

# U.S. SPECIALTY CHEESES

An Introduction to the Heritage, Quality & Trends



## A RESURGENCE OF PAST TRADITIONS

U.S. specialty cheese production dates back to several centuries when European immigrants first settled America. While some settlers brought cheese with them, others brought dairy cows in hopes of continuing their dairy traditions. After the immigrants settled into their new environment, dairy farming soon emerged. Much of the milk produced was initially used for fresh milk, cream, butter and cheese.

As the immigrants migrated westward from the rocky coasts, they encountered fertile fields and lush grasses reminiscent of their European homeland. Shortly thereafter, they cultivated grains, which helped sustain them and their farm animals throughout the long, cold winters. Growing grains also enabled them to feed their dairy cattle year round. Thus, a surplus of fresh milk became available. Cheese represented a process of preserving

surplus milk, and since many European settlers were seasoned experts in cheese making, a tradition developed.

Originally, cheese was produced and consumed at home on the farm. With subsequent improvements in infrastructure and transportation, demand exceeded production. As production increased in the United States, cheese was traded locally and exported internationally. Thus, a side business on the farm evolved into a calling for many.

Today, the United States alone produces a quarter of the world's cheese output in mostly large, state-of-the-art factories. However, specialty cheese making is still prevalent and is currently the fastest growing segment of the American cheese market. The size of U.S. specialty cheese factories remains at a reduced scale and production often times occurs in an open-vat environment. The U.S. offers a versatile range of specialty cheeses. Whether American Originals, artisan, farmstead or organic, cheese makers now showcase thousands of remarkable cheeses, reflecting their own heritage and cheese making innovations. Here are some definitions and guidelines to clarify these cheese categories.

The word 'specialty' denotes cheese that is exclusive in some way with added-value components that command a premium price. Used as an umbrella term, it describes a variety of cheeses, including American Originals, artisan, farmstead, and organic cheeses. Often aged or cured in special ways, specialty cheeses require particular attention to flavor, texture and overall quality. Examples include:

- Aged cheddar
- Highly perishable soft-fresh cheeses
- Cream fortified cheeses
- Brie and soft-ripened cheeses
- Washed-rind cheeses
- Blue cheeses
- Well-aged hard cheeses
- Blended milks with combinations of cow, goat, and sheep milk
- Naturally smoked cheeses
- Natural cheese varieties & cheese spreads with fruits, nuts, peppers & spices
- Limited production of American Originals





## SPECIALTY CHEESE TYPES

### AMERICAN ORIGINALS

Cheeses developed in the United States fall under this category. However, for marketing purposes, this term may also reflect cheeses originally produced elsewhere, but are now crafted in a different or unconventional method by American cheese makers. For instance, over a hundred different styles of blue cheese are now produced in the U.S. Rogue River Blue represents the perfect example, showcasing a combination of ingredients that truly make it an American Original. Utilizing raw summer milk and specially cultured blue molds indigenous to the area, the cheese is then wrapped in grape leaves that are marinated in pear brandy made from Oregon pears. Over the years, some American Originals became so renowned that a few are now manufactured in volumes too large to be classified as specialty cheese. Many are still made in limited quantities and considered specialty cheeses.



### ARTISAN OR ARTISANAL

The word “artisan” or “artisanal” implies that a cheese is produced primarily by hand, in small batches, with particular attention paid to the tradition of the cheese maker’s art. Thus, this process uses as little mechanization as possible. Artisanal cheeses normally require special aging or curing techniques. They may also include various flavorings including spices, herbs, or special methods of smoking. Most are produced in very small volumes, and often sold directly to retailers and chefs in the region where they originate. This trend has reinforced a resurgence of regional trends and cuisines with hundreds of varieties produced in specific areas around the U.S.



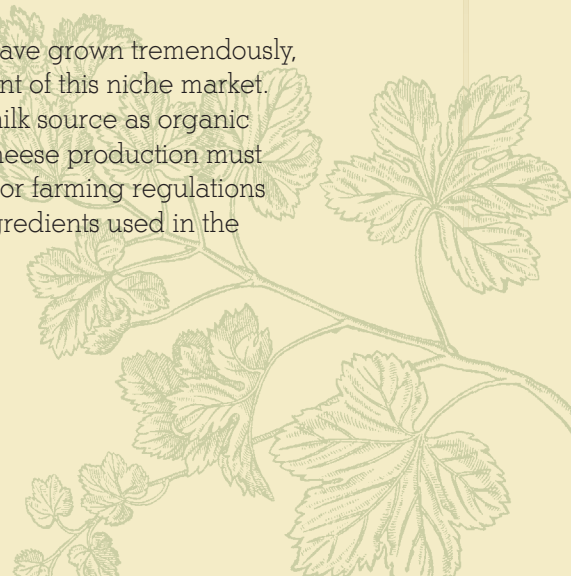
### FARMSTEAD

In order for a cheese to be classified as “farmstead,” the cheese must be made with milk from the farmer's own herd or flock on the farm where the animals are raised. Milk used in the production of farmstead cheeses may not be obtained from any outside source.

