AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Michelle C. Spatz for the degree of Honors Baccalaureate of Arts in Psychology presented on August 28, 2008. Title: Cheese Tour ’08: A Journey to Four of Oregon’s Farmstead Creameries and Into the World of Artisan Cheese.

Abstract approved:

Eric Hill

Oregon has a growing artisan cheese industry and is developing a reputation as one of the country’s leading regions for many varieties of cheeses. This thesis is an exploration of four of Oregon’s premier artisan creameries. The primary research for this project included visiting the farms and cheesemakers, tasting the cheeses and interviewing professionals. Secondary research consisted of consulting texts written by food writers, popular periodicals and recipe books.

The thesis consists of four essays; each essay is made up of narrative accounts of visits to farms, descriptions of the cheeses and recipe suggestions for cooking with the cheeses.

Through the process of writing this thesis, the author discovered the challenges of writing about food. These challenges included the following: learning the jargon of the cheese industry, cultivating a voice within the genre food writing and researching technical aspects of the cheesemaking process.

Key Words: Cheese, Oregon, Farmstead, Food Writing

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Cheese Tour ‘08:
A Journey to Four of Oregon’s Farmstead Creameries
And Into the World of Artisan Cheese
by
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Thanks to Tammi Parr, creator of the Pacific Northwest Cheese Project website, and to Steve Jones of Steve’s Cheese in Portland. Their help, especially in creating descriptions of these dozens of cheeses, was invaluable.

To all of the cheesemakers who welcomed me to their farms and became my friends over the past few months, thank you.

Finally, a warm thank you to my family and closest friends who tasted my recipes (good and bad), read and re-read my work and, most importantly, supported and encouraged me from start to finish.
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My initial interest in Oregon’s cheeses was sparked by a popular food blog, which noted that Oregon’s Rogue Creamery was receiving national and international acclaim for its cheeses. The creamery’s Rogue River Blue was selected as Best Blue Cheese at the 2004 World Cheese Awards in London. Intrigued, I chose to investigate further into what other notable cheeses Oregon has to offer. It wasn’t until I began sampling the cheeses, though, that I decided to dedicate the next several months to exploring Oregon cheese. Tasting Ancient Heritage’s Valentine cheese and Pholia Farm’s Elk Mountain cheese was a revelation and I was hooked.

Searching the website of Oregon’s Cheese Guild, I was surprised to discover that Oregon’s burgeoning cheese industry now boasts 15 ODA (Oregon Department of Agriculture) certified creameries. Tillamook, the cheddar giant, and Rogue Creamery are the two largest operations in the state, while the others are artisan creameries producing small batches of some unique and largely undiscovered cheeses. It was the smaller and lesser known operations, specializing in goat and sheep cheese, which intrigued me the most. I chose to focus on four of these artisan creameries: Ancient Heritage, Fraga Farm, Pholia Farm and Siskiyou Crest Goat Dairy. I made plans to visit
the farms of these Oregon cheesemakers, learn their stories, sample their cheeses and 
create a series of essays dedicated to these people and their craft.

I spent a sunny week in June driving through Oregon’s Willamette and Rogue 
Valleys navigating bumpy country roads and visiting the people who are producing some 
of the state’s (and country’s) best cheeses. I was able to spend time with the 
cheesemakers, their families and their animals. I petted the goats and sheep that 
produce the milk for these remarkable cheeses and wandered around the land where 
they browse and graze. I sampled every cheese available from these farms and 
witnessed the skill and hard work that go into farmstead cheesemaking. My diet that 
week consisted of about eighty percent cheese, ten percent bread and the rest, wine. I 
gained several new friends, a few extra pounds and an understanding of the dedication 
and love of Oregon’s cheesemakers for their work. Then, at the end of the week, with a 
cooler full of cheese and melting ice, I drove home to begin writing.

There is a subculture that surrounds cheese – its flavor, smell, affinage, 
purchasing, selling, importation, even international smuggling. Cheese is a way of life 
for some people and, accordingly, has its own jargon, norms and even celebrities – all of 
which were foreign to me at the start of this project. It quickly became clear that to 
write about cheeses and pursue this project I needed a better understanding of this 
cheese culture. I sought out the books, websites and people who could teach me these 
things, guide me in my research, and answer my questions. Met with remarkable 
support and guidance, I was given a glimpse into the world of cheese and had great fun 
doing it.
From the outset, it was clear that I needed to broaden my vocabulary to adequately describe these remarkable cheeses. The language used by professionals in this field is unique and specialized and requires experience to master. Steve Jones, who owns Steve’s Cheese in Portland, and who welcomed me into his store during his workday to taste the cheeses and discuss them at length. A professional cheesemonger, he is able to articulate what makes a cheese’s flavor seem so tasty, unique or interesting and his excellent descriptions are quoted throughout these essays.

Experimenting with recipes was the final step of this project – and the one most appreciated by my family and friends. Long hours were spent in the kitchen, surrounded by pounds of cheese, a laptop to keep track of quantities and ingredients, a camera to document the successes, a bin to dispose of the inedible failures and all the friends and family I could recruit to help me consume my end products. The recipes are a compilation of favorite family recipes adapted to match the cheeses, recipes sought out to complement a specific cheese, recipes given to me by the cheesemakers and my own experiments.

