CENTER FOR DAIRY RESEARCH

DAIRY PIPELINE

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2026 WISCONSIN MASTER CHEESEMAKERS

The Center for Dairy Research (CDR) and Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin (DFW) are excited to share the 2026 graduating class of the Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker® program. This year's class includes six new and one returning Master cheesemaker.

"Each new class of graduates confirms the value of the Master Cheesemaker program to our state and the Wisconsin dairy industry." said John Jaeggi, program coordinator. "The Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker® program is the only one of its kind in the United States, which further strengthens Wisconsin's reputation as the premier cheesemaking state."

To be eligible for the Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker® program, cheesemakers must be licensed Wisconsin cheesemakers for at least 10 years. Before applicants are accepted into the program, they are required to complete CDR's Advanced Cheesemaking Short Course and one other workshop of their choice. In addition, applicants undergo a plant visit where they lead a walk-through of their facility and must pass an oral exam. Once they are accepted into the program, participants complete a list of courses and an intensive exam. In addition, the cheeses they are being certified in are graded for flavor, composition and microbial analysis—this is done three times before they can graduate as a Master cheesemaker. All said, it takes about three years to complete, and, in the end, once successful, the cheesemaker earns the honor and respect of becoming a Master cheesemaker as well as the right to use the Master Mark® on their products.

Please join CDR and DFW in recognizing the 2026 Wisconsin Master Cheesemakers.

BRYAN ALLEN • *New Master*

Foremost Farms, Clayton

Certified Master: Mozzarella, Provolone

Bryan Allen took the long way around to cheesemaking. His path included working as a landscaper, a truck driver, and a carpenter. But when he took a job at a local cheese plant in 2006, he knew he'd found his place in the world.

"I grew up helping on the family dairy farm," said Allen, "and I enjoyed it, but I just didn't see myself doing it for a long time. At the dairy plant, though, I just kind of fell in love with the processing side of things. I remember thinking to myself, 'Why didn't I do this a long time ago?'

Within two years, he had his cheesemaker license and was overseeing the entire operation from start to finish. When Allen moved to Foremost Farms in 2017, his curiosity only deepened as he drew on his natural tendency to seek solutions for even the smallest issues.

"I want to strive for the best," said Allen. "I don't want problems, but I do want to see where I can make improvements. I work toward perfection at all levels, even on little things. I love it when I see that a change has a positive effect."

When Scott Navarre, a Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker at Foremost Farms, approached Allen about participating in the program, it felt like a good fit. The ensuing three years of courses, sampling, and exams proved nothing short of awe-inspiring for Allen. As he pursued his certifications in Mozzarella and Provolone,

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two cheeses he's made since first stepping up to the vat in 2006, new worlds of knowledge opened up for him.

"Over the course of almost 20 years, you gain an understanding of what temperatures, time, and ingredients do, as well as the stirs, the cooks, everything like that," said Allen. "My Master's work brought all of that together. I can troubleshoot so much better now because I can see the things that are happening and understand what the root cause is."

For Allen, though, the learning doesn't stop with him. Taking his newfound knowledge back to the plant and sharing it with his team creates an atmosphere of partnership and open lines of communication that he sees as invaluable.

"The more understanding my team has of the make process, the better decisions they make," said Allen. "The Master's program gave me the ability to move them forward as well. Now, it's a collaboration between everybody. It makes us that much better."

He also sees that reflected in the larger Wisconsin cheese community.

"It elevates everything," said Allen. "We have people with the same mindset, with the goal of making the best cheese possible and world-class products all the time. That's why Wisconsin has the reputation that the best cheese in the world is being produced here. We should be proud of that."

TIM DUDEK ® *New Master*

BelGioioso Cheese, Pulaski
Certified Master: Fontina, Parmesan

Learning is something Timothy Dudek loves. And little did he know that, when he started at BelGioioso Cheese in 2002, he was right where he belonged.

"Cheesemaking is not the same thing every day or all day. It's always changing and evolving. That's what's great for me: the challenge of working through the problems and learning something. When you have a problem, you learn from it, and you get better. Those things are my favorite part about cheesemaking," said Dudek.

Over the course of his 24 years with the company, Dudek has done every job in the plant, from cleaning to flipping cheese and working nights. As he made his way up the ranks to cheesemaker, he found himself discovering a love for the work and the product.

Dudek points to his time working with retired Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker Gianni Tofolon as a turning point. While learning to make Parmesan, one of the cheeses Dudek earned a Master certification in, he also developed a passion for the craft.

"He taught me that this is an art form," said Dudek. "It's not just a mundane process that we do. Cheese is a living, breathing food, and you're part of it. You're like an artist when you work with it, using all of your senses. You need to know what's going on and be part of that process."

