



Western SARE

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MARKETING ARTISAN CHEESE

Situation

As consumer interest in healthful foods continues to grow, there is a parallel rising interest in handmade artisan cheeses. A value-added dairy product based on pasture-based grazing could potentially satisfy these interests, at the same time improving profitability of grass-based dairy farms.

The project team hypothesized that consumers may choose – and pay higher prices for – foods that have a brand image of quality and authenticity linked to sustainable production.

Objectives

- Conduct market research on niche-market potential for artisan cheeses produced on pasture-based farms, including



Tim and Jill Pedrozo of Pedrozo Dairy and Cheese Co. display one of the artisan cheeses they craft at their pasture-based dairy near Orland.

surveys of retail cheese buyers and consumer focus groups

- Develop product identity (labeling) to differentiate practices of grass-based dairies from those of intensive dairy management systems.
- Conduct test marketing of a newly developed cheese.

Actions

- 47 telephone interviews were conducted
- 34 people participated in focus groups
- 36 people sampled cheeses

Results

Telephone Interview Results

- Two-thirds of respondents said specialty cheeses comprise half or more of their cheese



purchases; 48% said they comprise 75% or more

- Three-fourths buy a half pound or more of specialty cheeses in a typical shopping trip
- 57% of the purchased specialty cheese comes from Europe, 32% from California
- All interviewed said they purchase specialty cheese made with cows' milk; 96% purchase goat

Farmer/Rancher Grant

Title: Test Marketing Pasture-Produced Artisan Cheese
Project Number: FW00-210

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SARE Grant: \$7,910



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MARKETING ARTISAN CHEESE

- or sheep milk cheeses
- 98% buy hard cheeses like parmesan, asiago and gouda; 94% buy veined soft cheeses like Roquefort, stilton and bleu; 81% buy soft surface-ripened cheeses like brie and camembert; and 68% buy fresh cheeses like chevre, queso and blanco

Focus Group Results

- 75% said buying local food is important or very important
- 79% said buying direct from family-owned farms is important or very important
- 72% said buying organic is important or very important
- 65% said buying food produced in a sustainable manner is important or very important
- 94% said buying food with potential health benefits is important or very important

From the focus group, it was learned that although price is not a major factor in purchases, consumers prefer to sample premium-priced cheese before buying.

Based on phone and focus group feedback, four cheese-case card statements were developed, each offering a different description of a newly developed Pedrozo cheese. Cheese-case visitors were asked to assess the statements and to rate the flavor and texture of the Pedrozo cheese compared with other cheeses they buy.

The statement receiving the highest rating said:

"Pedrozo Peppercorn is a Gouda-style cheese, hand-made in limited quantities by Tim and Jill Pedrozo. The Pedrozo family ages this cheese over 60 days. This cheese is great as an hors



Two of the Pedrozo artisan cheeses in the aging room at Pedrozo Cheese and Dairy.

d'oeuvre or on top of a salad."

Tasters gave the cheese a 'superior' rating compared with cheeses they buy, and all responding said they would buy the cheese if it were available in their grocery store.



Benefits or Impacts

Information from the project, which can help target promotions for artisan cheese, included:

- Consumers like to sample an unknown cheese before they buy it
- Consumers rely on sales staff for information about cheese
- In-store displays – chalkboards or case cards – will influence purchases and should contain information about the cheese makers, including names and taste characteristics
- If selling through a distributor, educate the distributor and conduct in-store demonstrations when possible
- If cheese is sold in individual packages, packaging will help consumers identify known brands, but consumers will not select a cheese on packaging alone

- Avoid selling pre-packaged cheese alongside commodity cheese – shoppers who browse such areas are price conscious and wary of new products
- Product quality and freshness are more important than whether a product is made locally, organically or sustainably, but buyers of specialty cheeses try to support these attributes
- Foods free of antibiotics and hormones are important to these buyers.

Outreach

This study was presented to:

- 65 people attending the North Valley Dairy Day
- 25 people attending the statewide artisan cheese producer meeting in Stanislaus County
- 200 people at the California Cheese and Butter Association annual meeting in Temecula