From the initial steps of explaining this project to the cheesemakers and visiting them at their farms and homes, to the final stages of extensive cheese tasting and recipe testing, I have come away from this process relieved, impressed and excited about sharing what I have learned.
Driving through Willamette Valley countryside where my car radio picked up only country music stations, I was unsure of what to expect from the little creamery I was about to visit out in Scio, Oregon. Ancient Heritage Dairy was the first creamery on my Oregon cheese trip itinerary and, as a life-long city-dweller, I had never before visited a dairy. Pulling up the driveway, after missing the unmarked gravel road about seven times, the scene was similar to a page from a beloved childhood book of mine. The farmhouse sits near the road with several old cars perched here and there around the perimeter. Beyond, a bumpy dirt road winds up though the sheep’s grass pasture to the long rustic building that houses the creamery. Kathy Obringer, who owns Ancient Heritage with her husband Paul, explained in an email to me how I was to pass the first, second and third gates on my way up the drive. Dodging the roaming sheep I followed Kathy’s instructions. The email ended with the short, disconcertingly vague phrase, “Ignore the dogs.” During the drive over, my mind had been conjuring images of a pack of Dobermans, foam dripping off their gums, peering across a fence, looking forward to eating me. Instead I was greeted by Luna, the Obringers’ big, friendly Great Pyrenees, lumbering over to lick my bare legs as I stepped out of the car. Then Kathy and Elle, the Obringers’ 19-year-old daughter, both in work boots, dusty jeans and cutoff tees – true farm girl attire – came out of the creamery building to greet me.

Working my way though a labyrinth of sheep turds, I followed Kathy and Elle around the farm as they told me the story of Ancient Heritage Dairy. Kathy, whose
artwork appears on the Ancient Heritage cheese label, is formally trained in the fine arts and has a background in the restaurant industry. After Paul was transferred from Boston to Portland for a job in sales, he and Kathy made the decision to move their family of six out to the country, in large part because of their son’s allergy to diesel. They lived in Estacada, Oregon, before choosing Scio as their home and birthplace of Ancient Heritage Dairy. Their son’s intolerance to both goat and cow milk led the Obringers to start raising sheep for their milk.

Seeing a demand for artisan sheep cheese in Oregon, Kathy and Paul soon made the decision to start a creamery and, three years ago, Ancient Heritage became Oregon’s first certified sheep milk creamery. Sheep milk is naturally high in solids, making it an excellent milk for producing their rich, buttery cheeses. Paul and Kathy are both self-taught and incredibly persistent; they have refined their cheesemaking skills and now produce some of the highest quality cheese in the state.

With the help of their four kids and one local 15-year-old who helps out with the milking, the Obringers run their farm with creativity, persistence and passion. Their consistently high quality cheeses are the product of a family committed to their craft and to their animals. Walking, chatting and laughing with Kathy and Elle through the farm, their love for the farm was evident. Paul, they say, is their salesman who goes out to the markets, chats with the customers and makes the sales. But for the two of them, they say the place to be is there on the farm. On that sunny 80 degree afternoon standing in the grass amongst the sheep, I couldn’t have agreed more.
The Obringers currently produce seven excellent sheep and sheep/cow mix cheeses. Their Valentine cheese, named after the family’s favorite ewe, was the first Oregon artisan cheese purchase I ever made. I bought it from Paul at Portland’s Saturday farmer’s market and stowed it carefully in my purse. I brought the white little parcel home to my family and we circled around the counter as I pulled back the folds of paper to reveal a fuzzy, wrinkly white little cheese lump. It’s obvious why this is called a bloomy-rind cheese – its wrinkly skin is entirely enveloped in minute blooms of incredibly soft, fine mold spores. Even more satisfying than the unwrapping is the sensation of cutting into the rind, through the gooey, creamy layer closest to the rind and into the pure white unripened core. With a few sliced apples we brought the delicious little mound out to the porch and devoured it all within minutes. It’s just too good to save. Valentine has a velvety consistency with a flavor that is rich, mushroomy and pleasantly earthy. It typically comes into season at the same time as Oregon’s Bing cherries and the two together make a dynamic pair. It also pairs well with apples, pears, hazelnuts or dried cherries.

Ancient Heritage’s Adelle is made in the same way as their Valentine, but uses a seasonal blend (ratios vary by season) of cow and sheep milk, instead of the pure sheep milk used to make Valentine. It is a very similar cheese, though it has a milkier, more lactic note and less of the citrusy flavor that you find in Valentine. Steve Jones, of Steve’s Cheese in Portland, suggests pairing both Adelle and Valentine with a sparkling wine like Champagne or with dark beers like a stout or porter.
The Obringers describe Ancient Heritage’s **Scio Feta** as an attempt to recreate the taste of the authentic imported Greek sheep milk feta. It is one of the most intensely flavored fetas produced in the state. They have achieved the characteristic crumbly texture and obvious, though not overwhelming, saltiness in this cheese making it an excellent choice in fresh, savory dishes like a simple Greek salad.

**Scio Heritage** is a raw 100% sheep milk cheese aged at least two months and, the Obringers say, is the cheese that “inspired their journey to make sheep cheese.” Sheep milk has a richness and depth of flavor that gives the cheeses a tangy acidity.

**Hannah Bridge Heritage** is produced in the same way as the Scio Heritage, but is made with a seasonal blend of cow and sheep milk. It has a flavor that is more lactic and almost buttery than Scio Heritage, with less tang and acidity. Both Scio and Hannah Bridge Heritage pair well with heavier white wines, like Chardonnay, or light bodied reds, like Dolcetto.

The Obringers produce one cheese, named **Rosa**, which they make using Provolone cultures. It unsurprisingly has Provolone-like characteristics, a sharp, acidic flavor and a distinctly bitter finish.

Ancient Heritage Dairy has recently added a new member to their family of cheeses: **Opal Creek**. It is washed rind cheese made with a blend of raw cow and sheep milk and aged for about three months. According to Tami Parr, of Pacific Northwest Cheese Project, Opal Creek is “smooth and not too stinky, but still plenty meaty for wash rind appreciators.”
-- WHERE TO FIND ANCIENT HERITAGE CHEESE --

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-- RECIPES --

**Kathy’s Pasta with Hannah Bridge**

Makes 3-4 servings

In Kathy’s words, the key to this dish is using seasonal ingredients and your imagination. I made this dish for my family with pappardelle noodles, walnuts, arugula and dandelion greens and it was a hit.

