapped in waxed paper. And if you wrap cheese in plastic wrap, use new plastic wrap any time you rewrap it."

Next hot American cheese trend: The increased presence of a much better selection of cheese even in average grocery stores. "Just like we've become accustomed to having great wines available to us, I think we'll see the same thing in cheese," says Dammeier.

Cypress Grove Chevre

www.cypressgrovechevre.com
707/825-1100

Founded by a mother who started raising Alpine dairy goats in an effort to give her kids fresher milk, Cypress Grove celebrates its 25th anniversary this year.

Best-known cheese: Humboldt Fog, a soft-ripened cheese with a creamy texture and a ribbon of edible ash in the center and around the outside.

Newest cheese: Truffle Tremor, a soft cheese with the earthiness

of truffles. "It's our fastest-growing new product ever," says Mary Keehn, founder.

Recent accolades: The company bagged the Best Product Line award at an NASFT Fancy Food show last year. "We've been a finalist many times, so it felt like winning an Oscar!" says Keehn. Humboldt Fog also won a gold medal in the World Cheese Awards in London last year, and the company's products win numerous awards at the American Cheese Society annually.

Point of distinction: "We really focus internally on our whole company," says Keehn. "We say, the culture isn't just in the cheese. In order to have consistency of high quality, you have to get the whole team behind excellence." For instance, when the company started working more closely with its dairies and paying a bonus for excellent quality milk, the quality of the cheese improved. The company now has more than 50 employees, and still does a great deal of its work by hand.

Favorite American cheese trend: "We've enjoyed being there at the beginning of goat cheese popularity, creating new categories and watching its growth," says Keehn. "I think it's part of the American inventiveness to never be satisfied. When you go to France, there's a mindset of, 'This is how we always do it,' that we don't have here. We can get creative and get excited about the magic of all the different possibilities."

Ideal cheese plate: Purple Haze (a fresh goat cheese round with lavender and wild harvested fennel



Flagship is the best-known cheese from Beecher's Handmade Cheese (206/322-1644), which is a cross between a Cheddar and a Gruyère.

Perfectly Patriotic Cheeses



Cheesemakers John and Anne Hoyt of Michigan's **Leelanau Cheese Company at Black Star Farms** (231/271-2600) produce a Swiss-style Raclette.

pollen) paired with lavender honey; Humboldt Fog with fresh pears, and thin slices of Midnight Moon (a firm, dense, nutty cheese aged one year) cheese spread with fig compote.

Serving and storing tips: "Every cheese has different requirements," notes Keehn. Fresh cheeses should be tightly wrapped, either in plastic wrap or a plastic container. Soft-ripened cheeses, or anything with a molded exterior, need airflow, so should be wrapped with waxed paper. Hard cheeses keep at their best with no air, so they should be kept tightly wrapped in plastic wrap as well.

Next hot American cheese trend: "I think we'll see people specialize more in particular products and become more terroir focused," says Keehn. "The soft-ripened cheeses we make do very well in the high moisture, foggy Northwest climate and they wouldn't be the same if they were produced somewhere else. I think people will start specializing in products that reflect their region and their whole situation."

Fromagerie Belle Chèvre

www.bellechevre.com
800/735-2238

Cheese from Alabama? A former technology executive recently bought this goat-cheese creamery and is producing fun and irreverent cheeses.

Best-known cheese: Fromage Blanc, a fresh French-style goat's milk cheese

Newest cheese: Last year, the company released six new products, including Southern Belle, a 2-oz. disk of French-style chèvre made with Bourbon-soaked pecans, mint and sugar. Other new products include Greek Kiss, a cheese wrapped in grape leaf, and

Moroccan Gold, a creamy spreadable cheese flavored with curry, honey and dried cranberries.

Recent accolades: The company's cheeses have received more than 50 national awards, predominantly from the American Cheese Society.

Point of distinction: The creamery specializes in fresh chèvres in the French style, with a Southern twist.

Favorite American cheese trend: "One of the things I see, and which I want to do, is to make high-end cheeses very accessible and fun," says Tasia T. Malakasis, president. "There are some people who take cheesemaking so seriously, and cheese can be intimidating. But you can tell by the names of our products that we're just having fun. Hopefully good cheeses will become something that people will use every day, and cook with, and make a part of the fabric of their lives."