### ORGANIC

Sales from organic foods in the U.S. have grown tremendously, and organic cheese is a major segment of this niche market.

The process for declaring a farm or milk source as organic often takes years to complete. Organic cheese production must follow strict federal guidelines that closely monitor farming regulations and feeding specifications. They also dictate that the milk and any other ingredients used in the manufacture of cheese are certified as organic.





## FORGING THE LEGACY WITH INNOVATION

In the last several decades small artisan cheese makers all over the U.S. began producing specialty cheeses and coining them with inventive names to reflect their own region, tradition, or ethnicity. Today, hundreds of artisan cheese makers produce thousands of different cheeses—in fact, cheese is produced in 46 out of 50 states and, due to growing demand, is available both nationally and internationally.

As the largest cheese producing country in the world, with an output of over 4 million metric tons, the U.S. industry paves the way for advances in research, dairy science, and cheese making techniques. It has fostered a reputation for consistent quality, great production efficiencies, and an unparalleled food safety record. These innovations in make procedures have birthed a new generation of committed specialty cheese makers, who employ their creativity and style to create an incomparable array of cheeses.

U.S. cheese makers have pioneered many advances in the world of cheese and their accomplishments have not gone unnoticed. Competing side by side with their European counterparts, American cheese makers consistently win top accolades at international competitions such as the World Cheese Awards and the World Championship Cheese Contest. This demonstrates their long cheese making heritage, traditions and ability to produce top quality, delicious, and superior cheeses. The next page highlights a few of these varieties.

Also, testifying to the resurgence of specialty cheese making in America, the American Cheese Society (ACS), an organization headquartered in Louisville, Kentucky, was formed in 1982 by a group of American artisan and farmstead cheese makers. ACS is dedicated to promoting the growth of specialty cheeses.





## SPECIALTY CHEESE VARIETIES

The following list, divided by degree of hardness, presents just a fraction of the specialty cheeses made in the U.S. Some might be produced by more than one cheese maker, while others are specific brands.

### SOFT-FRESH CHEESE

Crème Fraîche  
Fromage Blanc  
Crescenza  
Mascarpone  
Schloss\*  
Feta (Plain & Flavored)  
Quark (Plain & Flavored)



### SOFT-RIPENED CHEESE

Brie  
Les Frères\*  
Camembert  
Mt. Tam\*  
ColoRouge\*  
Pierce Point\*  
Green Hill\*  
Poudre Puffs\*  
Hudson Valley Camembert\*  
Tomme  
La Petite Crème\*  
Velvet Rose\*



### BLUE

Amish Blue\*  
Berkshire Blue\*  
Maytag Blue\*  
Buttermilk Blue\*  
Point Reyes Blue\*  
Rogue River Blue\*  
Mountain Top Blue\*  
Crater Lake Blue  
Smokey Blue  
Creamy Gorgonzola\*  
Oregonzola



### SEMI-SOFT

Brick (Surface Ripened)  
Havarti (Plain & Flavored)  
Limburger  
Fontina  
Muenster  
Red Hawk\*  
Teleme Jack  
Knights Vail\*  
Gruyère Surchoix\*



### GOUDA & EDAM

Aged Gouda  
Smoked Gouda  
Geliefde\*



### PASTA FILATA

Aged Provolone  
Oaxaca  
Scamorze  
Fresh Mozzarella  
Burrini/Manteche



### CHEDDAR

Naturally Bandaged Cheddar  
Aged Cheddar (2-8 Years Old)  
Raw Milk Cheddar



### SWISS STYLE CHEESE

Gruyère Surchoix\*  
Pleasant Ridge Reserve\*  
Petite Swiss  
Raclette



### HARD CHEESE

Stravecchio Parmesan\*  
Monterey Dry Jack  
American Grana  
Romanello\*  
Sareanah\*  
Pepato



\*Indicates Brand Name



## EMERGING TRENDS IN SPECIALTY CHEESE

Many U.S. cheese makers produce cheeses that target specific nutritional and dietary requirements including:

- Low fat
- Reduced fat
- Low sodium
- Kosher
- Halal
- Organic
- Lactose-free

U.S. cheese makers have also launched unprecedented products for dietary purposes. One example is a natural cheese produced using active yogurt cultures, yielding a delicious, creamy cheese that is lactose-free and low in sodium.

