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Safe Sell Dairy

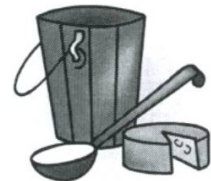
**Creative Ways to
Sell Dairy Products
Safely At Farmers' Markets**



Courtney Haase

Safe Sell Dairy

Creative Ways to
Sell Dairy Products
Safely At Farmers' Markets



by
Courtney Haase

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**Safe Sell Dairy: Creative Ways to Sell
Dairy Products Safely At Farmers' Markets**

CONTENTS

FOREWORD 5

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 7

INTRODUCTION 9

LEGAL ISSUES 12

 Liability Insurance 13

 Licensing and Inspectors 14

 Labeling 16

BUILDING A FOUNDATION 18

 Creating a Philosophy 19

 Maintaining Motivation 21

PRESENTATION 26

 Your Appearance 27

 Displaying Your Cheese 29

 Signage 30

 Logo Signs 30

 Display Signs 31

 Tents and Canopies 32

 Tables 34

 Tablecloths 36

 Essential Display Items 36

 Tasting Apparatus 37

 Display Cases 38

MARKET ETIQUETTE 42

 Children at the Market 43

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FOREWORD

In 1978 I began a new life. What started off as the purchase of two Toggenburg goats for my own milk consumption turned into a herd of 25 goats and a licensed commercial dairy. Between 1978 and 2004, when I closed Nunsuch Dairy and Cheese, a lot of milk passed through my machines.

During those years I created a mini-empire on a five-acre farm. This empire consisted of a goat dairy (heretofore unheard of in the small town in which I live); a small-scale dairy equipment sales business; and the Small Dairy Project, a non-profit farm-based educational center.

The design and manufacturing of small scale dairy equipment has enabled owners of small herds of goats or cows in the United States to process their own milk and cheese. I assisted in this turn of events by initiating the design and development of the first small-scale dairy pasteurizer and bottling equipment. The cheese produced by small herd owners using this equipment has come to be known as farmstead cheese in the truest sense of the word.

I was one of the first dairy-goat farm owners in New Hampshire to expand my licensed dairy operation into a value-added cheese making facility. The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines a value-added product as "one in which the producer changes the physical state or form of raw

SAFETY46
Keeping Your Product Cold47
Types of Cold Keeping.....47
Supplementary Insulation48
Thermometers49
Active Cold Keeping49
Thermoelectric (TE) Coolers.....50
Rechargeable Marine Batteries51
Ventilation51
Passive Cold Keeping52
"Combo" Cold Keeping54
Cleaning Coolers after the Market.....56
Hands—Yours and Others'.....56
Gloves57
Cross Contamination58
Sampling59
Soft Cheese Sampling60
Controlled Sampling61
"Snatch and Snack"62
Aged Cheese Sampling.....63
Pets, Livestock and Other Perils.....64
Summary66
CONCLUSION69
INDEX.....73

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And to Sherry Young, a wonderful person, whose help in writing and formatting this booklet has been invaluable. Her humor kept me alive when all else was failing. Her support and expertise is an integral part of this booklet. Her businesslike attitude has been a strong tower.

Courtney Haase
Sutton, New Hampshire

INTRODUCTION

This book will enhance your marketing skills by presenting safe and creative ways of selling dairy products at farmers' markets and outdoor arenas. It is not for the hobbyist, but is meant to help owners of commercial, licensed dairies market their dairy products.

Over the last 14 years as a licensed processor I have developed an educated eye as to what is acceptable from the standpoint of the buyer regarding safety and aesthetics. I have observed buyers from the unsophisticated consumers of the late 80's and early 90's to today's highly astute, inquisitive shoppers.

This booklet will discuss personal appearance, display tables and—most importantly—safe methods of preserving your product during the hours of market.

Inquisitive consumers want information about the food, about the livestock and about your dairy practices. They are keenly aware of hot days and know dairy products should be kept at the proper temperatures. When cheese is exchanged hand-to-hand from seller to buyer, customers expect it to feel cold.

Your own appearance should reflect your pride in your product. Buyers expect food to be handled with clean hands from a neatly groomed farmer in clean clothes.

We producers must devise our own methods



Cheese—cold and ready to sell—is what it is all about. (Photo courtesy Caryn Park)

of selling dairy products which reflects our pride as licensed commercial dairy processors and supplies the customers with cold, safe and delicious dairy products. My goal for this booklet is to address these issues in ways which will help us sell our dairy products safely and creatively.

We want customers and we want them to come back. We want our customers to remember our dairy products for the freshness of their taste, the uniqueness of their character and the neatness of our packaging and display.

I'm sure as time progresses you will develop skills that will take the ideas I suggest far beyond my thinking. Hopefully, ideas I present will challenge you to develop additional creative ways to sell your products safely. No one has all the answers but this booklet will act as a springboard for creative thinking. By sharing ideas we create an environment of success. When one person succeeds, we all benefit.

LEGAL ISSUES
including
Liability Insurance
Licensing and Inspectors
Labeling

LEGAL ISSUES

This booklet is not a comprehensive or definitive text on food safety or marketing. It is part of a grassroots, farmer-to-farmer effort to share information about sustainable agriculture. Many of the issues discussed in this book come right out of mistakes I made in my 27 years producing and selling dairy products. I hope you will learn from my experience, to your benefit and that of your customers.

Although this book will get you started, it is meant primarily to stimulate and augment your own research. You still need to do your homework by consulting with appropriate federal, state and local public health and dairy regulators before setting up to sell dairy products at any farmers' market.

Liability Insurance

Liability insurance is important for any vendor, but the perishable nature of our products makes it imperative for the licensed dairy farmer. Most markets require insurance, but even if your market doesn't, you are foolish to be without it. Whether you win or lose, all it takes is one lawsuit to bring your entire business to its knees.

Besides the obvious health risks involved in selling dairy food to the public, there are many other opportunities for liability at farmers' markets. If you use tents with ropes, people can trip. If your tent is set too low to accommodate tall people or if parents carry children on their shoulders, someone can hit his or her head. Many policies also cover your display in case of a mishap (e.g., the wind knocks down your tent or the tables blow over).

Liability insurance is not a cure-all for avoiding lawsuits, but it does demonstrate your intent to conduct business in a serious and conscientious manner. Besides carrying liability insurance, you should do your best to help your customers avoid mishap. Pay attention to possible hazards and mark the ones you cannot remove. For example, you can mark ropes or other hazards with inexpensive and highly visible surveyor's tape.

Liability insurance is very expensive unless you have some sort of all-inclusive policy. Farm Family Insurance, affiliated with your

local or state Farm Bureau, includes liability in some of its farm packages.

To reiterate, don't do business without liability insurance.

Licensing and Inspectors

You cannot sell dairy products at a farmers' market unless you have the proper license to make those products from your state's Department of Dairy Sanitation and Health. Known as a Processor's License, this legal document affirms your farm is a licensed, commercial, value-added dairy.

When you decide to sell your products at a farmers' market, you face additional public health requirements common to all food vendors. You should contact your local and state health departments to find out what issues concern them and what regulations you'll need to follow.

As part of the research for this book I contacted state Dairy Departments in Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont. At that time there were no written laws or regulations specific to selling of dairy foods at farmers' markets. Various state inspectors told me what concerned them regarding food safety in displaying, sampling and keeping dairy products cold. I have incorporated their

observations and suggestions into this booklet.

State dairy inspectors inspect your farm operation only and are not found at farmers' markets. Typically, inspectors who do appear on site are state Weight and Measures regulators and city or town health inspectors.