18 oz pasta noodles – pappardelle or fettuccini work well
6-8 oz Hannah Bridge Heritage
2 tablespoons of tomato sauce
1 cup chopped nuts – hazelnuts, walnuts or pine nuts
2 cups coarsely chopped fresh seasonal greens – arugula or dandelion greens work well

Roast the nuts in a 350°F oven until browned and fragrant.
Cook pasta in salted boiling water until al dente. Drain pasta and place in a serving bowl. Coarsely cut cheese and melt slowly in a shallow pan over medium heat, add the tomato sauce, mix to incorporate and pour onto pasta. Add nuts and chopped greens to the pasta, toss and season with salt and pepper to taste.
Popovers with Ancient Heritage Rosa
Makes 16 popovers

This recipe is an adaptation of a recipe from Gourmet magazine a few years ago which asks for Gruyere. I like the sharp, almost bitter taste of Rosa with these eggy treats. They work well served with dinner instead of a bread roll.

2 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoons salt
2 cups whole milk
4 large eggs, at room temperature
6 oz Rosa cheese, grated

Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease two eight-cup muffin tins. Whisk flour and salt in medium bowl to blend. Heat milk in small saucepan over medium-low heat until warm. Whisk eggs in large bowl to blend and then whisk warm milk into eggs. Slowly stir flour mixture into milk mixture until just blended – be careful to not overmix.

Pour ¼ cup batter into each of the 16 muffin cups. Top each with 2 tablespoons cheese and bake until deep golden brown, about 50 minutes. Remove popovers from pan and serve immediately.

Note: to help prevent the popovers from deflating, pierce the top of each with a sharp knife as soon as they come out of the oven, to allow the steam to escape.

Adapted from Gourmet September 2004
Come on, little goaties!” I heard as I pulled up at Pholia Farm on a warm Friday afternoon and climbed out of my car. Lanky 15-year-old Amelia Caldwell was calling to the family’s 60-some head herd of Nigerian Dwarf goats. And they were listening. They followed her lead and all trotted, scrambled and butted their way back into the fenced area where they live when not out browsing in the surrounding hills.

Amelia’s mum and owner of Pholia Farm, Gianaclis Caldwell, strolled out from a beautiful log cabin under construction on the farm. She welcomed us warmly and launched right into the tour of the 23-acre property they own, situated just outside the town of Rogue River in Southern Oregon.

Gianaclis grew up on the hill at the end of the long, narrow property bought by her parents in the 1940s. Originally an airstrip owned by her father, the land is now grown over with grass, bushes and slender Pacific Madrone trees. After marrying Vern, a now retired Marine Corps officer, and moving several times around the country Gianaclis and her husband returned to her family’s land with a vision of turning it into a goat farm. Gianaclis explains that “somehow the stars lined up” to make their cheesemaking experiment a success. Now they are an Oregon Grade A Certified Creamery, making some of the Pacific Northwest’s best cheeses.

Pholia Farm, remarkably, is entirely “off the grid” in terms of their energy needs, using only power that they generate themselves on the farm. Vern designed and constructed their 10 kilowatt solar energy system, housed in a small shed sitting by the
cabin. They also have a micro-hydro system connected to a nearby creek as a sort of energy top-off to supplement the solar energy. A well on the property supplies water for the farm. The entire operation was designed and built by Gianaclis and Vern who did all the electrical and plumbing work themselves.

Across the driveway from the power shed and log cabin is another work in progress: an underground aging cave. It is being dug from the side of a steep hill to create a place where the Caldwells can age their cheeses at a steady 50-55 degrees Fahrenheit, year round. As Oregon’s artisan cheesemakers continue to improve and come of age, we will likely see more and more of them constructing sizeable aging caves like the Caldwells’ to produce aged cheeses in a cool, controlled environment.

“High-tech primitive” is how Gianaclis describes their method of producing cheese because of the way in which they use small, labor-intensive chest freezers in place of the more standard bulk tanks used by larger operations. Additionally, everything is done by hand, on a small scale with more attention and interaction with the product. From the cutting of the curds to the washing and turning of the rounds in the nursery, the Caldwells are closely connected with their cheese at each step of the cheesemaking process.

Pholia Farm is entirely a family-run operation. It is managed exclusively by Gianaclis, Vern and Amelia with help from their other daughter, 22-year-old Phoebe. Gianaclis’s sister and mother, who live on adjacent properties to the farm, also come over on occasion to help out. Even the farm’s name (a fusion of the two daughters’ names: PHOebe + ameLIA) reflects the importance of family on the farm.
Pholia Farm is the first US dairy to use one hundred percent Nigerian Dwarf goat milk in their cheesemaking. The motivation for choosing this somewhat obscure breed came from Amelia, who as a child was looking for a 4H project involving animals that were small enough for her to handle. Since that time the Caldwells’ herd has thrived – just this spring they delivered 58 kids. The Nigerian Dwarf goats are also a favorable breed for cheesemaking because their milk is higher in butterfat than that of other goat breeds, resulting in a richer cheese. The best thing about the Nigerian Dwarf goats, though: they’re just about the cutest farm animals you’ve ever seen.

Amelia, who led us on a “goat walk” up into the foothills of Elk Mountain where the goats like to browse, is given a great amount of responsibility on the farm. She helps bottle-feed each young goat every day, is responsible for helping with all the daily dairy chores and, incredibly, does all of the middle-of-the-night deliveries on the farm. With a sense of humor and grace uncharacteristic of her young age, Amelia seems entirely in her element on the farm, interacting with the animals, leading groups of adults on tours and, most impressive, knowing the names of each and every goat on the farm.