Special packaging and convenient forms of cheese represent value-added components that can also be associated with specialty cheese.

Cheese is often used as a special ingredient in favorite recipes and meals at home. For those preparing their own recipes or meals, convenient forms of cheese have become widespread to accommodate today's fast paced environment. These cheeses are already shredded, sliced, or grated, and ready-to-use.

Enjoying cheese as a stand-alone ingredient is another significant trend. In its original form, cheese is a convenient, portable and ready-to-eat item that requires no cooking. It is a standard item in lunch boxes for families on-the-go, or as after school snacks for kids. It is also a popular option for entertaining at home.

Studies indicate that when people dine out, their top criterion for selecting a restaurant or menu item is flavor and quality. For this reason, cheese is heavily menued within the foodservice sector. Categories under this sector — quick service restaurants (QSR), full service or family restaurants, casual theme restaurants, fine dining, hotel & resorts — are now offering specialty cheeses in all courses including appetizers, salads, soups, breads, entrées, and desserts. Cheeses served within the foodservice sector are often used as ingredients or components in prepared recipes or cooked foods. Examples include four cheese ravioli or lasagna, onion soup with gruyère, fondue and asiago breaded chicken or fish.



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## PLEASING THE PALATE WITH A SPECIALTY CHEESE COURSE

Several decades ago, less than one percent of all fine dining restaurants offered cheese courses on their menu. Today, it is estimated that close to two thirds offer some form of cheese course. This is not a novelty, but instead, a return to the past when cheese was most often enjoyed as a stand-alone item.

### BEVERAGE PAIRINGS

One of the most important accompaniments to round out the cheese course is a beverage, usually a special glass of wine. For cheese courses served before or after the main meal, cheeses pair well with a wide range of red and white wines. Some of the most popular include Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel, Riesling, Chardonnay, and Sauvignon Blanc.

Cheese courses are frequently served at the end of the meal as a "finish course." For this style of service, Late Harvest Dessert Wines and Fortified wines pair well with cheese. Popular pairings include Late Harvest Riesling, Ice Wine, Orange Muscat, Port, and Madeira.



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### CONDIMENTS

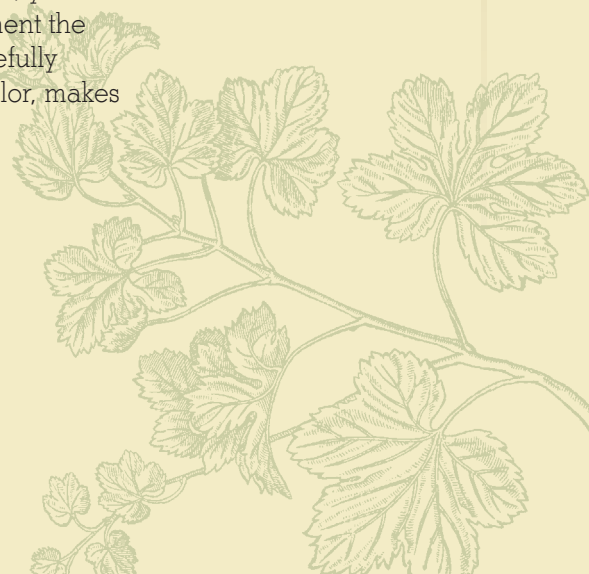
Cheese is often served with bread or crackers, fresh or dried fruits, and nuts. Condiments served with cheese courses have evolved and now fresh and dried fruits are often presented as fruit compotes, chutneys, and other preserves. Simple bread and crackers are still prevalent, but more complex fruit and nut breads are equally embraced. Sweet and savory condiments should be balanced according to the cheeses' flavor profiles.



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### CHEESE COURSE SELECTIONS

Most cheese courses combine a selection of three to five different cheeses. A selection for a cheese course typically includes soft-ripened, semi-soft, blue, cheddar, washed-rind or hard cheese. Well-aged and full flavored cheeses have become popular, yet some milder cheeses could also complement the cheese course. A cheese tray, carefully balanced in taste, texture and color, makes a spectacular presentation.





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