



STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS  
BY LISÉ STERN

# SAY CHEESE!

*Artisans transform milk in new  
and traditional ways*

## CHEESEMAKING IS ONE OF THE OLDEST CULINARY CRAFTS,

and today it is enjoying what might be called a cultural revival throughout the country. During much of the 20th century, America was not known for its cheeses, with just a few varieties available, plus European imports. In the 1980s, a movement away from packaged efficiency foods began. *Local, farmstead, artisan* became sought-after buzzwords, and cheesemaking returned to its small farm roots.

In 1983, the American Cheese Society (ACS) formed, and in 1985 they sponsored the first ACS competition, with 30 companies entering 89 cheeses. Thirty years later, the 2015 competition had 267 producers entering 1,779 cheeses. Cow's milk still dominates, but goat's milk cheeses are one of the fastest growing markets.

This artisanal cheese trend has firmly entrenched itself in New England. In the past few years, Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts each have had enough local cheesemakers to warrant creating their own state cheese guilds. We visited a quintet of cheesemakers close to the Seacoast. Some offer their cheeses at area markets, but many only sell their cheeses on-site, making a visit most worthwhile.



Wolf Meadow Silano



Wolf Meadow Ricotta



Wolf Meadow cheesemaker Luca Mignogna



Sophia, an Appleton cow



Appleton cheeses



Appleton cheesemaker Kristian Holbrook



Assorted cheeses at Wolf Meadow

## APPLETON FARMS

219 Country Road, Ipswich, Mass.  
978-356-3825, [thetrustees.org/appleton](http://thetrustees.org/appleton)

Sprawling fields, livestock, barns, and assorted buildings make up Appleton Farms in Ipswich, Massachusetts. Nine generations ran the farm since Samuel Appleton established it in 1638. Colonel Francis R. Appleton Jr. and his wife, Joan, were the last Appletons to live here. They had no heirs, so they bequeathed the 1,000-acre farm to the Trustees, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving open land in Massachusetts. “They didn’t want the land to be subdivided and built up,” explains Sandy Bemis, retail and wholesale manager for the farm’s store. “Appleton became a working farm, with a big engagement and educational program for people to come learn.”

In 2012, cheesemaking was added to that program. The cheeses are sold only on-site, and at Appleton’s new outpost at the Boston Public Market. Cheesemaker Arlene Brokaw developed the four cheeses the farm now produces. Her assistant Anna Cantelmo then took over, and now Kristian Holbrook is the resident cheesemaker. He had worked as a chef, but cheese beckoned, and he’s worked on farms with cows, sheep, and goats. “I was fascinated with the idea of making a product,” he says. “I like being on a farm, the proximity to the cows.”

Holbrook notes that the subtle flavors of the cheeses can change with the seasons. “We’ll tweak them as the milk changes over the course of the year,” he explains. “The fat content, the protein will change, and that affects how long you heat the milk, how long you stir

it during the cheesemaking process. The milk is different every day. Bigger places buy milk from multiple dairies and can standardize the fat/protein content. We have the same group of cows, so are a little more focused on the spectrum of qualities as cows go through lactation. It’s easier to make cheese from standardized milk, but it’s less of a challenge. Here, it’s never boring.”

Holbrook says he doesn’t yet have a favorite of the cheeses he’s started making at Appleton. “I’m an equal opportunity cheese eater,” he laughs.

“We’re milking just shy of 30 cows,” Bemis says. “But we have many more—70 to 80—and we rotate the milking based on their gestational cycle. We have happy cows.” The cows are Jersey cows, known for their high fat content, a boon for chefs and for cheesemaking. The cows are pastured during the warmer weather, and in the winter they’re fed the hay produced on the farm.

### APPLETON CHEESE BOARD

The store also sells Appleton’s milk and cream, as well as meat and produce, and other local goods.