When we scrambled back down the slope to the farm and the goats had had their fill of bark and poison oak (yes, they eat it and they love it) we got to go to the tasting room. For the next hour Gianaclis, Amelia and I sat devouring beautiful lumps of Pholia cheese, drinking a local Viognier (Amelia got apple juice), eating sun-warmed strawberries that Amelia had just plucked out of their garden, and chatting about, what else, cheese. Finally, giddy and content in a way that only excellent cheese, fine wine
and good company can make you, I said goodbye to the goats and to Gianaclis and Amelia, taking a block of Covered Bridge and a chunk of Hillis Peak along with me for the ride home.

--- THE CHEESES ---

Pholia’s Covered Bridge cheese, my family’s favorite, is aged at the farm for about 3 months and is their simplest, mildest cheese. The Caldwells cook the curds of this cheese in local Wild River Brewery’s Nut Brown Ale during the cheesemaking process which gives it a bready, lactic flavor with an excellent acidity. Creamy, slightly grainy and mild, it would be difficult not to enjoy this cheese. Steve Jones, owner of Steve’s Cheese in Portland, suggests serving Covered Bridge with a pale ale. It is, he explains, a very “beer-friendly” cheese. Gianaclis also suggests pairing this cheese with Starthistle Cuvee – a Riesling-like wine produced by local Southern Oregon Madrone Mountain Vineyard. Honey and tree fruits like local Rogue Valley apples and pears have an affinity to this cheese.

The next step up from Covered Bridge in intensity and complexity is Pholia’s Elk Mountain cheese. A raw milk cheese (like all of Pholia’s cheeses) it is stronger than Covered Bridge with a more assertive flavor. It is firmer, drier and has an almost dark chocolate flavor at the start, followed by a deeper briny finish. This was the first of Gianaclis’s cheeses that I tried last spring in Portland. I was infatuated, bought a hunk bigger than I could really afford and devoured it with the help of my sister, chunk by chunk, spread with fresh fig preserves from our neighbor. Elk Mountain is aged for 6
months and is bathed with Wild River Brewery’s Nut Brown Ale during its time in the aging room. The cheese is named for the mountain just west of the farm in whose shadow we hiked with Amelia on the goat walk. Cherry preserves pair wonderfully with this cheese.

In terms of strength, intensity and complexity, Pholia’s Hillis Peak is one notch higher still. Another washed curd raw milk cheese, it is aged for six to seven months and has a natural rind rubbed with oil and paprika during its time in the aging room. In Steve’s words, Hillis Peak is “bigger and more zippy” than the two above. It has a beefy, smoky flavor with slight woodiness and a spicy note at the finish. Like Covered Bridge, it pairs well with wild flower honey and local tree fruit. Gianaclis’s wine pairing suggestions: Port and Tempranillo.

Having never had the opportunity to try Pholia’s seasonal washed-rind Wimer Winter cheese, I have to take the word of some experts who have. Tami Parr, of the excellent Pacific Northwest Cheese Project, writes about Wimer Winter: “Stinky cheese lovers rejoice! Made only during the fall and winter months, Wimer Winter is a washed rind cheese with a constellation of up front flavors - salty, earthy and yeasty all at once. This is a strong cheese that gets your attention - in a good way.” Steve described it to me as caramely and beefy at the same time. He explains the experience of Wimer Winter as “sweet and meaty with an incredible richness.” Wimer Winter is made only in the fall and winter months when the humidity in the aging room is just right. It has a B. linens rind (like Munster and most other washed rind cheeses) and a soft, creamy paste.
Mid-August now, I greedily anticipate the cold weather months and the appearance of a new season of Wimer Winter.

-- WHERE TO FIND PHOLIA FARM CHEESE --

Rogue Creamery – Central Point, OR
Steve’s Cheese – Portland, OR
Pastoral – Chicago, IL
Artisanal – New York, NY
On farm sales 2nd Saturday of each month

-- RECIPES --

Elk Mountain Cheese Puffs
Makes about 14 puffs

Several years ago my family hosted an exchange student, Cecile, from France. My fondest memories of her visit include our time spent in the kitchen teaching one another our favorite recipes. The first time I ever made pate au choux was under Cecile’s guidance, and I found that it is not nearly as difficult as it seemed. This recipe draws on Cecile’s pate au choux recipe, with the addition of a little bit of mustard and Pholia’s Elk Mountain cheese. Served with tart cherry preserves, these puffs make an excellent appetizer.

1 cup water
1 stick butter
1 cup all-purpose flour
5 eggs
6 oz grated Elk Mountain
½ teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard

Preheat oven to 425°F.

In a small saucepan, mix water and butter and bring to a boil. Remove from heat, add all the flour at once and mix quickly with a wooden spoon until all the flour is
incorporated and the mixture comes together into a ball. Beat in the eggs vigorously, one at a time, not adding the next egg until the previous one is completely mixed in. Next, add the cheese, salt and mustard and mix until well incorporated.

Put the dough into a pastry bag with a wide tip, or into a plastic freezer back with one tip snipped off. Pipe the mixture onto a greased baking sheet into circles 3 inches across and about 1 inch high. Bake until golden brown, about 25 minutes.

Covered Bridge and Apple Filo Parcels
Makes about 2 dozen

This recipe was inspired by a spanakopita-like dish that my sister makes and by a recipe for Tiropitas in Laura Werlin’s The New American Cheese. Pholia’s creamy Covered Bridge goes well with sweet apple slices and in this recipe the two are baked together inside a blanket of filo pastry.

12 oz Covered Bridge cheese
1 egg, lightly beaten
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon fresh ground pepper
1 package filo dough, defrosted
1 stick unsalted butter, melted
1 apple (not too tart - fuji or pink lady work) sliced ¼-inch thick, slices cut into 1x1-inch pieces

Preheat oven to 375°F.