Dudek also earned a Master's certification in Fontina, another classic Italian cheese that he's become a fan of over the years.

"The Fontina cheesemaking process is something I really enjoy," said Dudek, "from the delicate starter make to the special steps throughout the process taken to make this wonderful cheese."

Dudek is also quick to note that several mentors influenced his journey to becoming a Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker. He credits Master Cheesemakers Randy Krahenbuhl, Josh Krause, and Dan Szczepanski as influential to his success. Krahenbuhl, now retired, helped ignite Dudek's passion for Fontina, while watching Krause and Szczepanski earn their Master certifications inspired him to pursue his own.

"I've worked with Dan and Josh since I started here. Josh was on the floor with me, and Dan was a cheesemaker. I've grown with those guys through the years," Dudek said. "As I made cheese for longer and got more serious about it, they motivated me to apply and challenge myself, saying I should get into the Master's program."

Dudek is now one of eight active Master Cheesemakers at BelGioioso Cheese and is the tenth in the company's history. It's a title he is honored to hold.

"It is a huge personal achievement. When I got the call from John Jaeggi, and he said, 'You're a Master.' It was an awesome feeling," said Dudek. "The Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker® program emphasizes our cheesemakers and how serious we take cheesemaking in the state of Wisconsin. It's a true art form to us, and that is emphasized with the Master program."

TIM ENTRINGER ® *New Master*

Baker Cheese/Sargento, St. Cloud
Certified Master: Mozzarella

For Tim Entringer, it all started with a phone call from his cousin.

"He asked if I was still looking for a job," said Entringer. "I went in, got a walkthrough of the facility, and I've been here ever since."

That was 1994 at Baker Cheese, now Baker Cheese/Sargento. Started in 1916 by the Baker family and acquired by Sargento in 2022, Baker's is considered the birthplace of Wisconsin string cheese and is also famed for their Mozzarella. From that very first day, Entringer began what would become his trademark for the next 32 years of his career: stepping into whatever role needed to be filled and learning everything he could along the way.

"When I started, they had one string cutter, and that was my job," said Entringer. "Then I learned sanitation, the make process, operated waste systems, intakes, and made bulk starter. Any job that was here, I worked it. As the plant grew, more needs arose. I was basically the cheesemaker-sanitation-whatever-they-needed-at-the-end-of-the-night-to-sleep guy."

That inherent adaptability has allowed Entringer to change and grow alongside the plant and the cheese industry, a resourcefulness he sees as a natural result of growing up on a dairy farm just down the road.

"Our milk came to this facility when I was a kid," said Entringer. "My aunts worked here. I remember growing up eating string cheese and just loving it. I've also been fortunate enough to have friends and multiple family members work here, including my children. That's the roots of where I am now."

That foundation has made seeing the whole process from milk to cheese even more fascinating for Entringer. He points to Bob Baker, the third generation of the family to own and operate the plant, as the one who first gave him a passion for the craft and an eye for the quality that continues to define Baker Cheese/Sargento. Brian Baker, Bob's nephew and fourth-generation to run the plant, helped Entringer develop on a personal as well as a professional level. Brian also encouraged him to earn his Master certification in Mozzarella. For Entringer, that step led to whole new arenas of knowledge that have only deepened his interest.

"It was eye-opening to realize the similarities and differences between cheese makes, to see what attributes they bring to the different starter cultures, to understand the effects of different ripening times, pH levels, and how all of that makes each cheese so different. I loved it. I was like a kid in a candy store," he said.

The Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker® program also gave Entringer even more tools. He's learned more about what questions to ask and how to look and listen for answers as he takes in the different perspectives of each member of his team.

"I find it really enhanced my development and my team's development," said Entringer. "Now, we talk a lot about why and how things are happening. In the Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker® program, you become a conduit. You're developing and refining things for yourself, but in the end, you are also honing the skills of your team."

ERIN RADTKE ® *New Master*

Sartori Cheese, Antigo
Certified Master: Open-class Hard Cheese, Parmesan

Growing up three doors down from the Sartori Cheese plant in Antigo, Erin Radtke never thought she would work there, much less earn Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker status in two of the company's flagship cheeses. But once in the door, her curiosity made it irresistible.

"I'm inquisitive," said Radtke. "I'm always trying to understand the whys behind everything and how I'm affecting things."

That need to understand has been a hallmark of Radtke's 22 years at Sartori Cheese. As she moved from wheel production to drain table operation, sanitation backup, and relief operator, Radtke was always on the hunt to find out more. When she got to cheesemaking, she found her niche. "I loved the combination of the art and science behind

cheesemaking," Radtke said. "I wanted to know what the impact was, for example, if I didn't cut the cheese at the right time, the effect of temperature on the milk, and how that would affect the composition of the cheese."