The representative from Weight and Measures may check your scale if your cheese is being cut on site. Or the inspector may check your pre-packaged cheese to ascertain the accuracy of the net weights written on your packages. You need to have your scale certified with the State Department of Weights and Measures. I suggest calling the department and having it done prior to the market start-up date.

Another inspector you may meet will be from the local town or city health department. He or she may ask to see your Processor's License or even request a copy of it, if you have not submitted it to the market manager.

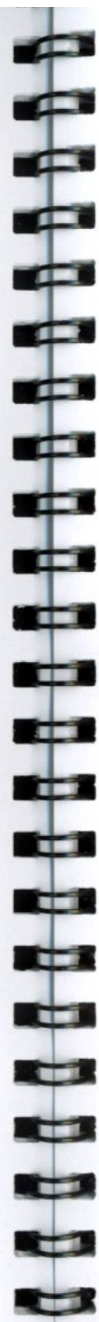
The biggest problem I see in dealing with state and local agencies is a lack of communication among them. Agencies work independently of each other and you cannot count on representatives of one agency to refer you to another. It is up to you to seek out information on licensing from as many agencies as you can think of before going to a farmer's market. This is your homework and no one can do it for you!

Labeling

Your label is important because it not only creates an image for your products, it allows the customer to see what is in your cheese. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have very specific legal requirements for commercial food labels. It pays to have your dairy inspector or health officer review the content of your proposed labels before you invest in having them printed.

In general all labels must contain the name of your farm and contact information, consisting of business name and address of the farm or manufacturer. You must list net weight of the product and all ingredients starting with the most (by weight) down to the least. Bear in mind spices and herbs are considered separate ingredients; you cannot group both of these items into one category. You will want to differentiate between animal and microbial rennet. Finally, you may want to list the names of your cultures. You should check with your inspector and health officer to make sure you've met all legal requirements.

You may also want to include a UPC (barcode) number on your labels. The Uniform Code Council, Inc. can give you information on the application process on their website, <http://www.uc-council.org>; by snail mail at The Princeton Pike Corporate Center, 1009 Lenox Drive, Suite 202, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648; or by telephone, 609-620-0200.



BUILDING A FOUNDATION
including
Creating a Philosophy
Maintaining Motivation

Creating a Philosophy

A dynamic philosophy is the foundation of any successful business. Vibrant ideas are infectious. Have you ever walked into a room full of young entrepreneurs? It's like walking into what appears to be a dimly lit room and crossing over the threshold into a bright, vibrant atmosphere. Positive thinking, new ideas and enthusiasm for your business create an ambience of forward thinking and encourage the participation of young entrepreneurs.

A philosophy clarifies why you are "doing dairy". This strong sense of purpose allows you to become focused and clear in your intentions. The clients you encounter want more than food for the body. Customers want "soul food" too, an upbeat presentation of why you are doing food and particularly dairy foods. Soft, creamy dairy foods comfort the body; truthful, direct thoughts on why you dairy farm comfort the soul.

By developing this philosophy you will be inwardly keeping your business plan alive in your own heart while satisfying your customers' desire to educate themselves about the source of their food. If a person takes the time to ask about your products or to inquire about who you are, you have an obligation to answer those questions thoughtfully and thoroughly.

Your trips to and from the markets give you time to consider questions that may arise and

BUILDING A FOUNDATION

Just as when you build a barn, you need a strong foundation to build a healthy business. This foundation, resting on a well-developed personal philosophy with a wall of motivation, one of goals and another of focus, will weather any storm. If your roof is humor and your doors integrity, your business will stand as firmly as any New England barn.

If you make something, someone is bound to purchase it. If you make it well and safe, that someone tells others and your philosophical foundation turns into a business which weathers both days that are profitable and those that are not so.

time to develop answers that will offer a true presentation of who you are and why you are farming. By selling at a farmers' market you encourage a relationship with your customers and that relationship invites them into your life.

Whether your farm is high tech or low, be prepared to explain and share the good parts of your life. Money is not the only motivation, although we all know we have to pay our bills. Most people know farming is hard work, so you don't need to belabor the point.

Your customers buy into your philosophy as much as they buy into your product. If you are clear on why you are doing what you are doing then you can explain why your cheese, milk or whatever you produce is different from someone else's. By establishing a philosophy, competition diminishes as an issue. People will buy your product because they want to support you as a farmer and support your philosophy of farming.

Take advantage of the mystique that still surrounds the work of raising dairy animals, milking and cheese making. As our food system moves further and further away from its agrarian base, the wonder of producing food, raising livestock and milking goats, cows and sheep creates an aura of mystery about our enterprise and the people who manage it.

Farmers are people who made a choice to live close to the earth with integrity, reaping moderate financial rewards. Successful dairy

farmers possess an enormous wealth of technical knowledge and intuitive wisdom in fields as diverse as plant biology, animal husbandry, meteorology, bacteriology and marketing. They must be financially astute. They must produce, manufacture and distribute their products and manage their wastes within a complex, constantly changing regulatory framework.

If everything in your person speaks to these principles, you will succeed and you will build a business base that will follow wherever your products take you. And your nightly sleep will be peaceful and well earned.

Maintaining Motivation

Once you develop a strong, dynamic philosophy you'll need to work to keep your motivation high. Though it sounds easy, a strong philosophy and high motivation are not easy to maintain.

Usually the first three or four markets days feel fun. You absorb energy from other vendors and customers. Seeing new people discover the market and *your* space is enough to keep your motivation high for maintaining proper sanitation, keeping your display fresh, and talking about your products.

Once the summer heat begins to creep in and your schedule increases to three, four and even five markets a week (after doing all the chores you normally do) your enthusiasm

tends to wane. The markets begin to feel like real work; you tire of saying the same things to different customers and your energy level decreases. Remembering why you pursued this career is crucial to maintaining your motivation.

Summer heat and humidity can kill the spirit. You can help yourself by keeping your hands clean. This helps cool the body, as can keeping a glass of ice or cold water nearby. If you remain relatively comfortable it lessens the stress of long, hot market days.

Difficult customers can tax the spirit. Insensitive comments and rude behavior take the punch out of any sale. Ever hear "That's so expensive, I could do it much cheaper!"? Remarks of this nature reflect the upbringing of the customer, not the quality of your products. Yet you, the cheese maker, will smile and tell the customer perhaps he will find another cheese at the market which he will enjoy.

Children running through the display, "sampling" enough for a lunch can be discouraging. Trying to be gentle, keeping an eye on the table, trying to increase sales by offering samples keeps us on our toes. It can be exhausting. It's hard to keep cool, conduct business and be pleasant to customers. It may seem all the money in the world isn't worth the effort.

And you know, it isn't. While it is imperative to pay your bills to live a good life, your

profession has to be motivated by something besides the income you produce. Doing your part in life to keep agriculture alive because you believe good food is worth effort, because you enjoy raising livestock and because you give back to the earth what the earth has given you are some of the reasons why farmers choose to move beyond mere milk production to become licensed commercial dairies.

Because you have taken the necessary steps to secure a commercial license, you know the venture is not cheap. Over time you will realize this was one of the best investments you could make for yourself and your farm.

Many people dream of living in the outdoors, being surrounded by responsive livestock and eating healthy, homegrown food. Farmers get to live that dream, to have the reality of it at their fingertips. The financial investment of having sufficient land to enjoy, taking time to make the livestock responsive and the work involved in producing the food demands determination and commitment.