In a bowl, mix together the cheese, egg, salt and pepper.

Unroll one sheet of pastry, brush it with butter and cut into thirds, lengthwise. Place one heaping teaspoon of filling onto one end of the pastry strip, place one apple piece on top and fold up the strip into a triangle-shaped package, as if you were folding a flag. Brush the package with butter and place on an ungreased baking sheet. Continue until all of the filling is used up. Bake for about 20 minutes, or until the packages are golden brown. Remove from oven and serve immediately.

Adapted from The New American Cheese by Laura Werlin
At nine in the morning I was sitting in Jan Neilson’s kitchen, trying to make a dent in a piece of rhubarb pie the size of a goat’s head and comparing stories of personal life experiences with her. It was just a little surreal, meeting for the first time and feeling strangely at home at her little farm outside of Sweet Home, Oregon overlooking the Santiam River, a herd of goats bleating in the background. Jan and Larry Nielson, owners of Fraga Farm Goat Dairy, invited me to their farm that morning like an old neighbor. We sat at their kitchen table, eating pie, and they told me the story of Fraga Farm.

Jan grew up on a farm in California which was named after her grandmother, Agnes Fraga. On that same farm years later, Jan and Larry were married. When the state bought the land to expand the nearby highway, Jan and Larry rented the farm and lived there as newlyweds until it was torn down. They were forced to move to the city in the Bay Area where Jan worked as a massage therapist and Larry worked for the US Navy. Fourteen years later, they got the opportunity to move back to the country, this time to Oregon. In 1994 they purchased the four acres of land that is now Fraga Farm where they started out raising sheep, pigs, goats and rabbits. Goats, they soon discovered, were their favorite animals and so, beginning with just two, they chose to focus on goats and build up their herd.

In the beginning, Jan and Larry used the goats for their milk, and made ice cream and other dairy products before branching out into cheese. A neighbor of the Neilsons’
shared his recipe for what is now their popular Farmhouse cheese. The rest of their cheesemaking knowledge they gleaned from books and from talking with other cheesemakers. In 2006, after six years of cheesemaking on their farm, the Neilsons submitted Fraga’s raw milk feta as their first entry in the American Cheese Society’s annual competition and were awarded first place in the Aged Raw Feta category. Most recently they have hired Mariano, a cheesemaker from Argentina who works full-time with them at the farm, collaborating in the cheesemaking and developing process.

Fraga Farm is currently Oregon’s only USDA Certified Organic goat dairy. The process of becoming certified, using all organic inputs and practices and paying annually for the certification has been prohibitive for most other farmstead creameries in Oregon and across the country. Jan and Larry, however, made the decision to undertake the process as a reflection of their commitment to organic and sustainable farming practices, and in 2002 became certified. Jan’s training from her grandmother at the original Fraga Farm in California in caring for the animals without the use of antibiotics or chemicals is, in large part, how the Neilsons are able to maintain a healthy, productive herd under USDA Organic guidelines.

Fraga Farm’s entire production team consists of Jan, Larry, Mariano, plus two local teenagers who help out part time in the dairy and the Neilsons’ herd of about fifty Alpine and Nubian goats. The dairy, they say, is their life and their dedication is evident in their consistently tasty high quality cheeses.
-- THE CHEESES --

Fraga Farm’s **raw milk feta** is currently their most popular cheese. They send shipments of their feta to restaurants and retailers by the bucketful. Theirs is a salty, stronger feta than most of the other fetas produced in Oregon but has the characteristic crumbly, slightly grainy texture of a traditional feta. Fraga feta is aged for at least two months in a salt brine and has a creamy richness and assertive flavor that makes it a good choice to use in stronger, more complex dishes because it can hold its own when sharing the stage with other flavors.

Fraga’s **Farmhouse** is a young, almost Mexican-style cheese. Salty and somewhat crumbly it is reminiscent of a queso fresco and works beautifully sprinkled on a fish taco or tostada or baked in chiles rellenos. Its mildness and sweet freshness make it dangerously easy to eat more than you planned. Fraga also makes two flavored Farmhouse varieties: **jalapeño** and **chipotle**. Only mildly spicy, they also complement Mexican dishes beautifully and are exceptional in enchiladas.

The fresh **chèvre** that they make at Fraga Farm comes in four varieties: **Plain**, **Greek Olive**, **Chef’s Blend** and **Oil & Herbs**. Their plain chèvre has a lemony, citrusy flavor with a slight saltiness compared to other Oregon chèvres. It has a smooth, firm texture and a distinct, pleasant goatiness which allows it to stand out beautifully in more complex dishes. The Greek Olive features their plain chèvre with a topping of Kalamata olive tapenade and works beautifully as an appetizer served with crostini rounds and roasted red peppers. The Chef’s Blend is plain chèvre mixed with garlic and a variety of herbs, and the Oil & Herbs explains itself – plain chèvre bathed in extra
virgin olive oil and an assortment of herbs. Both are great served simply with crostini rounds, or on a salad.

Fraga’s unique “Goat”zarella is exactly what it sounds like – a mozzarella-style cheese produced with goat milk. Fresh, milky and slightly salty, this cheese grates and melts wonderfully and works with anything for which you would normally use traditional mozzarella. Pizza and quesadillas are my personal favorite uses for this mild, squeaky cheese and are always popular with kids. In fact, Carissa Albin, a former intern at Fraga Farm who runs their booth at the Portland Saturday Farmers’ Market, told me that “Goat”zarella has a cult-like following with teenage boys in Portland. Their mothers, she says, will arrive early to the market to buy up pounds of the cheese each week because it’s the only cheese the growing boys will eat.

