

Cheese maker among Kentucky Crafted artisans

Ky. Crafted boasts variety of artisans

By Andrew Wolfson
awolfson@courier-journal.com
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Kenny Mattingly's stinkiest cheese, Kentucky Bleu, is also his most expensive, at \$18 a pound.

With his wife, Beverly, and seven assistants he makes 23 other varieties in Barren County, from common Colby to horseradish cheddar to cumin seed Gouda to St. Jerome, a less noxious cousin of the notorious Limburger.

His 120 cows are milked at 4 a.m. and 4 p.m., seven days a week (Mattingly, 50, doesn't do the early shift anymore), and the warm, unpasteurized milk goes straight into the cheese vats.

Making 230 pounds a batch, Kenny's Farmhouse Cheese produces about 50,000 pounds a year that finds its way onto the tables of 15 of Louisville's finest restaurants and into 16 health and specialty food stores.

Mattingly is a craftsman, and yesterday he showed his wares alongside the less perishable work of weavers, woodworkers and potters at the 26th annual Kentucky Crafted, the fair sponsored by the Kentucky Arts Council at the Kentucky Exposition Center.

The centerpiece of this year's show was an "Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Showplace," which showed off rugs and prints with a Lincoln theme as well as Civil War-era music and reproduction iron cooking utensils. The work of a dozen artisans was featured.

Mattingly's cheese was among more than two dozen edible crafts available for tasting. Other treats included coffee cake from Sweet Sensations of Louisville; fudge from the Sweet Shoppe of Hodgenville; pecans roasted in Bluegrass Red hot pepper sauce from Bracken County's Fire on the Ridge Farm; bourbon jelly from Frankfort's City Grocery; Spille Bee's honey from Morris View Farm in Kenton County; white chocolate popcorn from Mrs. Roger's Original of Nicholasville; Kentuckyaki-soaked portobello mushrooms from Bourbon Barrel Foods of Louisville; Cherry Sue Gourmet Granola from Versailles; Towering Infernuts from KP's Specialty Products of La Grange; and country ham from Broadbent B&B Foods of Cadiz.

There were many more, but this reporter had to stop sampling when he began to get a stomachache.

Mattingly brought about 70 pounds of cheese cubes and crumbles to give away, and he had hoped to sell as many as 1,000 pounds, but because of the unusually wintry weather, he moved only about half that.

Still, he said the show allowed him to expose his craft to some new customers and to meet some fans.

"Is there really a Kenny?" asked Jennifer Oladipo, who said she and her fiancé only eat Kenny's Farmhouse Cheese. "I just love your cheese."

Oladipo said she got turned on to it at Rainbow Blossom Natural Foods, then switched to shopping at another grocery store that didn't have any. "That didn't last long," she said.

Mattingly, a second-generation dairy farmer, said he got into cheese out of desperation, about 10 years ago. With milk prices "depressed -- and depressing," he said, he knew he either had to expand his 200-acre farm or find a way to add value to the operation.

On a trip to Western Europe with the Community Farm Alliance, he saw how farmers there raised specialty products and sold them locally, he said.

"I got into cheese because it made sense," he said.

Lucky for him, he got in on "the front end of a cheese boom" that has seen America's per capita cheese consumption rise to more than 30 pounds a year -- twice as much as in 1975 and eight times as much as in the early 1900s, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Self-described "cheese freak" Melissa Clark of Lapel, Ind., contributed to the trend yesterday when she bought a 6-ounce chunk of asiago from Mattingly's booth. She said she made the purchase in part because she felt so guilty after nibbling through about 60 samples.

"I used so many of their toothpicks," she said.