Ideal cheese plate: Fromage Blanc with fig preserve or dried apricots; Montrachet Style Log rolled in Korean Red Pepper; Parmigiano-Reggiano; Humboldt Fog from Cypress Grove Chevre and Red Hawk from Cowgirl Creamery. "I'd serve it with a sparkling wine or a Sauvignon Blanc," says Malakasis.

Serving and storing tips: "As Americans, we're a little afraid of leaving anything out too long," says Malakasis. "But my stepmother in Greece leaves things out on her counter all day long. Cheese should be left out for hours before it's ready to serve, so it can come up to temperature. You can reserve the life of cheese by putting it in a bowl of olive oil with herbs. And, with leftover cheese, make Fromage Fort [a creamy spread made with a variety of cheeses]."

Next hot American cheese trend: Good-quality cheeses will be more accessible and available. "Even Wal-Mart is researching the movement of higher-end foods and looking at a market for that," says Malakasis. "We'll see that artisan cheeses will be more accessible to a greater market than it is now."

Leelanau Cheese Company at Black Star Farms

www.blackstarfarms.com
231/271-2600

Cheesemakers Anne and John Hoyt met while making cheese in Switzerland, so their Michigan-based creamery is certainly a labor of love.

Best-Known Cheese: Swiss-style Raclette

Recent Accolades: Leelanau's Aged Raclette won Best in Show at last year's American Cheese Society competition.

Point of Distinction: "Since Raclette is the only cheese we make, we really focus on it," says Anne Hoyt, co-owner and cheesemaker, along with her husband John. "We both were trained and worked in Switzerland, so there is an authenticity to the cheese."

Favorite American cheese trend: "It's interesting to see a return to original, traditional cheesemaking," says Hoyt. "In Wisconsin, it used to be small factories, then it changed to industrially made cheeses, and now they are going back to artisanal cheesemaking."

Ideal cheese plate: Aged Raclette paired with a soft goat cheese or Brie, and a blue cheese, served with a baguette and a glass of wine, such as a Bordeaux.

Serving and storing tips: Keep cheese at room temperature for serving, but for storing, keep it cold and wrapped in waxed paper to pre-

vent cheese from drying out and molding. "Buy small quantities and often — cheese will not get better in your refrigerator," says Hoyt. And encouraging more frequent trips to the store is always a good thing for specialty retailers.

Next hot American cheese trend: "I think people are going more to the European mindset of paying more attention to what they eat and the quality of their products," says Hoyt.

Roth Käse USA Ltd.

www.rothkase.com
608/328-2122

Wisconsin's "Little Switzerland" region is an ideal home for Roth Käse, which boasts a connection to one of Switzerland's best cheese companies.

Best-known cheese: Grand Cru Gruyère and Buttermilk Blue

Newest cheese: Roth's Private Reserve, a washed-rind raw milk cheese that's cured for 9 to 12 months

Recent accolades: Most recently, Roth's Private Reserve took First Place in the "American Originals" category at the 2007 American Cheese Society Conference, and was also named Second Runner-Up in the Best of Show category. Roth's Private Reserve also racked up awards at the 2007 U.S. Championship Cheese Contest, and GranQueso has won First Place in its category for four years in a row at the American Cheese Society Conference, and three years in a row at the World Cheese Awards in London. Overall, the company has won more than 100 awards in local, national and international competitions.

Point of distinction: "We're a small, family-owned company that has been in the cheese industry since 1863," says Kirsten M. Jaeckle, marketing manager. "We offer a broad range of cheeses, and have partnered with dairy artisans



Greek Kiss, a goat cheese wrapped in grape leaves, makes an elegant presentation and is new from **Fromagerie Belle Chèvre**, 800/735-2238.

For more information on the challenges of maintaining great cheese sales, read what retailers have to say in our "Top-Shelf Advice" column on page 34.



Moroccan Gold is a creamy spreadable, ready-to-serve cheese flavored with curry, honey and dried cranberries. It is just one of the exciting goat cheese selections available from Fromagerie Belle Chèvre, 800/735-2238.



Roth's Private Reserve, a washed-rind raw milk cheese that's cured for 9 to 12 months, is the newest release from **Roth Käse USA Ltd.**, 608/328-2122.

across the country in order to offer our customers the very best cheeses available."

