

## The Training Center Turns Two

Imagine a place where, once a month, people come to learn about making cheese from raw milk, where experienced cheesemakers share the knowledge of their craft and business with novices, farmers talk shop, and cheesemakers try each other's cheeses for lunch. Welcome to the Training Center for Farmstead Milk Processing, which turned two years old in January, 2005.

The training center began operating at Westminster Dairy at Livewater Farm in Westminster West, Vermont and, after several months found a permanent home at the Woodcock Farm and Cheese Company in Weston, Vermont. It has proven to be a useful resource for those who want to know more about the art and science of making dairy products on the farm. In the past fourteen months, sixty people; mostly farmers and farmstead cheesemakers but also chefs, educators, and marketers, have received instruction in the processes of turning milk into a wide variety of cheeses, butter, sour cream, Crème Fraiche, buttermilk and yogurt. The novices have gotten a genuine feeling for the reality of operating a farmstead milk processing business and the experienced cheesemakers have learned to make many new varieties of cheese. Some of the highlights from the twelve, weekend workshops:

- Exploring traditional cheesemaking techniques and developing recipes to make cheeses from different regions of the world
- Using sheep, goat, and cow milks and observing the differences in composition and properties for cheesemaking
- The science of soft-ripened cheesemaking (bloomy rinds and smeared rinds) with Dr. Paul Kindstedt of the University of Vermont
- Effective use of starter and ripening cultures (EZAL and Lacto Labo) with Margaret Morris of Glengarry Cheesemaking and Dairy Supplies
- Cheese tasting and evaluation sessions
- Shared group learning about farming, cheesemaking, milk processing, business and life

A typical weekend workshop has accommodated a group of five to ten people, who have spent most of their time learning to make four kinds of cheese and other dairy products. What started as a lunch break evolved into a cheese tasting and evaluation session because many participants brought in their creations for others to try. We also had the pleasure to sample local cheeses from Westminster Dairy, Woodcock Farm and Taylor Farm and to critique cheeses made in previous workshops. One weekend tasting included five tommes from cow, goat, sheep and mixed milks made by four different cheesemakers. Afternoons gave us time for lectures and roundtable discussions about techniques, conditions and facilities for aging cheese; composition and use of starter cultures; equipment; marketing; and other related topics.

The collective progress we have made in nurturing the activity of making dairy products, especially cheeses, on farms and in artisan businesses has been exhilarating. It seems as if there will always be a place for this “reality-based” training center and plans are to

continue operations for at least another year. This year we will most certainly be making more cheeses, such as Gorgonzola, Stilton, Bleu de Gex, Roquefort, Brie, Camembert, Crottin and other aged goat cheeses, Chevre, Feta, Gouda, Havarti, Citeaux, Cheddar, Chesire, Colwick, Caerphilly, Tomme, Toma, Romano, Provolone, Mozzarella, Ricotta, Asiago, Appenzeller, and Swiss. Some new ideas for the training center are:

- Classes about cheese aging techniques and conditions (affinage), and designing cellars and caves
- Beginner classes with instruction in starting milk processing businesses
- Workshops taught by foreign cheesemakers about their traditional cheesemaking practices
- Apprenticeship programs
- Presentations about the science and craft of making different cheeses

Thanks to all of you that attended last year and I hope to see many more people in the months to come.

by Peter Dixon

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