One of the more effective means of keeping motivation high is to create a list of the pros and cons for running your dairy. A yearly review of this list helps you stay focused during the difficult summer months. Money is important, but there is more to living a challenged life than financial return. Money pays the bills and is a medium for exchange—but money can't buy energy!

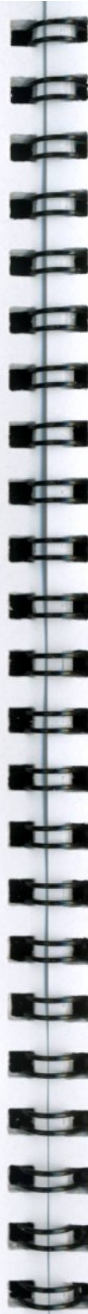
By understanding reasons deep within your spirit, the work lightens and turns into gift. And the word *choice* becomes an integral part of motivation. Freely choosing to make the transition to a value-added dairy allows the farmer to creatively turn work into gift.

Most of us want to be more than consumers. Putting back into the earth what we take out can be a wonderful motivation for caring and for nurturing the earth and the livestock we tend.

Reconciling our spiritual life with the outer realities can cause conflicts, but in the greater scheme of things, life always searches for and realizes the balance. It's the balance we strive to achieve. With a dynamic philosophy as a foundation and a strong motivation as building blocks, you are 80% on the way to a successful business.

When I began my value-added dairy, my priority issue was *want* versus *need*. It was many years before I could realize the *want* part of my life.

Grappling successfully with this dichotomy is a major help in avoiding enormous debt. Often, setting aside the *wants* in life means we can have the *needs*; the *wants* can always come later. The balancing of these two entities creates an enriching journey. This journey becomes a very important part of life and is far more interesting than the destination.



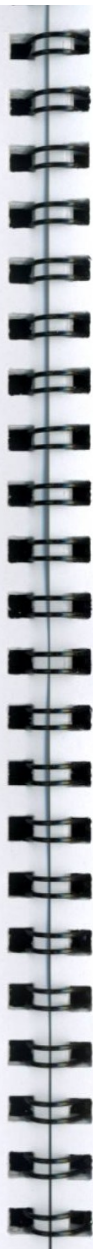
PRESENTATION
including
Your Appearance
Displaying Your Cheese
Signage
Tents and Canopies
Tables
Essential Display Items
Tasting Apparatus
Display Cases

PRESENTATION

By developing a philosophy and determining your motivation you create an interior image which translates into an outer package.

Marketing experts report that packaging accounts for 80 percent of sales. Add another 15 percent for personality. Yep, that leaves about 5 percent for the product itself. We're all familiar with the industry that "packages" actors, politicians and other public personalities. However unacknowledged, every aspect of creating your business helps create the "package" that will determine how well your products sell.

The main issue in creating an image is to pick a style and stick with it. As time goes along, you can modify your presentation to better reflect your energy and style.



Your Appearance

If you are motivated to be a producer of high-end food you have to look the part. Your image can make or break a sale. Looking like a professional takes a little effort and planning but can be a timesaver in the long run.

Attention to detail in appearance may seem a bit trite, but my experience has shown that clean clothes, clean hands and a tidy appearance translate into sales and into the confidence a client needs to embrace your farm philosophy. You know what you are doing and should look like the expert you are.

Have you ever been to a really nice restaurant and seen the greasy-haired chef come out of the kitchen wearing a dirty apron and jeans? Neither have I. Chefs work in a highly competitive market. They know the importance of looking good and assuming the role of a well-trained expert.

Working with food in a high-end environment with lots of competition around the corner means constantly looking for the creative edge. The more professional you look, the more you are justifying high-end payback.

Clothes at a market are a statement of how you envision your business. The market clothes need not be expensive or fancy. It helps to mention your farm's name on an apron or tee shirt. Remember, the market is the only time some customers see you.

Decide at the beginning of the season what you will wear. When you are rushing to get to the market the last thing you want to worry about is what to wear. Keeping your choice of clothes simple and discreet saves time and energy.

White clothes always look crisp and clean, if they are cared for. A clean, crisp appearance denotes focus and attention to detail. It conveys to the buyer you care enough to be conscious of your person and surroundings. You may decide to have an assistant to help you with sales at the market. It saves stress

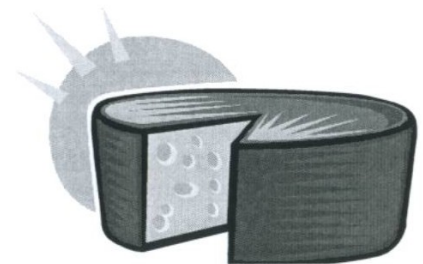


The market is the only time some of your customers see you. Market clothes need not be expensive or fancy but should always be fresh and neat. (Photo courtesy Nancy Evans)

and possible conflict if you decide what your staff will wear before you hire them.

Dress Code or not? If you plan to hire young helpers, will you set guidelines for their appearance? Body piercing and tattoos have become popular adornments among young people, but many shoppers may not want to buy cheese from someone with a pierced tongue or low-riding pants that reveal a colorful lower-back tattoo.

I recommend setting appearance standards for yourself and your hired helpers as part of your overall sales strategy. If you formulate a dress code of some sort from the very beginning, you may well avoid embarrassment for yourself or your assistants.



Displaying Your Cheese

Simple, elegant, rustic or quaint. What will be the special look of your booth? Whatever style you pick, this first impression is what your customers will remember and, after a while, begin to expect.

Each of the following factors contributes something of interest to your overall presentation:

- Signage
- Tent
- Tables
- Essential table items
- Tasting apparatus
- Display cases.

Signage

There are two types of signs to be considered when setting up your display. One is the large central sign which draws people to your area. This is referred to as your logo sign. The other type denotes the various signs you place on your display to declare pricing and other information. These are known as display signs.

Logo Signs. Everyone likes to see his or her name "up there". A creative sign will be with you a long time, so take the time to consider your choices. A good sign can be expensive but worth the money in the long run.

What is your central theme? Do you want your sign to show your livestock, the fields in which they graze or your product? You want an image of good clean living in packaging yourself and your product.

Your sign needs to be clear, easy to read and immediately identifiable. It need not be too

detailed; simple and direct usually does the trick. Multicolored signs are attractive and draw the eye. I recommend strong colors and an uncomplicated design.

Your logo sign can sit outside your spot at the market or it can hang in or on your tent. You can purchase signs silk-screened on vinyl which hang easily and withstand harsh weather well. A wooden sign looks great, but if the market is on blacktop you will have difficulty securing it.

Consistency is important. Always place your sign in the same place at each market. If your spot at the market changes, many people will continue to search for your sign. If you need to replace your sign, make the new sign similar to the original one so established customers can locate you easily.

Choosing your sign brings you one step closer to being a self-sufficient entrepreneur. It is also a chance to choose how you wish to be identified. Once you hang out your sign and start selling there is no turning back!

Display signs. The eye sees yellow first and foremost. Keep this in mind as you design and print your signs.

What happens when yellow signs clash with your display? The trick is to have signs that explain what is being sampled, what to do with used items and what the price is for your products—all in a color-coordinated, attractive setting.



These are challenges which can turn a fun endeavor into a search for answers. How each farmer addresses the problems becomes a measure of creativity.

Tents and Canopies

A tent defines your space and gives your territory a "shop" look. Whether you use the sidewalls that often accompany them or just the overhead canopy, your tent is your shop space for the duration of the market. You are responsible for the upkeep and neatness of your store.

