

## **Cheese please!**

### **The 5C's of regional economic clusters that build an agritourism premium for local cheese in Maine USA**

Sourced from milk, cheese is a global commodity worth \$200 billion that reflects the unique regional identity, heritage, traditions, and practices of working rural landscapes. To connect consumers with producers, culinary trails have emerged as a strategy to organize, market, and brand the signature assets of a region, shaping the identity of places; promoting rural economic development; branding distinctive local food products; and increasing the contribution of tourism and agriculture to GDP. To achieve these important outcomes, farmers and food producers must work together as a cluster, a geographic concentration of suppliers, producers, and service providers in a related industry that improves productivity and performance across the value chain. Based on interviews with dozens of producers in Maine USA, the 5'C of capacity, cooperation, communication, coordination, and collaboration have facilitated the growth of the state's cheese cluster, including a low regulatory barrier to market entry that allows licensed home production; an industry culture of training, mentoring, and networking that supports emerging, optimizing, and maturing cheesemakers; and statewide marketing that promotes an annual cheese festival, open creamery day, and seasonal agritourism activities. Through the 5Cs, Maine has generated a statewide brand for cheese that results in a price premium 5-10 times that of a national brand. Come away with a practical strategy - the 5Cs framework – that you can apply in your region, state, or country to develop an agritourism cluster.