Over the years, Radtke's mentors encouraged her drive to dig deeper, created an atmosphere that welcomed her questions, and encouraged her to become a Master. For example, cheesemaker Joel Pagel taught her how to operate the vats when she started out.

"He never got frustrated, even though I came in every day asking why we were doing it like this, how do I troubleshoot it, how do I fix it," said Radtke. "He was really impactful."

Larry Steckbauer, a now-retired Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker, showed her the cheese at different stages of the aging process and helped Radtke develop an eye for cheese development. Working alongside Mike Matucheski, another retired Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker, also proved formative. The two worked on developing new cheese types and experimented with different soaks and rubs for BellaVitano®, one of the cheeses, along with Asiago, that Radtke earned Master certification in.

Ultimately, the Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker® program gave her even more of the knowledge she craves

"You get a lot of the background and the science behind the cheese," said Radtke. "In the plant, you make adjustments and see the results, but you don't understand the science of it until you dig into those courses at CDR."

It's also not lost on Radtke that she is the fifth woman to become a Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker.

"It feels like a huge accomplishment. When I started in 2004, there were a lot of times that I was the only woman doing the same work as the guys," said Radtke, "but it was important to me."

She also sees the impact the program has beyond the vat and her own plant.

"The Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker® program is about quality and consistency," said Radtke. "That's huge for the industry in Wisconsin because we have super high-quality milk, and we make the best cheese we can from that."

DUSTIN WALLENDAL ◎ *New Master*

Widmer's Cheese Cellars, Theresa
Certified Master: Brick, Cheddar

Born and raised just five miles away in Mayville, Dustin Wallendal always thought of Widmer's Cheese Cellars as the cheesemaker just down the road. When he saw the ad for an assistant cheesemaker in 2007, he thought he'd give it a try.

It is perhaps no surprise then that Wallendal's first cheese to make was Brick. Legendary purveyors and makers of the Wisconsin original, Widmer's still makes it the traditional or old-fashioned way, as Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker Joe Widmer likes to say, which means by hand and in open vats.

"We have the actual physical bricks that you set down to press the cheese," said Wallendal. "We stir the curd by hand, flip it by hand, cut it by hand, and salt everything by hand."

While such practices may seem quaint to some, for Widmer's, they are best practice. For Wallendal, it was simply part and parcel of learning the craft. Guided by two former cheesemakers, Dennis Gubin and Lenny Zimmel, along with Joe Widmer, he began developing an eye and a feel for what the cheese should look like at different stages.

"They showed me the ropes, told me exactly what to do with words, and by just showing me," said Wallendal. "I had to learn the specific things to shoot for and the timing of it all."

Wallendal was intrigued, and when he started the coursework for his cheesemaker's license, his interest only deepened.

"It was the science," said Wallendal. "I enjoyed the Pasteurizer class, and the microbiology behind it all. I didn't know much of anything about cheesemaking when I started, but once I started the classes, it really interested me."

So when Joe Widmer asked if he would be interested in becoming a Master, Wallendal jumped at the chance. Choosing Brick and Cheddar for his certifications was easy. Both are cheeses Wallendal knows well and has a fondness for, pointing to Widmer's Cheddar as a personal favorite.

The coursework proved challenging and stimulating, adding to his comprehension of the cheeses themselves as well as the make process.

"It gave me a much better understanding of how to control the cheese," said Wallendal, "both for safety and quality, and all of the different parameters. Having the knowledge to change things if there are problems or to improve them are some of the biggest takeaways for me."

It also increased his ability to think on his feet, something every cheesemaker learns on the job. The Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker experience brought together Wallendal's nearly 20 years of experience in the vat with his love of the science behind it all for a bit of a taste of heaven.

"I'm really happy to have made it this far," said Wallendal. "It was a struggle, a difficult struggle, but it was really worth it."

JUSTIN WILLCOX ◎ *New Master*

Schuman Cheese's Lake Country Dairy, Turtle Lake
Certified Master: Parmesan, Romano

When it was time for a career change, Justin Willcox was open to ideas. In 2008, he saw the ad for a cheese production position at Schuman Cheese's Lake Country Dairy and thought he'd give it a go. It only took him three days to realize it was exactly where he wanted to be.

"Cheesemaking is physical, it's fun, and the learning never stops," said Willcox. "I kept learning different jobs from intake to pasteurization to cheese make to how the cheese is aged and packaged."

