

MATTINGLY USES OLD WORLD TECHNIQUES TO CARVE NICHE IN 21ST CENTURY CHEESE MARKET

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Kentucky Proud defines agricultural products that are raised or produced in Kentucky by Kentuckians. The slogan means many things to many people – delicious blackberry jam, rich-tasting Kentucky country ham, mouth-watering tomatoes and melons, and much more – all produced with the greatest care to offer a special treat to families throughout Kentucky, the nation and the world.

Kentucky Proud also means the people behind those products – people willing to take chances and try new things, people who won't settle for second best, people who love farm life.

To commemorate National Agriculture Week March 20-26, the Kentucky Department of Agriculture is beginning an ongoing series of profiles of Kentucky agricultural businesses that have become household names in the Commonwealth. Some are developing a national audience and even a global following.

AUSTIN, Ky. — Contented cows are the first step in making Kenny's Farmhouse Cheese – 122 pure-bred Holsteins dotting the 203-acre farm of scenic, rolling hills near Austin in Barren County.

The work for Kenny Mattingly, his family and farm hands from South America begins at 5 a.m. with the milking. The raw milk is piped to a sanitary, all-white room that looks like a science lab – more precisely, a cheese laboratory.



Kenny Mattingly works in his "cheese laboratory" in Barren County. (Photo by Roger Snell)

Mattingly fills a large stainless steel vat with the fresh, unprocessed raw milk, constantly stirring, heating and adding a bacterial culture from France that naturally

begins the conversion to cheese. The mix is similar to how yeast converts flour to bread.

Tiny bits of curd begin forming and then the texture thickens after lots of mixing and stirring combined with heating the vat to a precise temperature.

Mattingly has perfected the process on this remote Kentucky farm, following the best techniques of makers of artisan cheese discovered centuries ago on European farmsteads.

Because the milk is so fresh, pasteurizing is not necessary. The heat and the cheese-making process preserve naturally beneficial enzymes in the milk, aiding digestion of lactose and absorption of calcium. Just as important, raw milk cheese has a much richer depth of flavor.

What Mattingly does with his varieties, flavors and storage techniques are getting him and his Kentucky Proud products all kinds of attention at such high-profile venues as the Kentucky Derby, five-star restaurants in Chicago, and top Louisville restaurants such as Limestone, Lilly's, and Jicama Grill.

Mattingly now makes seven varieties of cheese: Cheddar, Colby, Jack, Asiago, Gouda, Swiss and Havarti. He has just as many different flavors, including Garlic Paprika Jack, Jalapeno Jack, Sun-Dried Tomato and Basil Cheddar.

Gil Logan, head chef at Churchill Downs, is one of Mattingly's largest customers. Logan ordered 1,000 pounds each of Gouda and Colby last year and another 1,000-pound special recipe of Cranberry Havarti served through the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays at Churchill Downs.

"His cheese is outstanding, and I would buy out everything that he makes, but I don't want to take away his entire market," Logan said.

"My personal favorite is the horseradish cheddar, which I'm going to melt on our Kentucky corn beef sandwiches this year," Logan said.

Mattingly is experimenting with adding a new variety, Bleu cheese, but this will launch only after a planned expansion. He is considering his largest expansion and personal investment since he started the business in 1998.

Kenny's Farmhouse Cheese, which was served at President George W. Bush's second inauguration ball, can be found at Wild Oats, Doll's Market in Louisville, Slone's Signature Markets in Lexington, Paul's Fruit Market in Louisville, Houchens supermarkets throughout southern Kentucky and Good Food Co-ops.

For more information or to arrange a farm tour, contact Kenny Mattingly at Kenny@kennyscheese.com or visit his Web site at www.kennyscheese.com