After trying different types of shelters, most farmers at market choose the E-Z UP™ products. They are sold at wholesale outlets such as Sam's Club. If you take care of them, the frames will last a very long time; I have had mine for about eight years and have replaced the cover once. I bought it directly from the company in California (1-800-742-3363 or <http://www.ezupdirect.com>), whose staff I found very helpful in ascertaining what I needed.

Rodents have been known to attack the canopy during the off season, so be sure to store it in a mice-free environment. The frame section can be replaced whole or in part, just remember your model number.

Keep a repair kit in the truck. It comes in handy when you are setting up and realize you have lost a bolt or the stems are difficult



A tent or canopy gives your space a "shop" look. You can have your logo screen printed on the tent. Consider sun, weather and the customers' view when you add or take down sidewalls. (Photo courtesy E-Z UP International)

to raise. Your kit can be very simple. We New Englanders have a saying "If it moves and it shouldn't, use duct tape. If it doesn't move and it should, use WD-40."

Keep your WD-40 and duct tape packed with a little bag of extra bolts, nuts and a wrench. You can repair the tent on the spot and spray the legs periodically when taking it down.

There are several ways of weighing the tent down on windy days. What looks the neatest and appears to be the easiest to handle are lengths of PVC piping filled with sand and capped at each end. The pipes can be tied to the tent legs or be hung from the metal supports. Remember to be aware of tall heads and the danger of people bumping their feet.

You can purchase sidewalls for the tent that are hung with Velcro™. Sides define your area, but on a hot summer day cut the breeze and block your view. Putting up only one sidewall can be beneficial. It can stop the wind in one direction or add protection from blowing rain. Consideration of weather, as well as the view and ease of operation should determine your choice of space-defining cover.

Tables

How will you display your samples and products? Tables or counters, fine or funky? The rustic look or the "fine dining" look? It all depends on the image you want to project.

The trick is to make your table or space look abundant, yet not over-crowded or too busy. Give your cheese a dedicated table. Put non-cheese or non-food items on a separate table.

Whatever your choice, make sure it's easy to set up. You need to consider the following:

- Your view of the display
- "Customers'-eye" view of your products
- Ease of making sales
- Rough edges on wood counters
- Ability to clean up spills.

For the "fine dining" approach, I've found light tables hold up well and stand evenly in soft ground. Light tables are inexpensive and easy to clean. The moment of sale is easy, passing money and product over the table.



Tables can be moved around and taken down as they are emptied without disrupting the entire setup. Because they are light, you may need to weight them with sandbags or sand-filled PVC piping.

On the other hand, I've come to realize tables often are too low for customers to view the display easily. Raising products to just below shoppers' eye level enhances the display and enables customers to read signs readily.



The high counter of this rustic farm stand allows customers a ready view of the vendor's offerings and gives the vendor a subtle way of monitoring sampling activity.

The high counter, or cheese bar, is a nice idea which can complement a "rustic farm" display. The cheese bar places the tasting cheese within reach and at the eye level of a prospective buyer, yet allows you to monitor the sampling cheese for cleanliness and



The sample cheese should have some sort of glass or insect-proof mesh cover over the top while it is left on the

table.

A cover appeals to your customer's sense of caution. It conveys to the customer your commitment to keeping things safe, clean, fresh and appetizing.

Whenever you use a cover your label should be visible for all to see. It trains the customer to associate you with your product and label.

You should have available anti-bacterial wipes or paper towels and a waterless hand cleaner for vendor and customers. Wipes can be used to clean hands and for an occasional swipe of your table or sampling platter. The cleaning agent helps keep your hands cool.

Tasting Apparatus

Sampling is one of the most powerful sales tools at your disposal. The advantage to customers is apparent; they get to "try it before they buy it". The cheese maker gets immediate feedback.

Sampling creates an atmosphere of comfort which helps your customers get to know you. In a small way you are participating in the

amount. It is also a subtle way to monitor the children who come by for a sample.

You need to pay attention to splinters on wood—children often run their hands over the counter. If the wood is sanded and sealed cleaning is not a problem, but if you use heavy wooden planks setup may be difficult.

A cheese bar can be an attractive and fun-looking space. It's a good way to go if the setup is permanent for the season.

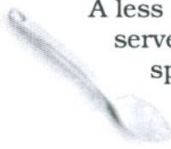
Tablecloths. The "fine dining" approach can be enhanced with the use of nice tablecloths. Whether you choose strong colors to attract attention or fancy-looking white cloths, they should be fresh and clean every time you put them on your table.

Essential Display Items

Whatever your base structure, you will need the following essential items on that table or counter:

- Tasting spoons or toothpicks
- A receptacle for used items
- A covered sample cheese, marked "SAMPLE—NOT FOR SALE"
- A certified scale, if you have wedges or rounds that need cutting
- A container of antibacterial wipes
- A sample bottle of milk (if you are licensed to sell fluid milk) marked NOT FOR SALE.

age-old custom of sharing food. You need to make some decisions about how you will dispense samples. Supplying crackers with the cheese can become expensive. Often you end up feeding a free lunch to children and fellow vendors.



A less expensive, safer alternative is to serve your samples with tasting spoons. You may go through a lot of them but in the long run they are cheaper than crackers and people won't come just to eat.

These tasting spoons—they are actually called Tasting Spoons—are small, not more than three inches long, and can be purchased cheaply at a paper supply outlet.

Not only do the tasting spoons serve as a sampling control (you can only fit so much in the bowl of the spoon), but they are an alternative to crackers for people who are allergic to wheat.

Display cases

A display case may be a good idea if you handle it properly. The advantage of such a case is your customers will be able to look at your items before deciding whether to sample and buy.

A display case can help maintain your product at the proper temperature and helps

avoid contamination. Any small case which fits on your table or stand will do the job. If you have artistic talent, consider making and displaying facsimiles of your products. In Japan this is done all the time. Wooden or paper items can be made to look like the real thing—a great project for your children. If you go this route, you can keep your saleable products in the cooler and not worry about keeping your display cold.

If you are displaying real products, you need to keep them cold. You can be creative here. There are many approaches to creating small, coolable display cases including a *new* glass aquarium—minus the fish!

You can make a double-bottomed display case from the top and two bottoms of display cases purchased from a restaurant supply company. Stack one bottom inside the other, with a layer of ice or ice packs in between and use the top as a cover. This works well as long as you don't stack your pre-packaged cheese higher than two layers.

Whatever you use for a display case, you'll need to keep the interior free of moisture and condensation by wiping the sides with paper towels whenever they fog up.





MARKET ETIQUETTE
including
Children at the Market



*The farmer's response to issues of market etiquette is a juggling act of kindness, firmness and business savvy.
(Photo courtesy Bruce Elliott.)*

Market Etiquette

Your tent defines your space and sales room. When the weather is threatening, when people want to retreat from the sun or just visit with friends, they may congregate in front of your tent or under it.

It is a challenge to ask customers politely to move away from your sales area if they wish to socialize. You don't want to appear rude, but you must speak up and ask the patrons not to block the entrance to your sales area. Sometimes they understand, apologize and move on, sometimes not.

Children at the Market. Farmers' markets are downright fun for children. They are meant to be. Children enjoy running around outdoors, tasting different foods, seeing what's going on. Markets schedule events for children. They may bring in live musicians and conduct demonstrations. A party ambience prevails.

Because of the "outing" atmosphere of a market, parents often let children run around unsupervised. Who will correct them when they begin fighting in front of your tent or making lunch of your samples? Be prepared with a strategy.