The Neilsons produce a raw milk aged cheddar at their farm, but it is made only in the winter when cheese production slows down a little and gives them time to focus on aging the cheeses. Additionally, they, with the help of Mariano and his recipe from Argentina, have recently begun selling another aged cheese, the Rio Santiam. It has a fresh, clean, milky and mildly goaty flavor with a deep earthy note in the finish. As is characteristic of goat cheeses, it also has a lovely faint coconut flavor and pairs well with rosé and lighter white wines.
WHERE TO FIND FRAGA FARM CHEESE

Rogue Creamery – Central Point, OR
Ashland Co-op – Ashland, OR
Capella Market – Eugene, OR
Sundance Natural Foods – Eugene, OR
Life Source Natural Foods – Salem, OR
First Alternative Co-op – Corvallis, OR
Periwinkle Provisions – Sweet Home, OR
EVOO Cooking School – Cannon Beach
Barking Dog Farms – Lincoln City, OR
Steve’s Cheese – Portland, OR
Food Front – Portland, OR
Alberta Co-op – Portland, OR
New Seasons – Portland, OR
Peoples Co-op – Portland, OR
Saturday Farmers Market – Portland, OR
Market of Choice – Ashland, Portland and Eugene, OR

RECIPES

Greek Salad with Fraga Feta
Makes 4 servings

My uncle Karl is Lebanese and picky about his Mediterranean food. This is roughly his recipe for Greek Salad – the only Greek Salad recipe we ever use in my family – and it goes beautifully with Fraga’s strong, creamy feta.

1 large green bell pepper, chopped into about 2-inch chunks
1 lb firm ripe tomatoes, chopped into about 2-inch chunks
1 large cucumber peeled and chopped into about 2-inch chunks
½ cup red onion, cut into about 1-inch slices
½ cup pitted kalamata olives, halved
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
3 large cloves garlic, finely minced
4 oz diced Fraga feta
Salt and freshly ground pepper

Mix all ingredients except cheese together in a serving bowl. Add cheese last and mix gently. Season with salt and pepper and let stand for at least 2 hours (but no more than a day) before serving.
Chiles Rellenos with Farmhouse and “Goat”zarella

Makes 4 servings

This recipe comes from Cheryl and Bill Jamison’s Border Cookbook – an excellent resource for recipes from the southwest United States and northern Mexico. I have altered it somewhat to highlight the flavors of Fraga’s “Goat”zarella and Farmhouse cheeses.

6 oz sliced “Goat”zarella
6 oz crumbed plain Farmhouse
8 Anaheim chiles

1 ¼ cups all-purpose flour
¾ teaspoon salt
4 eggs, separated
½ cup water

Corn oil for deep-frying

6-8 oz crumbed chipotle Farmhouse

Remove skins of chiles using the following method:
Turn a couple of gas burners on high and place the chiles directly onto the burners. Let the chiles sit on the burners as their skin begins to bubble and turn black. After about one minute, one side will get well blistered. Turn chiles over and repeat until they are blistered or charred on all sides. Place the chile in a brown paper bag. Close the bag and let sit for 10 minutes so that the chiles can steam, making it easier to pull off the skin. Remove chiles from the bag. Use your fingers to rub off the skin. Make a long cut down one side of each chile. Remove and discard the stem, seeds, and veins.

In a bowl, combine the “Goat”zarella and plain Farmhouse cheese. Stuff each chile with an eighth of the cheese mixture. In a large bowl, combine flour, salt and egg yolks. Then slowly incorporate the water. Beat egg whites in a separate bowl until stiff peaks form. Mix egg whites into the rest of the batter.

Heat 3 inches of oil in a wide, heavy pan until a drop of water sizzles on contact. Lay the first chile in the batter, spoon batter over it and pull it out by the stem when completely coated. Fry in the oil for about 4-5 minutes, turning to fry each side until golden and crisp. Remove from oil, drain and serve with crumbled chipotle Farmhouse.

Adapted from The Border Cookbook by Cheryl Alters Jamison and Bill Jamison
“Goat”zarella Quesadilla
Serves 1 hungry kid – or 2 adults as an appetizer

My sister and I ate quesadillas and apple slices almost exclusively for several years of our childhood. Bread and cheese is a classic, satisfying combination and Fraga’s “Goat”zarella is the ideal cheese – gooey, melty, stringy, slightly salty – for the perfect quesadilla.

2 8-inch four tortillas
2 oz “Goat”zarella, sliced
1 teaspoon finely chopped fresh cilantro
1 tablespoon butter
Your favorite salsa (optional)
Sour cream (optional)

In a wide skillet melt butter. Place one tortilla in pan, top evenly with cheese and cilantro and place second tortilla on top. Cook until bottom tortilla is golden brown and cheese has begun to melt. Flip with a spatula and cook until other side is brown and cheese is completely melted. Cut into six wedges and serve with salsa and sour cream, if desired.
On a hot afternoon at a place called Boones Farm, a few miles outside the hippie haven of Ashland, OR, I met Mookie Moss and learned the secret of Siskiyou Crest Goat Dairy’s success: creativity, perseverance, a passion bordering on obsession and... hip-hop music.

Mookie (born Michael) Moss moved to Oregon in 2000 and, with his father, bought the 64 acre plot of land that is now home to Boones Farm and Siskiyou Crest Goat Dairy. Raised in Colorado, Mookie studied biology (and, he chuckles, a little skiing and beer tasting on the side) at Colorado Mountain College before leaving college to focus on agriculture. He worked first at a farm in upstate New York and from there spent time interning at eight different farms in the US. Mookie ran his own vegetable business from 1995 to 1999 before moving to Oregon and founding Boones Farm in 2000. Limited water on the farm meant that he could not produce vegetables on a large scale, so Mookie chose to expand and start producing cheese. He bought a few Nubian goats to start out and is continuing to build up his herd which is currently up to 38 head with about 20 does in milk production.