Under the firm but consistent guidance of cheesemaker John Stezniak, one of Willcox's three mentors, he started building a solid foundation of knowledge and experience. As he moved through different departments, including R&D, Willcox grew increasingly curious, soaking up everything he could. When Christophe Megevand, another mentor, asked him to join a group heading to France for a week-long education experience in 2017, Willcox didn't hesitate.

"Christophe has taught me about so many different kinds of cheeses over the years," said Willcox. "He's meant so much to my growth as a cheesemaker."

Shortly after that trip, Gary Gosda, plant manager and Willcox's mentor, encouraged him to consider the Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker® program. Gosda's leadership, passion for education, and constant striving for perfection inspired Willcox to take on the challenge, choosing Parmesan and Romano for his certifications. Schuman Cheese has won many awards for both cheeses, including second runner-up for Cello Organic Copper Kettle Parmesan at the 2025 U.S. Championship Cheese Contest.

"Our Copper Kettle Parmesan is my favorite, and it's one we are known for," said Willcox. "But I have a passion for Romano. The best way I can describe it is that what we are doing in America is following the same blueprint as what they do with sheep's milk in Italy. When Romano is made right with the right ingredients, it's a very pleasant cheese."

Willcox found his time in the Master program both demanding and satisfying.

"Working with CDR and going through all that coursework was so educational," he said. "All those instructors have helped me become who I am today." Willcox is also humbled to find himself part of the Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker tradition. He is not only more driven to continue learning, but, like each of his mentors, to share his knowledge.

"When I work with our cheesemakers and the cheeses, I'm trying to teach everyone why we're doing something," said Willcox, "and that impacts everyone. I think that's the biggest effect that the Master program has. It makes us very knowledgeable, and we bring that to the team."

While Willcox is back at Lake Country Dairy with his two certifications in hand, he's also giving some thought to two more in Asiago and Fontina. Both are favorite cheeses of his as well as award-winning products for Schuman. More importantly, perhaps, is his craving for knowledge.

"Who doesn't want to learn?" said Willcox. "If it's something you want to do for the rest of your life, why wouldn't you want to learn more about it?"

JAKE NIFFENEGGER ❁ *Returning Master*

Moundview Dairy, Platteville

Certified Master: Muenster , Queso Blanco

It is perhaps no surprise that third-generation cheesemaker Jake Niffenegger enjoys his craft. He started working with his father at the family cheese plant in Rewey, Wisconsin, when he was 12 years old. There, alongside his older sister, Heidi, he began what would become not just a job, but a lifelong passion.

"When I wasn't in school, I was in the cheese factory," said Niffenegger, whose grandfather was a Swiss cheesemaker who immigrated to Wisconsin in the early 1900s. "It's physically and mentally demanding work. It's in my blood."

From there, Niffenegger worked at a few different plants, eventually settling down with Lactalis American Group in Belmont, Wisconsin, where he stayed for over 30 years. During his tenure, the company expanded twice, and Niffenegger had an opportunity to work in their R&D department, playing with recipes and discovering ways to make a good product even better. He also earned his first two Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker certifications in Camembert and Brie and a third in Feta.

That experience and knowledge also made the prospect of starting a new role in 2017 at a brand new operation in Platteville – Moundview Dairy – very attractive. Primarily producing Muenster and Queso Blanco, his current experience lets Niffenegger take full advantage of everything he's learned over the course of his career. Adding two new Master certifications in Muenster and Queso Blanco to that is also a big boost.

"Earning my Master's means a little bit more to me this time," said Niffenegger, "because I helped start this plant, tweaked the product, worked with the team, and came up with our recipe for the Muenster. It's been a real joy."

Niffenegger also points to his wife and daughters and what he calls his working family – the team of people he works alongside each and every day at Moundview making cheese – as his inspiration.

"My sister, Heidi, along with my dad, taught me the ins and outs of cheesemaking at the factory in Rewey. I've been married to my wife for 43 years, and she's supported me all the way through to where I am today. And," he continued, "I've got a good group of team members here. I couldn't do it without them."

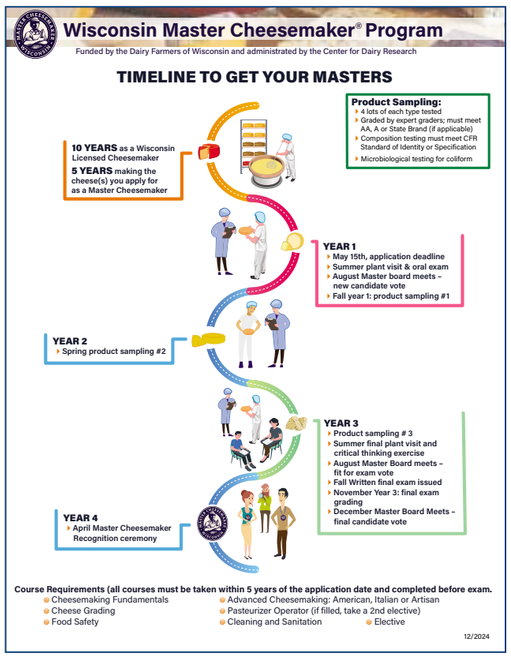
He also sees his Master certifications as part of a Wisconsin tradition he's humbled to have a role in.