The farmer's response to the above problems is a juggling act of kindness, firmness and business savvy. If your market doesn't have a written set of policies for dealing with these concerns, consider encouraging the manager to convene a meeting of the market's

MARKET ETIQUETTE

While the market is fun for the buyers, it's a business for you. This is your livelihood. This is valuable sales time. Remain attentive to your customers at all times. Don't hold extended conversations with other vendors, customers or on a mobile phone.

Even though customers may want to talk about your farm, your products or just chitchat, you have to be aware of others waiting in line to buy. It is a real test to be pleasant, informative and still able to move your customers in and out of your market space.



governing body and its vendors to establish one. Members may decide to post appropriate portions of the policy for patrons to read.

It helps when vendors sit on the market's governing board, since they understand the "push-pull" nature of selling in a recreational atmosphere. A coherent written policy of market protocol allows individual vendors to invoke "market policy" when problems arise.

A clear, written policy makes you less reproachable when you cut short a conversation with a neighboring vendor or remind a throng of customers congregating in front of your tent to move on.



SAFETY

including

- Keeping Your Product Cold
 - Active Cold Keeping
 - Passive Cold Keeping
 - "Combo" Cold Keeping
- Cleaning Coolers after the Market
- Hands—Yours and Others'
 - Cross Contamination
 - Sampling
- Pets, Livestock and Other Perils

SAFETY

Safety is a complex issue. Keeping cheese cold both in transit and during the market, safe sampling and clean hands are just some of the considerations. Sound simple? It's not. You cannot believe how complex an apparently simple concept can become!

Farmers and market vendors can't afford to slack off in any aspect of public health and safety. My goal in writing this book is to train your eye to potential hazards and illustrate how to deal with them in a manner that decreases your liability and stress level and enables your customers to receive a fresh, safe product.

Know your equipment, know your product. Understand the demands of the equipment you have and work with them. Cheese, cold and ready to sell, is what it is all about. Many cities and towns have specific health requirements, so take the time to call the appropriate health authorities before you set up at a new market. It is a good idea to make a list of questions before you call.

Keeping Your Product Cold

Cold keeping was the central issue inspectors mentioned when I researched this publication. Keeping food cold when no electricity is available can cause the best of us to worry about the product.

You'll need a plan for keeping your products cold and you'll need to evaluate its cost. "Getting the most bang for the buck" is an important consideration. Keeping food cold in a cost-effective manner in 60-, 70-, 80- or even 90-degree Fahrenheit ambient temperature is a challenge for even the most conscientious farmer.

The first step in ensuring safe food is to identify the necessary criteria for keeping cheese cold when you don't have access to a commercial refrigerator. What leads to trouble and how it can be avoided?

The ideal temperature for keeping milk fresh is 36-degrees Fahrenheit. Although you are legally required to keep milk at or below 45 degrees, it tastes best when kept at or below 40-degrees and you'd be wise to do make this your goal. Soft cheese should be kept at 40-degrees F. or below and aged cheese at or just below 50-degrees F. At higher temperatures bacteria begin to multiply; milk—especially goats' milk—starts to develop an off flavor; soft cheese deteriorates quickly and aged cheese begins to "weep" oil.

Types of cold keeping. There are three major ways to keep your products cold: active, passive or a combination of both, which I refer to as "combo" cold keeping. There are tricks of the trade to any of these methods. Active cold keeping refers to coolers using electrical power from an AC or DC source.

Passive cold keeping is nothing more than placing chilled items and ice or freezer packs into pre-cooled insulated units (such as regular store-bought picnic coolers), using the retained cold air to maintain temperature. Do not use Styrofoam coolers; they don't hold up and cannot be cleaned and sanitized properly.

Combo cold keeping uses both active and passive methods during different periods of a cold-keeping cycle. It's the most versatile of the three methods when you face an unknown availability of electrical service.

Supplemental insulation. Whatever your choice, you will want to retain as much cold air as possible. This is easy to accomplish by using an interior layer of insulating material.

Reflectix™ is a wonderful insulating material sold in home improvement stores. It comes in various widths and roll sizes. It consists of something like bubble wrap, sandwiched between two pieces of aluminum foil.

A sheet of Reflectix can be cut to fit a cooler opening with an ordinary pair of scissors to create an additional inside cover. A piece of duct tape will hold one side of the Reflectix

firmly to the edge of the cooler without causing damage to the cooler's cover.

Thermometers. You can push a thermometer through the Reflectix or other material of this supplemental inside cover. This enables you to monitor the temperature of the cooler without opening the cover and letting warm air in.

Some localities have an ordinance requiring vendors to keep a thermometer in each cooler. You should consider this an essential practice even if your local regulators do not.



You can find inexpensive instant-read thermometers in any restaurant supply store.

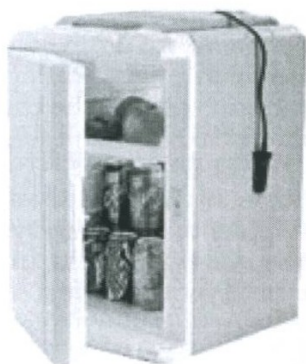
They can be re-calibrated if they are incorrect. If you suspect a cooler thermometer is reading incorrectly, ask your state dairy inspector to check your instant-read thermometers when he or she comes to calibrate your pasteurizer thermometers.

Active Cold Keeping

Active cold keeping is the safest possible way to keep products cold. There are several types of active coolers on the market and every year manufacturers become more creative. Coleman thermoelectric coolers, refrigerated units, freezers mounted in the truck, entire refrigerated truck caps—the list goes on and on. I have tried many of

the above. Below is a brief description of the active cooling systems with which I am familiar.

Thermoelectric (TE) coolers. Coleman thermoelectric (TE) coolers are little "refrigerators" that run on marine batteries or plug into your vehicle's cigarette lighter. They come in 16- and 40-quart sizes and can plug into a car cigarette lighter or, with an optional adapter, a standard electric outlet. They are neat little units which operate fairly well and are a very good buy for what they do.



TE coolers are able to chill contents to about 40-degrees Fahrenheit below the ambient temperature. There is less stress on the motors if the cheese is cold before you put it in the coolers. They do an excellent job when the ambient temperature is no greater than 70 to 80 degrees. But when the temperature rises to 80, 90 or 100 degrees, these coolers simply can't keep up.

If a TE cooler runs for an extended time during cold weather, there is the possibility of cheese freezing. Freezing soft, fresh goat cheese is not a problem; the cheese will defrost with no damage to taste or texture.

But freezing aged cheese or soft fresh cow cheese does become a problem; the freezing causes the cheese to flake and crumble.

Rechargeable marine batteries. If you are in area where electricity is not available and you want to use the active cold-keeping approach, you can run these Coleman coolers on a marine (deep-cell) battery. You can run several coolers in series on this type of battery. I have run as many as three coolers at the same time on one battery.

However, do *not* use the cigarette lighter in your vehicle to run more than one TE cooler at a time. You can damage your vehicle's electrical system by doing so.

Marine batteries use a trickle charge and should be run dry before recharging. To maximize the unit, it helps to have two batteries. Run one battery completely dry and use the second while the first is recharging.

Be mindful, marine batteries aren't cheap or lightweight; don't expect to move them around a lot. When you return to the farm from the market, park your vehicle near an outlet so recharging is easy.

Marine batteries also need to be maintained. Safety is an issue when using these batteries. If the battery gets hot, its useful life is over, and you should discard it. You should always be cautious when working with batteries, as they occasionally explode. Whenever possible, recharge your battery away from the house.