Favorite American cheese trend: "Affinage — proper curing of the finished product is something that most cheesemakers strive for," says Jaeckle. "Affinage can be a labor-intensive process that can truly influence the character of the cheese." Jaeckle sees not only cheesemakers, but also a number of cheesemongers and restaurants doing their own affinage in-house, which entails researching the proper conditions and working closely with the cheesemaker to keep the cheese in the optimal conditions.

Ideal cheese plate: Buttermilk Blue Affince, GranQueso and Grand Cru Gruyère Surchoix. "We like to serve Harvest Song Preserves with our cheeses — they're amazing," says Jaeckle. "I'm a huge fan of their Apricot and White Cherry Preserve; it pairs perfectly with many of our cheeses." She also recommends toasted pecans and honeys to pair with blue cheeses.

Serving and storing tips: "Each variety has its own special things you can do to keep it at the peak of freshness," says Jaeckle. "My best suggestion is to go to your local cheesemonger and request a cut of cheese that you think you're going to eat within a day or two ... buy small amounts, and buy often." Jaeckle says another recommendation is for consumers to continue to store the cheese at home in the type of container or wrapper that was used by the cheesemonger.

Next hot American cheese trend: Improved packaging and presentation that maintains the integrity of the product. ©

international home + house wares show 2008



Paula Deen at the 2007 GOHO Cooking Theater

goho, gourmet
home + food district
south building
mccormick place

featuring 130 exhibitors of gourmet and specialty foods and products, the popular goho cooking theater and the NASFT specialty food marketplace... an exciting destination!

hi. style defines the art of modern home life.
it demands innovation + defies expectation.

Sunday – Tuesday, March 16-18
McCormick Place, Chicago



INTERNATIONAL HOUSEWARES ASSOCIATION

attendees – www.housewares.org/attend
exhibitors – www.housewares.org/exhibit

hi. style.

For More Information Circle No. 108

1. The Birch earthenware covered cheese tray has the faux look of birch wood and makes a stylish way to present cheese. With the lid it measures 10.75 inches wide by 9 inches long and 4.5 inches tall. Suggested retail: \$50. From **Magenta Inc.**, 510/849-3888 or www.magenta-inc.com

2. The Hogri Friends Forever Cheese Slicer has a fun face that livens up any cheese experience. It is part of a whimsical line of entertaining and kitchen tools made in Germany. Suggested retail: \$37. From **Kress International**, 630/305-7377 or www.hogriusa.com

3. The Bistro Cheese Set includes cutting tools needed for serving a variety of specialty cheeses. The set offers a cheese chopper, cheese plane and cheese knife, all in high-gloss, 18/10 stainless steel. The knives can be purchased individually or in the set. Suggested retail: \$56.25. From **WMF USA**, 800/999-6347 or www.wmf-usa.com

4. The new Vermont Slate Cheese Board is decorated with laser-engraved cheese names. Made of North American natural dark slate, the server features a soft felt backing. The natural edge is rustic and earthy, and the surface works well with chalk so a host can write personal cheese comments like "pungent," "sharp" or "goat milk" and wipe it clean with a damp sponge. Suggested retail: \$29.99. From **J.K. Adams**, 800/451-6118 or www.jkadams.com

5. The Pop Up Cheese Serving Set contains four specialty cheese knives that are easy to use and keep neat in a party setting. The natural wood surface of the board has a modern look and measures 13.5 inches by 9.25 inches. A storage drawer is included to make it easy to keep in a cabinet when finished. Suggested retail: \$24.99. From **Trudeau Corporation**, 888/887-8332 or www.trudeaucorp.com

6. The Fontina Cheese Set contains a removable bamboo cutting board, cheese knife and divided white teak wood serving platter. The cheese knife fits perfectly into a grooved section for storage and keeping the serving platter tidy during use. It measures 20 inches by 10 inches. Suggested retail: \$39.95 to \$44.95. From **Picnic Time**, 888/PICNIC-9 or www.picnictime.com



By Natalie Hammer Noblitt

Fun with Fromage

Cross-merchandise stylish cheese tools both near party displays and your cheese case. Be sure to also suggest these items as gifts for wedding showers and other occasions.



hi. class

learn to be more profitable at

Specialty Retailer University

international home + housewares show 2008

March 16 - 18, McCormick Place, Chicago

www.housewares.org

For More Information Circle No. 109