**Broad Meadow**, aged 6 to 8 months

**Goodhue**, aged 9 months

**Pinnacle** (Plain, Dill, and Hot Pepper), similar to Havarti

**Sunset Hill Triple Cream**, similar to Brie

## WOLF MEADOW CHEESE BOARD

**Caciocavallo**, a kind of Silano

**Caciotta** (Plain, Peperoncino), aged semisoft cheese

**Mozzarella**, a fresh stretched cheese

**Primo Sale** (Plain, Peperoncino), lightly salted farmer's cheese

**Ricotta**, Mignogna's favorite

**Ricotta Salata**, a pressed, salted ricotta, aged 6 months

**Scamorza** (Plain, Tartufo, Peperoncino), like a slightly aged mozzarella

**Silano** (Plain, Tartufo, Peperoncino), provolone-like, aged 2 months to 2 years

## WOLF MEADOW FARM

91 High Street, Amesbury, Mass.

978-201-1606, [wolfmeadowfarm.com](http://wolfmeadowfarm.com)

Luca Mignogna creates amazing classic Italian cheeses in a single-story orange cinder-block building not far from downtown Amesbury, Massachusetts. This is Wolf Meadow Farm—technically not a farm, although Mignogna feels a farmer's connection to “the ladies,” as he calls the cows of the nearby farm that supply his milk. “Wolf” is a nod his family nickname, Lupo, meaning “wolf” in Italian, and the name of his dog. The dairy also has a stall at the new Boston Public Market.

Mignogna was born and raised in Campobasso in the Molise region of Italy. He worked in restaurants in Japan, England, and California. “I was making cheese in my basement for friends and family,” he says. When he decided to go pro “to make traditional Italian cheeses,” he felt drawn to the seasonality of the Northeast. “California is one weather all year long. One of the reasons I moved to here is the spring milk, the summer milk, they all have different butterfat, and that's the beauty of working with these natural products. They're always different, and the challenge is to be consistent.”

Before opening, Mignogna did some serious research. He attended a course at the University of Vermont's Institute for Artisan Cheese. He then returned to Italy to the village of Carovilli to work in professional dairies so that he could combine the chemistry knowledge gained at UVM with time-honored methods. “I wanted to make sure everything I was doing was correct,” he says.

Back in the States, the first matter at hand was to find cows. “All you need is fresh, good milk to make cheese,” Mignogna says. He found it at Artichoke Dairy in West Newbury. He was impressed by the way owner Bruce Colby farmed. “Most important is how you treat those creatures. These are creatures that have feelings. There is no violence, nothing not natural. Bruce loves what he does, which is great. He treats the cows correctly, does nothing to impact the quality of the milk. What he does is part of what we do. The cows are fed grass during the summertime, and have 180 acres of pasture for grazing. During the wintertime, we have a couple breweries around Newburyport, and they bring leftover mash. So we feed the ladies with fermented grains during the wintertime. And farmers pick up leftover whey from our cheese for their pigs. That's part of the whole cycle.”

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## BROOKFORD FARM

250 West Road, Canterbury, N.H.  
603-742-4084, [brookfordfarm.com](http://brookfordfarm.com)

A steeply winding road off Route 93 leads to the flat fields of Brookford Farm in Canterbury, New Hampshire. It's a diversified farm, explains Luke Mahoney, who owns the farm with his wife, Catarina, with multiple types of agriculture. They have dairy cows as well as pigs, chickens, and organically grown produce. A full-service farm.

Luke and Catarina Mahoney grew up an ocean apart—he in New York state and she in Germany. Neither came from a farming background. “We’re a new generation of farmers. It’s a bit of a trend,” Luke says.

In college, he studied anthropology. “But I didn’t want to work in my field,” he says. “I wanted to live anthropology, and I felt that farming was living anthropology, creating landscape specific to place. That sent me on a path to find an internship on how to farm.” He ended up on a livestock-oriented farm in Russia, where he met and married Catarina, and they had the first of their four sons. Next stop was Germany, then the United States, where they were able to start their own farm.