Shaggy sun-bleached hair, torn pants, a tattoo of his dog’s name down his arm, and a grin on his face, I dubbed him “Mookie the hippie farmer” in my mind as we wandered around his property. He was explaining to me the frustrating process of becoming a certified Oregon Grade A Creamery as we walked and weaved through the dozens of goats lazing under trees in the grass. With most people insisting that he
would be met with failure, Mookie persevered for three and a half years until, in the summer of 2007, Siskiyou Crest Goat Dairy earned its Oregon Grade A Creamery certification and became the newest member of Oregon’s family of cheesemakers. (Since then another creamery, New Moon Goat Dairy, has become certified in Oregon.)

Now, says Mookie, he’s married to the goat dairy and milks his herd by hand twice a day, every day, and spends the rest of his time caring for his animals and making cheese. Other Oregon cheesemakers have described goat farming and cheesemaking as challenging, rewarding, difficult and demanding. Mookie simply describes it as “a trip.”

So here’s where the hip-hop music comes in. As we wandered around the farm, through the tiny rustic milking parlor, the 100-yr-old barn and the farm’s aging cave the sound of hip hop music floated from a little white hut perched on a nearby hill. That hut, Mookie explained, is the cheesemaking room where he and his interns work their magic, turning his Nubian goats’ milk into fantastic cheeses. A pretty informal operation, the music in the cheese room was blaring when we stepped in and a group of three twenty-somethings in cutoffs, hemp bracelets and hairnets were gathered around a stainless steel table scooping gobs of only hours-old chèvre into little plastic tubs and weighing them. Mookie, smiling, introduced me to his interns who help him and his business partner, Stu O’Neill, with the day-to-day chores of maintaining a goat farm and creamery.

Mookie and Stu typically take on two interns each year who stay at the farm for a year at a time to gain practice and training in agriculture. A Certified Permaculture Instructor, Mookie invites students of all ages to his farm. He co-teaches an on-site field
class called The Alchemy of Permaculture in which students learn permaculture and proper land use principles and learn to better understand the connection between humans and their environment. The class’s mission is to educate students on how to better care for themselves, the planet and their community. Mookie has also co-authored a curriculum, made possible by a grant from the non-profit organization, Within Earthy Bounds, to teach the necessary basics of farming to students interesting in a career in agriculture. For the youngest students, Mookie simply introduces classes of students to what it’s like to live and work on a farm.

Simplicity is Mookie’s mantra. He sold his milking machine recently, opting to milk each of his animals by hand instead. There are no fences surrounding Mookie’s property – the goats are free to browse all day and their diet is supplemented with a feed mix that Mookie and his team make themselves on the farm. The young animals are all bottle-fed and Mookie knows each of his goats by name.

At the end of the tour I sat on Mookie’s porch with Boone, his big dog for whom the farm was named. Mookie brought out a bowl the size of a basketball filled with mounds of his roasted red pepper & Kalamata chèvre, basil & garlic chèvre, plain chèvre, a big chunk of feta and two spoons. We sat there with Boone sleeping on our feet and chatted with Mookie about his annual surfing trips to Mexico, and his involvement in South American political activism. At one point he jumped up, offering to let me try raw (unpasteurized) milk from his goats and returned with two glasses of frothy white milk. Though not much of a straight milk drinker, I am sure that this is the best tasting milk that I have tried. Ever. It was creamy, smooth and sweet without being overly rich or
heavy and the flavor had none of the gamy goatiness that store-bought goat milks often have.

I sat there chatting on the porch, sweat rolling down my neck and shoulders, a goat gnawing on the hem of my shirt and a spoonful of Mookie’s decadent chèvre in my mouth – what a trip.

-- THE CHEESES --

Siskiyou Crest cheese is a bit difficult to come by, especially if you’re not living in the Rogue Valley. The only time I’ve eaten Mookie’s cheese was on his porch, surrounded by the very animals that had produced the milk as little as 24 hours before.

The plain chèvre he makes has almost no goaty flavor which many chèvres tend to take on, and is surprisingly smooth without any chalkiness. Not as citrusy as many other chèvres, it has a sweetness and a distinct coconut flavor which make it ideal for using in sweet dessert recipes. Its mildness also makes it well-suited to simple savory dishes that won’t overpower its subtle flavor. Flavored chèvres are all the rage these days and Siskiyou Crest makes three excellent varieties: salt & pepper, roasted red pepper & Kalamata, and garlic & basil. Each works well on a salad or sandwich, as a ravioli filling or simply spread on crackers.

Like their chèvre, Siskiyou Crest feta is on the mild end of the flavor spectrum. Its texture is crumbly and quite dry, considering it’s been soaked in brine for months. It’s a good beginner’s feta for anyone wary of sampling a new cheese and is an excellent choice for use in a simple summer pasta or a clean watermelon salad.
Mookie also produces a **raw aged cheddar** which has proven quite elusive – I have yet to try it. I look forward to seeing Siskiyou Crest’s cheeses appearing for sale in more locations soon and to sampling his aged cheddar.

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**WHERE TO FIND SISKIYOU CREST CHEESE**

On farm sales at **Boone’s Farm**

Online sales at [www.siskyoucrestgoatdairy.com](http://www.siskyoucrestgoatdairy.com)

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**RECIPES**

**Feta and Watermelon Salad**  
**Makes 6 servings**

Siskiyou Crest feta is pleasantly firm and salty, which complements the sweet watermelon well. It has none of the creamy, goatier flavor of Fraga Farm’s feta, making Mookie’s feta well suited for this clean, fresh summer salad.

4 cups 1-inch chunks watermelon, seeded  
2 cups 1/2-inch chunks Siskiyou Crest feta  
1 tablespoon fresh mint leaves, torn into pieces  
Coarsely ground black pepper to taste

In a large bowl, combine the watermelon, feta, mint and several generous grindings of black pepper. Serve immediately.