Safety: Passive Cold Keeping

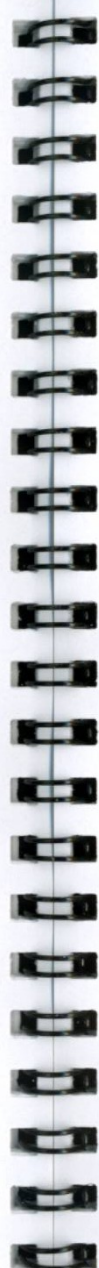


Freezer packs are sometimes filled with a gel-type material which freezes quickly and remains frozen longer than water. If you use the same ice packs frequently, place them into food-grade zip-loc freezer bags to minimize the chance of leakage. This also cuts down on sweating of the packs.

Food-grade perforated rubber matting, the kind restaurant owners use on their shelving, is good to put on the bottom of the cooler. This matting can be purchased at most restaurant supply companies. It keeps the condensation which collects in the bottom of the cooler away from containers of cheese.

Put a layer of the matting on the top of the cheese and place the ice packs on top of the matting; your cheese is easier to remove and it will be kept colder. A layer of Reflectix (or similar material) on top of the ice packs adds more insulation and will keep cold air inside the cooler. It is imperative to work quickly while opening the coolers to retrieve products.

If you decide to use ice cubes or chips, remember to protect your containers of cheese from any water generated by melting ice. It goes without saying that any ice used in your coolers should be made from potable water. All dairies are required to have the water tested twice a year so this shouldn't be a major problem.



Ventilation. TE coolers have motors and fans which require ventilation whenever the cooler is running. Therefore, if you connect the coolers to the battery while you are going to the market, you have to be careful to allow sufficient space around each unit. If you have a packed vehicle or fear something might fall near the coolers, wait until you arrive at the market site before attaching the coolers to the battery.

Keep any fabric from tent or displays far enough away to keep the cloth from getting sucked into the fans or motors. If you don't do this, you will quickly burn up the cooler's motor.

Passive Cold Keeping

Coolers packed with ice packs are a viable option. Freezer packs are now made in a variety of sizes. You can purchase them in perforated sheets which enable you to pull off what you need. They are also available in large flat pads.



Freezer packs take up space, but save money and energy in the

long run because they can be recycled many times over.

Some local health officers require coolers be stored off the ground to avoid "dog incidents" or soil-borne or other contamination. Some require a height of four inches, others want them higher. Check requirements for each market you attend with your local authorities.

"Combo" Cold Keeping

You can take the best of both active and passive cold-keeping and combine them into an effective and efficient system by mounting a small freezer in the back of your transport truck or van and using it unplugged as a cooler at the market site.



Companies now make small freezers (four- to six-cubic feet) with a bottom drawer which serves as an excellent means of dispensing cold cheese at markets. A freezer in this range is manageable in weight and size, but if you have a cap on your truck you may have to modify your vehicle to

accommodate the freezer's height. Many truck caps can be lifted onto 2 x 4's and clamped back onto the truck bed.

You also can remove the hinges on the freezer top, allowing the cover to slide to the side instead of lifting up. This allows you more

Safety: "Combo" Cold Keeping

room to take items from the top and transfer them to the drawer. At the market, you can slide the freezer to the tailgate of your vehicle for easy access to the freezer drawer.

You can use Reflectix or other supplemental insulation in the top section of the freezer but remember, cold air sinks. Do not use supplemental insulation in the bottom drawer; as cold air descends from above, the insulation inhibits it from sinking into the drawer. It's also a good idea to place food-grade rubber matting on the floors of the top section and the drawer of the freezer.

If you put freezer packs into the plugged-in freezer the night before market day, the interior will be quite cold the next morning. As you prepare for the market, fill the freezer with cheese. This keeps everything cold for approximately six hours so your cheese remains safe until "lift off" time.

If you are lucky enough to have access to electric outlets at your market, you might choose just to "plug 'er in" for active cold keeping.

In a nutshell:

- Maintain each cheese at its proper temperature.
- Keep all food containers dry.
- Add supplemental insulation whenever possible, remembering cold air sinks.
- Keep a thermometer in each cooler.
- Monitor the temperature frequently.
- Raise all coolers off the ground.



Cleaning Coolers after the Market

It is essential to clean each cooler thoroughly after each market. Using a good washing agent (manual washing detergent for dairy works well), rinse, sanitize and let each cooler and all rubber matting air dry. It is then ready for the next market.

You can use the same sanitizer you use in the dairy to sanitize your market coolers. About ½ ounce to a gallon of water is more than enough. You can also purchase test strips which allow you to monitor the degree of sanitizer you are using. You can purchase these strips at a cheese supply company and are the same ones you use when checking the sanitizing rinse for your dairy equipment.

Hands—Yours and Others'

If the eyes of a person are the mirrors of one's soul, the hands of a food handler are the mirrors of his or her conscientiousness. Hands are the first thing customers see when they express interest in buying your dairy product.

Strive to keep your hands free of stains. Excessive jewelry or long or dirty fingernails are a problem when handling tasting apparatus and cheese. Jewelry gets caught on items and stones can be lost.

It is a good idea to clean your hands periodically with paper towels and some sort

of cleaning agent. Purell™ is an alcohol-based cleaning agent which evaporates quickly, cleaning and cooling your hands. Generic versions are available.

Or you can buy the little individually-wrapped handy wipes used at fast food stores. You can purchase them at any paper supply company. If you go this route, have a trash bag handy so you can avoid spending valuable sales time picking up wrappers and wipes dropped on the ground.

These options are not a complete substitute for good washing with warm soapy water and a clean towel but, as we all know, these facilities are not available at most farmers' markets. Simply put, these cleaning agents or wipes are better than nothing.

With all the "nooks and crannies" in our hands it is impossible to keep them sterile. No matter how clean you keep your hands, invisible bacteria and other pathogens that remain can pose a threat of food-borne illness to the customers you serve.

It is a legal requirement that no bare hands touch ready-to-eat foods. Although it is not legally required, it is best to use deli papers or gloves even when handling pre-cut, waxed or pre-packaged cheese.

Gloves. Deli papers or gloves make it easy to comply with food-safety regulations. You can purchase both from any paper supply company.



If you choose latex gloves for protection, make sure to choose non-powdered gloves to avoid contaminating your products with the powder. One problem with latex is your hands may swell from the heat, so the gloves won't slip on and off easily. Many people have latex allergies so they won't be able to use these gloves.

Plastic, non-latex deli gloves work best for most people. They are so cheap it is no big deal to throw them away. They come in a 100-count pack and can be dispensed through the box, which keeps them clean and fresh.

Remove your gloves whenever you handle money and slip a new pair on for the next customer. Easy on, easy off.

Cross Contamination

Any open product (e.g. unwrapped or unwaxed cheese) should not come in contact with any non-food grade material. This is why food safety experts highly recommended all cheese be pre-cut and wrapped or waxed prior to the market. This allows you to determine the cost of each piece and avoids a lot of extra handling during the market.

Cross contamination can occur when you handle uncovered cheese without cleaning your hands after you touch other items. For instance, during a break from your own sales area you run to pick up some vegetables from

another vendor. You look over and see customers congregating in front of your table.

Rushing back, you make a sale, then realize you didn't put gloves on or use a cleaning agent before handling the cheese. Or you might make a sale without removing your gloves before taking payment. Always keep your money hand away from the cheese hand.

Sampling

Sampling rivals cold keeping as a safety challenge. It's difficult but essential to keep the sample as cold as possible. How do you accomplish this?