In 2006, they leased Brookford Farm in Rollinsford, then moved to their current location in 2012. The cheese component of their business happened when they had too much milk. Catarina admits, “Cheese wasn’t my thing. I preferred working with nature, being outside, with the soil. But somebody had to take it on.” Initially they hired a cheesemaker, then Catarina began to research, including taking courses, and was won over. “I was curious about the process. I like that I can create something out of that raw product and change it into something else.”

Their cheese starts with their cows. “We raise our cows on grass,” Luke says. “We like to feed them outside, foraging for their own food, searching for what is going to make them healthy. In the winter they’re in the barn; they get what we give them, which is hopefully high in grass. They’re ruminant, which means they extract a lot of nutrition out of grass, way more than we could, because they have a four-chambered stomach, and each stomach has a task. If they just eat grain, it won’t work; the food passes right through, not working the muscles. We like to encourage our animals to work for their nutrition, to utilize all the muscles that were given to them, and grass is the food that works those muscles better than any other food.”

### BROOKFORD CHEESE BOARD

**Brie**

**Camembert**

**Cheddar** (Raw, Smoked, Jalapeño, Aged Clothbound)

**Cottage Cheese**

**Feta**

**Gouda**

**Maasdam**, a Dutch semi-firm yellow cheese

**Quark** (Plain, Garlic & Dill, Horseradish), a fresh cheese similar to ricotta

**Shades of Blue**



Luke and Catarina Mahoney of Brookford Farm



Silvery Moon cheesemaker Dorothee Grimm



Brookford Farm Clothbound Cheddar



Assorted Silvery Moon cheeses

## SILVERY MOON CREAMERY AT SMILING HILL FARM

781 County Road, Westbrook, Maine  
207-699-3170, [silverymooncheese.com](http://silverymooncheese.com)

Smiling Hill Farm in Westbrook, Maine, has been owned by the Knight family since the 1700s—they're now on their 12th generation. The 500 acres of rolling hills and woodland are surprisingly close to downtown Portland. The Knights established the Silvery Moon Creamery cheesemaking operation on-site in 2003 with original cheesemaker Jennifer Betancourt. They supply milk to area Hannaford supermarkets and have a year-round ice cream stand and cafe, where you can buy their cheeses, which have won several ACS competition awards. The cheeses are also available at markets throughout Maine. The milk comes from about 30 Holstein cows owned by Smiling Hill, as well as from neighboring farms.

Dorothee Grimm, a native of Germany, became the Silvery Moon cheesemaker in 2011. This was a career change for her—her background was in microbiology, researching Lyme and Legionnaires' disease and different kinds of bacteria. "I wanted to work in agriculture because I liked the idea of working with food from the source," Grimm says. She already was doing so at home, with a garden, rabbits, and chickens. "I fish and hunt too. When I cook, I cook from scratch—I don't just heat up a pizza from the store."

Grimm had limited familiarity with cheesemaking, however. She had taken classes with some Maine cheesemakers and had made some simple fresh cheeses and yogurt at home. But that was more experience than other applicants for the job, and she was hired. "Since cheesemaking and microbiology are very similar, that's what I ended up doing. In both jobs, you try to temper the good bacteria and keep the bad out."

Five years into the job, Grimm thoroughly enjoys cheesemaking and doesn't miss the labs. "I like the process," she says. "We do follow protocols, but there's always something different, depending on the milk. Summer is a little different from winter; sometimes you have to tweak it. I like that it's a small farm. You work all day long and go home and say I did something, this is what I made. And you can eat the product in the end."

### SILVERY MOON CHEESE BOARD

**Brie**

**Camembert**

**Casco Bay Dulse**, with Maine's VitaminSea red seaweed

**Cheddar Curd** (Plain, Herbed, Maple Barbecue)

**Cream Cheese**

**Moonchengo**, Manchego-like

**Provolone** (Plain and Smoked), aged one month

**Queso Oaxaca**, similar to string cheese

**Rosemary's Waltz**, with rosemary

**Tomme**, firm yellow cheese

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Nigerian dwarf goats at Creeping Thyme