"I think it sets us apart from all the cheesemakers in other states," said Niffenegger. "It is just an amazing course. For me, it's kind of like a lifelong diploma." ❁

Contributor: Joan Bailey, Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin

TIMELINE TO GET YOUR MASTERS

The graphic shows the requirements and timeframe for the Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker program admittance and completion. This is an overview and does not include all program details. For more information contact: John Jaeggi, Program Coordinator | jaeggi@cdr.wisc.edu or Lindsey O'Brien, Dairy Foods Trainer | lobrien@cdr.wisc.edu ❁



WATER – THE HIDDEN INGREDIENT

Technical reviewers: Alex O'Brien, Lindsey O'Brien, and Dean Sommer, CDR

In dairy processing plants, water plays a number of important roles. "You use it to clean your vats, to make salt brines, to rinse off curds and much more—it's a forgotten ingredient," said Alex O'Brien, CDR Dairy Food Safety & Quality Coordinator. Water is also used in the dairy plant for purposes such as rehydrating milk powders, as a media for bulk starter, to dilute rennet and calcium chloride, flush out vats, and more. With the many ways in which water comes into contact with equipment and products, it's important to know what's in the water.

Well versus Municipal

Dairy plants will either be getting their water from a well or municipality. If sourcing water from a well, or wells, O'Brien recommends that plants apply some sort of kill step to the water before it is used in the plant. For example, a water chlorination system or UV light treatment can be used to treat well water. O'Brien says this is important because well water can test positive for coliforms (some coliforms, like toxigenic E. coli, are pathogens). If the plant is using multiple wells, each must be tested individually.

If using well water, O'Brien recommends checking the UV treatment system to ensure that it is working properly. This can be completed by water quality testing including coliform, yeast and mold, and aerobic plate count. This can be done on a frequency to risk evaluation. A reasonable frequency for sampling would be between monthly and once every 6 months. Preventive maintenance of the UV light bulb life is essential to proper functioning of the system. Similarly, if you're using a water chlorination system, weekly testing of chlorine levels in the water is recommended.

Wells also need to be visually inspected. For example, wells can get cracks in the casing, which is a major source of coliform contamination in well water (1). In fact, physical failure of well hardware is the most frequent cause of bacterial contamination. Physical failures can include:

- Compromised Well Cap: A loose, cracked, or missing well cap allows insects, small rodents, windborne dust, and surface runoff to fall straight down into the water.
- Cracked Well Casing: The underground vertical pipe can corrode, crack, or split over time, allowing unfiltered shallow groundwater to seep into the well.
- Failed Annular Grout Seal: If the cement or bentonite grout surrounding the outside of the casing shrinks or cracks, surface water will pool and channel straight down the outside of the pipe into your drinking supply.
- Well Pump: The body is jacketed and become cracked and harbor bacteria.

If using water from a municipality, it's important to know how the water is treated. For example, municipalities may chlorinate their water, and chlorinated water should not be used to dilute rennet. Typically, municipalities have water quality reports available. Dairy plants should review those reports to better understand the water that is coming into their plant. For example, if the water is hard, maybe it should be softened before being used in the plant. Hard water can damage equipment and cause accumulation of minerals in equipment. Soft water is suggested for some applications in a dairy plant. This soft water may come from a water softener, or sometimes reclaimed water from a whey evaporator condensate, or reverse osmosis water.

Testing for Safety and Quality

According to the Pasteurized Milk Ordinance (PMO), dairy plants are required to test their water every six months (2). O'Brien says, ideally, a plant runs water tests once a month. He recommends that, at a minimum, plants test for coliform and E. coli and test different locations in the plant. For example, test hand washing sinks, COP tank lines or the ends of hoses.

To clarify, PMO testing is required on water coming into the plant and is tested at the main water feed into the ➡

building (or as close as possible). Other water testing at other locations are for quality purposes. Any time water comes in direct contact with product, it needs to be treated as an ingredient and should meet ingredient thresholds.

There are also strict regulatory standards that apply to water quality and water testing requirements, both on the farm (Wisconsin ATCP 65.10) and in the dairy plant (Wisconsin ATCP 65.24(8)). Most water quality tests are based on testing for coliforms or fecal coliforms in the water. Product recalls are possible if regulatory agencies determine your water used in your facility is contaminated with coliforms.