Available options include setting the sample cheese in a bowl of ice or placing the sample on ice packs. If you have several small ice packs, you can rotate them throughout the day. Smaller (less than eight-ounce) samples enable you to keep products cold by changing samples more often.

When you display your cheese for sampling, mark your sample **NOT FOR SALE**. This assures you a customer won't pick up what is on the table for sampling and think they will buy that particular cheese. For those of you who have attended many markets, this isn't as strange as it sounds.

Never be tempted to sell the sample, especially if it's been out all day. Chalk it up as an eight-ounce loss every market. Most of



the time you will use all the sample cheese; very little, if any, will remain to be pitched.

Soft cheese sampling. Soft cheese has its own sampling protocol. Several different options are available. The classic crackers and cheese is by far the most appealing—and the most expensive. A knife or cheese spreader allows customers to sample on their own.

The disadvantage is obvious; people like to lunch off your samples. Children often don't move away from the table when eating their samples, dropping cracker crumbs into the sample and on the table.

Some vendors serve pretzels or other edible dipping sticks. I don't recommend this option. Some samplers bite off a chunk and "double dip" their pretzel or vegetable stick right back into the sample—an unappetizing sight that



A table in the "fine dining" mode for sampling soft fresh goat cheese.

poses safety risks to other customers. Broken sticks, crumbs and pieces of salty chips land in the cheese and litter the sampling table.

A third option is to use tasting spoons. They are cheap and, initially, appear to be the answer to the above problems. But these little spoons pose a significant problem—customers tend to pick up discarded spoons for their sampling.

Labeling containers TASTING SPOONS and USED SPOONS and putting them on separate corners of the sampling table works *only* if customers read your signs. Unfortunately, they often do not.

One solution is to outfit the USED SPOON receptacle with a small, one-way slot, making it impossible for samplers to retrieve used spoons.



Controlled sampling. While you may find it convenient to have a container of spoons available for the soft, fresh cheese and let the customer dig in, it is far better for you and your customers if you maintain control of all sampling.

As you are making sales and counting out change, are you aware of what is happening with that sample container? Unless you can monitor for "double dipping" every moment of market hours, you run the risk someone will pass on E. coli, salmonella or other illness by dipping a used spoon back into the cheese.

Better to dip the spoon yourself and hand it to the customer, even if he or she has to wait a minute to get it. This prevents double dipping and enables you to cover the sample between tastings.

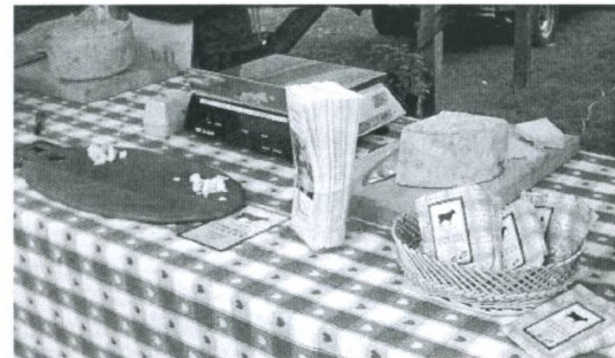


Although customers enjoy digging in freely, controlling your samples is the best approach.

"Snatch and Snack". A final option which avoids all of the above hazards is to have a "Snatch and Snack" available. This is a one- or two-ounce sample container filled with soft, fresh cheese. These are the same containers in which fast food restaurants serve salad dressing.

A lunch bag including the packaged cheese and a little plastic bag of crackers or pretzels sold for a reasonable price can be just the ticket for a tasting that doubles as a simple lunch. If you keep the cheese containers in a

handy cooler, adding the pre-bagged pretzels or crackers at the time of sale, the cheese will be cold and the pretzels crisp.



Precutting aged cheese before you leave the farm saves precious time at the market.

Aged cheese. Presenting aged cheese for tasting is simpler. You will find it a real time saver if you cut it into cubes, add toothpick "handles" and cover it with plastic wrap in advance of market opening. Keep a minimal number of samples on display during the market, retaining the remainder of your samples in your cold-keeping device.

Aged cheese samples can be placed on a marble slab to keep the samples looking fresh and help keep the cheese cold. If you have access to several slabs, change them frequently during the market. Remember to keep the cheese covered when it's not being sampled and use deli or plastic gloves whenever you handle opened cheese.

In a nutshell:

- Keep a container of antibacterial wipes on your sampling table.
- Cover samples to avoid attracting insects.
- Offer fresh cheese on tasting spoons or crackers.
- Serve aged cheese pre-cut and pierced with toothpicks.
- Avoid having children sample over the table.
- Supply a slotted, labeled container for used spoons or toothpicks.

Pets, Livestock and Other Perils

Pets. As individual vendors, we have no control over visitors bringing their pets to the market. But we can control what enters our sales area.

The sight of a dog relieving himself on your tent post or table is neither pleasant nor appealing. If this becomes a serious problem, the vendors might want to ask the market's governing body to consider instituting a "no pets" policy.

Livestock. In planning meetings, the issue of bringing livestock to the farmers' markets almost always comes up. Some vendors contend that having livestock present generates sales.

The few sales that may result are not worth the risk incurred by having livestock present. Just don't do it. Toting livestock in the same

vehicle as food and unloading calves or kids poses serious threats to food safety.

Although most *E. coli* bacteria is species specific, hemorrhagic *E. coli* (such as *E. coli* O157:H7) are infectious across species. Cattle and humans are known reservoirs for hemorrhagic *E. coli*.

The fur of a calf or cow could carry hemorrhagic *E. coli* pathogens. Children who stroke these animals, then eat or taste your samples could become seriously ill.

Salmonella is an even greater concern for small children, as it can be spread from many animals, especially from chicks, ducks and reptiles. *Campylobacter enteritis* can also be transmitted from infected farm animals. That said, for the sake of the animals themselves—lest they pick up something and bring it back to the rest of the herd or flock—it is better if the animals are left at home.

Flying insects. Domestic animals are not the only cause for a vendor's concern. It appears wasps and yellow jackets have a taste for cheese!



Stinging insects not only create a nuisance, but also pose a serious allergic threat to some customers. The sight of customers fleeing your space because of flying intruders won't enhance sales, either. So cover any open samples with a glass or non-porous cover.

Summary

The suggestions I've made concerning food safety come from my own experience and from consultation with the experts I've met in my 27 years as a value-added dairy producer. Knowledge about sanitation and food safety expands daily. You will need to develop your own network of helpers to keep up with the times and maintain safety for your customers and your self.

As you move from farm to market you will develop your own set of business standards. Inevitably, food safety issues will crop up. Keep a running list of your questions and observations during these times. Use all the resources at your disposal, including your market's governing board, other vendors and state and local health authorities to formulate an effective food safety strategy.

Don't forget the resources offered by your county Cooperative Extension office. Not only can they answer many of your food safety questions, Extension staff can tap the resources of sanitation and food safety experts at your state university for those questions they are unable to answer.



CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

Farmers have generous hearts. We know that with this gift comes a corresponding responsibility. It is an honor and a challenge to feed our neighbors. The honor is to have the ability and means to feed someone other than our immediate family; the challenge is to do it safely and well.

I hope this book helps you rise to the challenge of feeding friends and neighbors with dairy products and assume the corresponding responsibility of doing it right, according to the USDA and FDA laws, state and local regulations and—most important of all—the laws of common sense.

Safety and creative marketing are the paramount goals to which all value-added producers aspire. Direct marketing gives you an edge and a return not found by selling through brokers. But that same edge requires farmers to present products in a fashion that demonstrates education, commitment and the determination to do it right.