Marie and Tim Clements

## CREEPING THYME FARM

39 Hall Road, Buxton, Maine  
207-727-3872, [creepingthymefarm.com](http://creepingthymefarm.com)

Creeping Thyme Farm is a micro goat farm on a private road not far from Route 95 in Buxton, Maine. In 2007, Marie and Tim Clements bought a pair of goats, planning to make a hobby of milking and making their own cheese. Both 51 at the time, neither had any agricultural or farming background. “Originally we just thought we’d get a couple goats for ourselves,” Marie says. “We started making cheese, people liked it and wanted to buy it; we got more goats, got licensed, and started making cheese full time.” Marie continued with her job as an executive with an insurance company for the first few years. Tim, who had previously designed sprinkler systems, became the designated cheesemaker, while Marie started making goat’s milk soap and fudge. “We just fell into it,” Marie says. “My husband was never a cook, but he’s become an amazing cheesemaker. We love doing it.”

### CREEPING THYME CHEESE BOARD

**Bondon** (Plain, Tuscan Bruschetta, Hot Pepper Jam, Blueberry Salsa), like cream cheese

**Chevre** (Plain, Garlic & Herb, Maine Maple Syrup)

**Feta**

**Haloumi**, a firm cheese, brined

**Manchego**, available in four stages of ripeness: Fresco (5 days), Curado (3 to 12 weeks), Viejo (3 to 12 months), and Aceite (over a year)

**Queso Blanco**, a firm mild cheese

**Queso Fresco** (Plain, Sundried Tomato and Basil, Black Olives and Green Chiles), a sliceable semi-firm cheese

**Ricotta**

**Ricotta Salata**, pressed, salted ricotta

## For the Cheese Connoisseur

Love cheese? That would make you a *turophile* if you prefer ancient Greek, or a *caseophile*, if Latin is your preference.

The following organizations offer information on local and artisanal cheeses

### SEACOAST

Maine Cheese Guild, [mainecheeseguild.org](http://mainecheeseguild.org)

Massachusetts Cheese Guild, [macheeseguild.org](http://macheeseguild.org)

New Hampshire Cheesemakers Guild,  
[nhdairypromo.org/cheesemakers-guild](http://nhdairypromo.org/cheesemakers-guild)

### NATIONAL

American Cheese Society, [cheesesociety.org](http://cheesesociety.org)

American Cheese Society Competition,  
[cheesejudging.org](http://cheesejudging.org)

*Culture: The Word on Cheese* magazine,  
[culturecheesemag.com](http://culturecheesemag.com)

New England Cheesemaking Supply Co.,  
[cheesemaking.com](http://cheesemaking.com)

Oldways Cheese Coalition, [oldwayscheese.org](http://oldwayscheese.org)

Nine years later, they are caprine experts, giving classes on goat raising and soap- and cheesemaking, selling goats as well as cheese. They have 20 to 30 does, with 16 to 18 lactating at any one time, plus two bucks for breeding, with about 45 kids born per year. They do all the milking—and birthing, which sometimes includes hands-on assistance. Marie also de-horns the young goats and neuters male goats.

The breed they chose is Nigerian dwarf, not often used for commercial enterprises because they’re smaller and give less milk. “But their milk is really high quality,” Marie says. “A lot of people don’t like the strong, gamey flavor of goat milk cheese. Cheese made with Nigerian milk is sweet, almost like another category of cheese.” The smaller size of the goats (they average about 50 pounds, the size of a medium dog) also makes them easier to transport.

Tim and Marie both obviously enjoy their new career, all-encompassing though it may be. The house is filled with goat-themed art, knickknacks, and memorabilia. “I was an officer at this big company,” Marie says. “I had to dress professionally. This is the absolute opposite. I was there for 38 years, which gave me the money to set up what I really wanted to do.”

The name of the farm, she says, is a play on words. Marie liked the pun of thyme the plant versus time. “But the joke was on us. We thought this would be a retirement project and life would slow down. But time is not creeping, not here!”

For recipes, go to [tasteoftheseacoast.com](http://tasteoftheseacoast.com).