While coliforms and, specifically, toxigenic E. coli are food safety concerns, there can be other contaminants in water that can cause quality issues. This is why O'Brien recommends running heterotrophic plate count (Similar to Aerobic Plate Count) numbers on water. Enumerating microbes may have different protocols, due to some bacteria going through osmotic shock, leaving you with lower numbers than what may be truly viable. APC, TPC, SPC, HPC – these are tests that show how many organisms are present in the water that need oxygen. One common contaminant that can result in quality issues is

Pseudomonas. These bacteria can cause dairy product quality issues and form biofilms on equipment, which can be tricky to remove. *Pseudomonas* spp. can also contribute to disturbing rinds in washed-rind cheeses or cause a blue color defect with cheeses like Mozzarella.

Additionally, there are other possible contaminants in water such as radionuclides, nitrates, PFAAS and persistent organic pollutants. However, O'Brien says this doesn't mean you need to be testing for all these contaminants. This is where a municipal water report is helpful and O'Brien recommends contacting your municipality to get access to your local water reports.

Other Quality Issues

Testing water for microbes is a good start but there are other issues to keep in mind such as turbid water or hard water. Turbid water might be carrying sediment or organic matter that can cause quality issues in your dairy products. Organic matter in your water can also decrease the effectiveness of cleaning chemicals and sanitizers, leading to higher chemical usage and cost. Another issue is hard water, which has a high mineral content. Hard water can cause mineral build up on equipment. Plants with hard water might have to do more acid washes to avoid mineral build up.

Once the water is in your plant, it is going through a lot of piping. This is why O'Brien recommends testing water at points of use, like at the end of hose and/or hand-washing sinks. It's possible that plants might have bad welds in their piping or other damage. O'Brien recommends using a borescope if you're suspecting any bad welds.

Ancillary Areas

Don't forget about the water purchased for anything that comes into contact with product (such as reconstituting products, processing aids, etc). Chill water is also a sneaky potential incidental ingredient. Maintaining the chill water/glycol/ice bank will not help with efficiencies but can prevent contamination of product if there are cracks, pinholes or leaks in the chiller plates, tube in shell, jacketed tanks/equipment. If microbial counts are out of specification, keeping of the dosage of the antimicrobial added is sufficient.

For COW (Condensate of Whey)/RO Water/Reclaim water, there are regulatory limits where this water can be used and must be followed. There are also regulatory requirements for monitoring storage of COW/Reclaim. For the exact microbial and storage requirements see ATCP 65.24 (9) and Appendix D part V.

Other Recommendations

Plants should pay close attention to the condition of their hoses. Old/damaged hoses can harbor microbes that contaminate the water. It is also important to keep hose ends off the floor because they can pick up microbes from the floor.

Potable water lines should be adequately marked on the exterior of the pipes to differentiate them from non-potable water lines such as COW water or RO water that is not potable. There should be no cross connection between potable and non-potable water lines.
These are some of the practices and issues to keep in mind when handling and testing water for your plant. It's important to keep water quality and handling top of mind as it comes into contact with practically every piece of equipment and product in the plant.

Sources:

1. New York State Department of Health. "Coliform Bacteria in Drinking Water Supplies." https://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/water/drinking/coliform_bacteria.htm

2. U.S. Food & Drug Administration. "National Conference on Interstate Milk Shipments (NCIMS) Model Documents." https://www.fda.gov/food/milk-guidance-documents-regulatory-information/national-conference-interstate-milk-shipments-ncims-model-documents

NEW GUIDE ON FOREIGN MATERIALS NOW AVAILABLE

The Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy® (IC) has released a new resource for dairy processors –"Foreign Material Controls – A Focus on Prevention." The document covers a number of topics including, people & programs, inspections, detection systems and much more.

The IC, formed in 2008, provides a forum for the dairy industry to work together pre-competitively. The IC Food Safety Team is very active with over 100 experts from 50 organizations involved across multiple platforms.

The guide is available at https://innovationcenter.usdairy.com/focus-areas/food-safety/guidance-documents

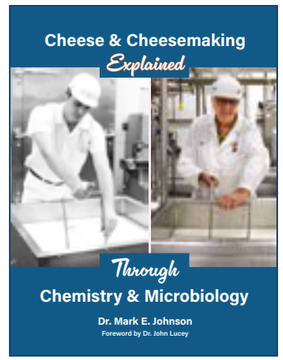
Dr. Mark Johnson Publishes Book, *Cheesemaking and Cheesemaking Explained Through Chemistry & Microbiology*

CDR is excited to announce that Dr. Mark Johnson's new book is now available. *Cheese and Cheesemaking Explained Through Chemistry & Microbiology* describes the chemistry and microbiology involved with the cheesemaking process and the physical and functional characteristics of cheese. The book provides technologists and curious cheesemakers with the tools to answer questions not yet asked, and to provide guidance to situations yet to be encountered.