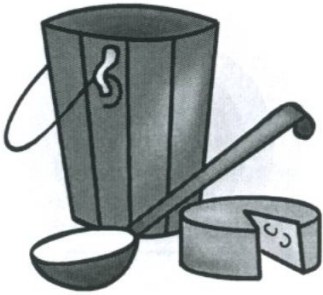
The ideas I have presented here are meant to inspire and bring licensed commercial dairy farmers one step closer to success. If you meet the challenge of becoming a direct marketer of value-added farm products with wisdom and forethought, you will have a sustainable business to enjoy and one day pass on to someone else.



Farmers' markets are part of a grassroots network that disseminates sustainable agricultural information and healthy food from farmer to farmer and farmer to customer.

Perhaps you have seen these ideas, heard the talk and even walked the walk. If that is the case, keep walking with vigor. Perhaps these ideas are new to you. If so, I hope this booklet nudges you to discover your own ideas; validates what you think might work; and challenges you to keep pushing the limits.

Creativity is not what you do; it is how you live your life. Integrity, honor and a firm belief in good food for people are winning values which help you create a sustainable business. These values spell your success.



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INDEX

INDEX

A

- Acknowledgements, 7
- Antibacterial wipes, 36, 37, 57, 59, 64
- Appearance, 9, 27-29;
- Appearance, dress code, 29

B

- Batteries, rechargeable marine, 51
- Batteries, safety and maintenance, 51
- Building a foundation, 18

C

- Cheese, freezing, 50-51
- Cheese, soft, ideal temperature for, 47
- Cheese, soft, sampling protocol, 60-61
- Children and farmers' markets, 13, 22, 36, 43
- Cold keeping, 9, 38-39, 46-55
- Cold keeping, active, 48, 49-52
- Cold keeping, combo, 48, 54-55
- Cold keeping, passive, 48, 52-54
- Cold keeping, thermometer usage in, 49
- Cold keeping, types of, 48, 49-55
- Cold keeping, using ice & freezer packs, 39, 48, 52-55
- Coleman thermoelectric (TE) coolers, 50
- Contamination, avoiding, 53, 57-59, 60-65
- Coolers, cleaning, 56
- Coolers, using ice and freezer packs in, 39, 48, 52-53
- Covers, food 36, 37, 39, 62, 63
- Cross contamination, avoiding, 58-59, 64-65

D

- Dairy equipment, small-scale, 5, inside back cover
- Display, 9, 10, 22, 29-30, 31, 35, 36, 38-39, 59
- Display cases, 38-39
- Displaying your cheese, 29-30
- Display signs, *see Signage, display signs*

E

E. coli, 61, 65
E-Z UP tents, 32

F

Farmers' markets, growth of, 6
Food safety, avoiding contamination, 53, 57-59, 60-65
Food safety, cold keeping, 9, 38-39, 46-55
Food safety, coolers, 39, 52, 56
Food safety, covers, 36, 37, 39, 62, 63
Food safety, E. coli 61, 65
Food safety, freezers, 54-55
Food safety, gloves, 57-59
Food safety, hands, 56-58
Food safety, ice, 39, 48, 52-53, 59
Food safety, ideal temperatures for dairy products, 47
Food safety, monitoring temperature, 47, 49
Food safety, regulations, 6, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 49, 53-54, 57, 58, 66
Food safety, food-grade rubber matting, 53, 55
Food safety, salmonella, 61, 65
Food safety, sampling, 37, 38, 59-64
Food safety, sanitation, 56-65, 66
Foreword, 5-6
Freezer packs, 39, 48, 52-53
Freezers, in combo cold keeping, 54-55
Freezing of cheese, 50-51

H

Hands, 56-58

G

Gloves, 57-59

I

Ice, 39, 48, 52-53
Insulation, supplemental, 48, 53
Introduction, 9-10

L

Labeling and labels, 16
Legal issues, labeling, 16
Legal issues, liability insurance, 13-14
Legal issues, licensing and inspectors, 14-15
Legal issues, regulations, 6, 12 *see also*
Regulations, food safety
Legal issues, safety, 13, 33
Liability insurance, 13-14
Licensing and inspectors, 14-15
Logo signs, *see* *Signage, logo signs*

M

Marine batteries, rechargeable, 51
Market etiquette, children and, 41-44
Motivation, maintaining, 21-24

N

Nunsuch Dairy and Cheese, 5, inside back cover

P

Pets, livestock and other perils, 54, 64-65
Philosophy, creating a, 18, 19-21
Presentation, 25-39
Presentation, display cases, 38-39
Presentation, displaying your cheese, 29-30
Presentation, signage, 30-32
Presentation, tables and tablecloths, 34-36
Presentation, tents, 32-34
Presentation, your appearance, 27-29
Presentations, tasting apparatus, 37-38
Purell™, 57

R

Regulators, 6, 12, 14-15, 49, 53-54, 66
Regulations, food safety, 6, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 49, 53-54, 57, 58, 66

S

Safety, 13, 33, 51-52
Safety, *see also* *Food safety*

Safety and liability, 13-14, 33
Safety, active cold keeping, 51-52
Safety, marine batteries, 51-52
Safety, sampling, *see Food safety*
Safety, thermoelectric coolers, 51-52
Safety, ventilation, 51-52
Salmonella, 61, 65
Sampling, 36, 37-38, 59-64
Sampling, hard or mold-ripened cheese, 63-64
Sampling, tasting apparatus, 37-38
Sampling, tasting spoons, 36, 38, 61-62
Sanitation, avoiding contamination, 53, 57-59, 60-65
Sanitation, cleaning coolers, 56
Sanitation, gloves, 57-69
Sanitation, sanitizers, 56
Signage, 30-32
Signage, display signs, 31-32
Signage, logo signs, 30-31

T

Tables, 34-36
Tables, high cheese bar, 35-36
Tables, tablecloths, 36
Tasting apparatus, 37-38
Temperatures, ideal for dairy products, 47
Tents and canopies, 13, 32-34
Tents, repair and maintenance, 32-33
Thermoelectric (TE) coolers, Coleman, 50
Thermoelectric (TE) coolers, safety issues, 51-52
Thermometers, 49

V

Value-added products, 5
Value-added products, USDA definition, 5
Ventilation of TE coolers, 52

W

Water, for making ice, 53



About the Author

Courtney Haase was born and raised in New Orleans and as an adult moved to a small New Hampshire town. In 1978 she bought two Toggenburg goats. From these two goats grew Nunsuch Dairy and Cheese, a licensed, grade-A commercial dairy renowned for the quality of its milk and farmstead cheeses. Courtney retired from active dairy farming in 2004.

During the years Courtney ran Nunsuch the farm was named a New Hampshire Farm of Distinction, showcased on several national TV shows and featured in the pages of national magazines and travel guides. Her cheese was voted "Best in NH" by *New Hampshire Business Magazine*. In 2001 Courtney was a candidate for an Ashoka fellowship.

Her commitment to sustainable agriculture led Courtney to initiate the design and development of the first US small-scale dairy pasteurizer and bottling equipment. She sells small-scale dairy equipment and has developed a pasteurizer loaner program to enable farmers to try out farmstead cheese production prior to making a full-scale financial commitment. She runs the Small Dairy Project, which educates farmers about value-added production and other options for sustaining their farms and serves as a SARE Northeast Region Farmer/Educator.

Courtney continues to share what she has learned about processing and adding value, direct marketing, licensing and issues relating to dairy products and goat milk production by speaking at workshops and conferences and via her website <http://www.nunsuch.org>.