

In Our Own Backyard: American Cheese

A Blueprint for a Tasting

Editor's Note: *The ACS's "Own Backyard Committee" was established to encourage members to showcase their cheeses and create excitement about American cheeses via consumer events in their own regions, or "backyards." Several such events have been staged over the past two years, including a great one in Dallas in March. Karen Silverstein, an ACS and Slow Food member, pulled it together and offers her blueprint for OBY event success. Karen can be reached at Karen@one-mail.net for more information on OBY event planning.*

By Karen Silverston

Our event, titled, *In Our Own Backyard: American Cheese*, showcased five North Texas cheesemakers with a panel discussion and tasting of local cheeses and a selection of ACS award-winning cheeses. The grassroots event sold out two weeks in advance. It benefited the ACS and the Slow Food USA table at the upcoming, biennial international cheese conference in Italy this September. All told, \$500 dollars was raised for each organization.

The vision for the event was to get local cheesemakers to bring their cheeses, taste each other's cheeses and to taste ACS award-winning cheeses while guests listened, tasted along and asked questions of the cheesemakers.

While sampling each local cheese, the moderator asked the cheesemakers how they learned to make cheese, how they made the cheese we tasted, how they test their milk, what affects the quality of the ingredients and what distinguishes their cheeses from mass-market varieties. Featured Texas cheeses were Chateau de Fromage Fresh Chevre and Triple Creme Chevre from Claudine Martyn; Deborah's Ft. Worth Farmstead Ash and Herb from Deborah Rogers; Full Quiver Farm Jalapeno Cheese Spread and Fresh Mozzarella from Michael and Debbie Sams; and Mozzarella Company Montasio Festivo and Blanca Bianca from Paula Lambert.

As we tasted the ACS award winners, which represented a diversity of cheesemaking regions, the moderator presented



comments from interviews with each cheesemaker. Award-winning cheeses included Green Hill from Sweet Grass Dairy (Georgia), Piper's Pyramid from Capriole (Indiana); Mt. McKinley from Cypress Grove Chevre (California); Marisa from Carr Valley Cheese (Wisconsin); Premium Reserve 18-month Bandaged Cheddar from Fiscalini Cheese (California); and Crater Lake Blue from Rogue Creamery (Oregon).

The rare opportunity to taste cheeses in peak condition and to question experts at the same time attracted enthusiasts and thoughtful food professionals.

I encourage you to embrace an 'Own Back Yard' (OBY) tasting in your own region. If good cheese is not supported, it will disappear. Those of us who love and appreciate cheese must promote it and teach about it to protect traditional practices and authentic flavors that otherwise may be lost.

New! Toolkit Available

To help you get started, we've developed an OBY Toolkit, available to all ACS members. It includes a planning checklist, budget spreadsheet, suggested panelist questions, a press release format and a copy of our Dallas program for ref-

erence. Contact Barry King, ACS executive director, at 502-583-3783 or e-mail bking@hqtrs.com to request your Toolkit.

A word about donations: Viking donated the venue and Central Market contributed support. Slow Food USA advocates that convivia pay small producers for products utilized for an event. We asked each cheesemaker to allow us to purchase the cheese at the wholesale price.

QUALITY CHEESE TOOLS **BOSKA HOLLAND**

CHEESE-O-MATIC

BRIE CUTTER

DUTCH CHEESE KNIFE

US-distributor:
Tools for Cheeses
Fax: 203.661-3707
Cell: 203.561-6577
usa@boskaholland.com

WWW.BOSKAHOLLAND.COM