The book includes a foreword by CDR Director Dr. John Lucey as well as an introductory preface by Dr. Johnson. Chapters include:

1. Milk Components: Atoms to Macromolecules: Chemistry and Definitions
2. Cheese Yield and Milk Standardization
3. pH and Titratable Acidity
4. Managing Moisture Content of Cheese
5. Acidity in Cheese and Its Control
6. Microbiology of Milk and Cheese
7. Cheese Ripening
8. Crystals in Cheese

Dr. Johnson enjoyed a long career, beginning in 1980, serving the cheese industry through his work at the CDR, until his retirement in 2024. One of his main interests was with cheese defects. He also enjoyed teaching and participating in short courses across the U.S. as well as overseas. He has served as a cheese judge in numerous competitions. Dr. Johnson has received many recognitions including the Chancellor's award for excellence in research, the National Cheese Institute's Laureate award, and the Babcock award from the Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association.



"I think of cheesemaking as a craft not an art and is a skill handed down through countless generations of observant folks finding a means to preserve milk," Dr. Johnson writes. "Cheesemaking is also not a science, but it is an application of principles that can be explained in terms of chemical, enzymatic and microbiological processes."

Dr. Johnson's book can be purchased here. https://cdr.wisc.edu/cheese-cheesemaking-explained-through-chemistry-microbiology

DBIA AWARDS OVER $46,000 IN GRANTS TO MIDWEST GOAT, SHEEP DAIRY PROCESSORS

The Dairy Business Innovation Alliance (DBIA), a partnership between the Center for Dairy Research (CDR) and the Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association (WCMA), has selected 10 small and medium dairy businesses across the Midwest to receive over $46,000 in grants through the Dairy Business Innovation Alliance (DBIA).

Dairy Business Innovation Alliance

"Consumers are developing a taste for diverse, specialty dairy products, and that's creating new opportunities for producers and processors across the Midwest. These small-dollar grants will have a big impact for sheep and goat businesses working hard to take advantage of those trends," said WCMA Executive Director John Umhoefer.

"These DBIA grants are boosting the visibility of our region's top-quality goat and sheep dairy products and connecting them with increasing consumer demand," added CDR Assistant Director Tom Guerin.

The Goat and Sheep Processors Grant Program opened for applications in March 2026. Businesses could apply for awards of up to $6,000 each to support educational training, product development trials, or trade show participation.

The grant recipients are:

Baetje Farms is an award-winning artisan goat-cheese creamery in Bloomsdale, MO known for handcrafted bloomy-rind and aged cheeses. This award will help Baetje Farms secure booth space at major trade shows, increasing brand visibility and opening new wholesale markets for their goat and mixed-milk cheeses.

Blakesville Creamery is a small farmstead goat and sheep cheese producer in Port Washington, WI crafting soft-ripened cheeses from their 1,500-goat herd and local sheep milk. This award will help the creamery participate in key marketing and trade events, enabling them to educate cheese mongers and buyers about the value of their artisan cheeses and expand distribution into new markets.

Carr Valley Cheese Company in La Valle, WI is a nationally recognized mixed-milk cheesemaker with over 900 awards and a reputation for innovation. This award will support the first phase of developing a new artisan cheese line, filling a major market gap for locally produced specialty cheese.

Hidden Springs Creamery is a sheep dairy and artisan cheese producer in Westby, WI known for its Driftless spreadable cheeses and innovative whey-based products. This award will support education and training needed to launch a new product line that meets rising consumer demand.

Kingston Cheese Cooperative in Cambria, WI supports 85 small family farms by innovating new dairy products and expanding market opportunities. This award will help the cooperative develop a new cheese as part of a diversification strategy that strengthens farm viability and preserves rural livelihoods.

Mesta Meadows is a fully integrated sheep-milk ice cream operation in Glen Allen, MO producing French-custard ice cream from their growing flock of dairy ewes. This award will support staff training to prepare new and existing team members for rapid production scaling as demand increases across Missouri and beyond.

Nordic Creamery is a small family-run dairy in Westby, WI crafting small-batch goat, sheep, and cow-milk cheeses, butter, and ice cream. This award will help the creamery conduct trials to develop a new cheese made from goat and sheep milk, expanding their product offerings and supporting local milk producers.

Prairie Fruits Farm & Creamery is Illinois' first farmstead creamery in Champaign, IL, producing award-winning goat cheeses from a herd of over 60 milking does. This award will help the creamery activate its small-batch R&D system for training and product development, allowing staff to run independent makes and strengthen skills as they expand aged-cheese capacity.

Vlietstra Dairy Farm in Kalamazoo, MI is a sheep-milk processing operation producing high-quality milk, yogurt, and artisan cheeses for regional markets. This award will help the farm develop new products and keep pace with growing demand.

Wild Angels Creamery in Cuba City, WI is a multi-species farmstead dairy producing over 40 varieties of artisan cheeses from sheep, goat, and cow milk. This award will help the creamery scale production of a new mixed-milk product line, transforming seasonal milk surpluses into a high-value, farm-to-table product.

DBIA's grant programs advance the organization's mission to support small and mid-size dairy processors across its 11-state service area of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

CDR WELCOMES NEW STAFF

DBIA Welcomes Mike Sipple

Mike grew up on a dairy farm in Dunn County (Wisconsin) and has spent his entire career in the dairy industry. Mike's experience includes five years at Hilmar Cheese Company in California prior to filling multiple leadership roles with Trega Foods/Agropur for nearly 27 years where he effectively led teams to utilize key performance indicators to identify opportunities and improve operational and financial performance. His broad experience with operations, quality, sales, business expansion planning, and the overall dairy business allows Mike to provide guidance and support on a variety of issues.

Jason Pronschinske, Scientist I

Jason's work supports research, training, and industry partnerships at the CDR. In addition to working in the Cheese Research group, he also helps with short courses and trainings. With a Bachelor of Science in Biochemistry and a PhD in Food Science from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Jason has strong experience in cheese chemistry and ripening. Jason's PhD research focused on developing shelf stable cheese snacks/puffs. Prior to joining CDR as a scientist, he has worked in the CDR's Analytical Group both as a student hourly during his undergraduate studies and full time before pursing his PhD.

LUCEY RECEIVES THE IDFA RESEARCH AWARD IN DAIRY FOODS PROCESSING

The American Dairy Science Association® (ADSA®) has announced John Lucey as the 2026 recipient of the International Dairy Foods Association (IDFA) Research Award in Dairy Foods Processing. The award will be presented on Tuesday, June 23, 2026, during the awards ceremony at the ADSA Annual Meeting in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

The International Dairy Foods Association Research Award in Dairy Foods Processing was created to recognize individuals whose research findings have allowed dairy foods processors to develop new products and to make a significant improvement in the quality, safety, or processing efficiency of dairy foods. The winner must have conducted research at public or private institutions, and their research findings must have clearly and significantly benefited the dairy foods processing industry in its ability to manufacture products with higher quality or safety (chemical or microbiological) or with increased processing efficiencies. Or the research must have led to innovative product development with a measurable impact on the market. The adoption of the findings must affect a significant portion of the dairy foods manufactured. Particular attention is paid to the long-term importance of the research application. The winner must have published the research during the five calendar years prior to the award. The winner must be and have been a member of ADSA for five years.

John Lucey earned his PhD at University College Cork in 1992 and has been a professor at the University of Wisconsin–Madison since 1999. He was named director of the Center for Dairy Research in 2011 and appointed the Owen R. Fennema Professorship in Food Chemistry in 2021. He teaches and conducts research on chemistry and the molecular basis for dairy product functionality. Lucey has published nearly 160 peer-reviewed papers and advised more than 50 graduate students. He teaches numerous industry courses and is a member of the International Scientific Advisory Board for Teagasc. He is a Fellow of ADSA.

Center for Dairy Research
University of Wisconsin-Madison
1605 Linden Drive
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Upcoming CDR Trainings

The Center for Dairy Research is here to help with dairy processing training. Below is a list of upcoming CDR short courses and other training opportunities. Registration for fall short courses will open July 16.

World of Cheese from Pasture to Plate – September 1-4
Advanced Cheesemaking | Italian Varieties – September 15-17
Cheesemaking Fundamentals – September 22-23 & October 27-28
Dairy Ingredient Fundamentals – October 6
Dairy Processing Comprehensive – October 7-8
Advanced Sanitation – October 13-14
Environmental Monitoring – October 15
Cheese Grading & Evaluation – October 20-22
PCQI Training Course (version 2) – November 4-6
For the latest information or to register visit | cdr.wisc.edu/education

DAIRY PIPELINE
Center for Dairy Research
1605 Linden Drive
Madison, WI 53706
www.cdr.wisc.edu
608-262-5970 fax 608-262-1578

Editor: *Shelby Anderson* | sanderson@cdr.wisc.edu | *608-692-7125*
We welcome your questions and comments.

Technical Reviewers: *Alex O'Brien, Dean Sommer*

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