Adapted from *Bon Appétit August 2006*
Chèvre with Figs and Honey
Makes 4 servings

The sweetness of grilled figs and honey match well with the creamy tangy chevre. This makes an excellent, simple summer dessert.

4 ripe fresh mission figs
2 tablespoons olive oil
Salt and pepper
8 oz Siskiyou Crest chevre
4 tablespoons honey

Heat a cast iron grill pan over medium-high heat until a drop of water sizzles on contact. Cut figs into quarters by slicing lengthwise in half and then each piece in half again. Toss lightly with oil, season with salt and pepper, and place on hot grill, skin side down. Cook for about five minutes, until clear grill marks appear, then turn figs and cook for another five minutes.

Heap about 2 oz of chevre onto each of four small plates or bowls. Arrange four fig slices on top of the cheese on each plate. Drizzle each plate with a tablespoon of honey and serve.
Chèvre Cheesecake with Summer Fruit
Makes 6-8 servings

This recipe is adapted from a recipe in Laura Werlin’s *New American Cheese*. So that the flavor of the cheese is more prominent, I have reduced the amount of sugar, vanilla and lemon zest that Werlin’s recipe includes. The tangy cheese flavor of the cake, served with naturally sweet fresh fruit makes a beautiful combination.

12 oz Siskiyou Crest chevre (at room temperature – this is important)
½ cup plus 1 tablespoon white sugar
1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
½ teaspoon finely grated lemon zest
½ teaspoon vanilla extract
6 eggs, separated
3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
About 1 lb fresh summer fruits (nectarines, peaches, blueberries, strawberries) washed and roughly sliced or chopped

Preheat oven to 350°F. Butter a light-colored 9-inch round cake pan and dust it with 1 tablespoon of the sugar.

In the bowl of a mixer combine the cheese, remaining sugar, lemon juice, lemon zest and vanilla. Beat on medium-high until smooth, then beat in egg yolks, one at a time. Turn mixer to low and mix in flour until just incorporated.

In another bowl beat egg whites until firm. Mix one third of the egg whites into the cheese mixture and then carefully fold in the rest of the egg whites. Pour the batter into the prepared pan and bake until it no longer jiggles in the center when given a light shake and the top is golden brown, about 40 minutes. Cool in the pan for 15 minutes on a cooling rack. When ready to serve, invert the cake onto a serving plate, cut slices and top each with a spoonful of fruit.

Adapted from *The New American Cheese* by Laura Werlin
Albin, Carissa. Personal Interview. 16 August 2008.


Neilson, Jan, and Larry Neilson. Personal Interview. 18 June 2008.


affinage: The craft of “finishing” or maturing and aging cheeses (Werlin 158).

artisanal: Artisan or artisanal cheese is produced primarily by hand, in small batches, with particular attention paid to the tradition of the cheesemaker’s art, and thus using as little mechanization as possible in the production of the cheese (American Cheese Society).

barnyardy: Describes a flavor and aroma in some cheese that is reminiscent of the smells that emanate from a barnyard. Usually it is a strong, musty and even sometimes dirt-like flavor or aroma which, despite that description, can be a favorable quality in a cheese (Werlin 158).

browse: The term used to describe the way in which goats graze or feed on leaves of bushes and other foliage (Amelia Caldwell).

bloomy rind: The white, flowery and desirable down-like surface of a soft-ripened cheese such as a Camembert or Brie which is a result of a mold spray, usually *Penicillium candidum* (Werlin 158).

brine: A solution, usually salt and water, in which certain cheeses are soaked for anywhere from a few hours to several months. Brining is a means of salting the cheese as well as creating a protective exterior for longer aging (Werlin 158).

cave: An aging room usually built underground which can often be a specially calibrated to maintain the precise humidity and temperature levels ideal for aging cheese (Werlin 158).

chalky: The texture of a cheese, often a goat cheese, whose consistency is dry, crumbly and leaves an undesirable coating in the mouth (Werlin 158).

chèvre: The French work for “goat,” chèvre refers to fresh cheese made from goat milk.

curd: The solid or coagulated portion of milk, curds are the result of milk proteins clumping together after being exposed to starter bacteria which raise the acidity of the milk (Werlin 158).

farmstead: In order for a cheese to be classified as “farmstead,” as defined by the American Cheese Society, the cheese must be made with milk from the farmer’s own herd, or flock, on the farm where the animals are raised. Milk used in the production of farmstead cheeses may not be obtained from any outside source (American Cheese Society).
feta: A fresh cheese that originated in Greece, where it was traditionally made with goat milk or sheep milk. Feta is usually stored in a saltwater brine and can be preserved for over a year (Werlin 158).

fresh cheese: Cheese that has not been ripened or aged (Werlin 158).

lactic: A strong presence of milk in a cheese’s flavor or aroma (Werlin 158).

queso fresco: A milky, fresh Mexican cheese that is very firm yet moist and is often used in cooking. It does not melt and is similar in its crumbly consistency to feta cheese (Werlin 158).

raw milk: Milk that has not been pasteurized (Werlin 158).

rennet: A plant or animal derived substance that contains the enzyme rennin which is crucial to the coagulation of milk. Originally, rennet was derived from the lining of the fourth stomach of an unweaned ruminant animal (e.g. a calf, kid, or lamb). Today, microbial, plant-derived, and GMO varieties produce the same results as traditional animal-derived rennet (Werlin 158).

rind: The outside of a cheese, which acts as a barrier between the cheese and the outside environment while also imparting a flavor of its own. Rinds can be either natural or artificial (Werlin 158).

soft-ripened: A cheese that ripens from the rind inward, due to the mold or bacteria added to the cheese or sprayed in the surface of the cheese (Werlin 158).

unpasteurized cheese: Cheese made from milk that has not been pasteurized. Often called raw milk, cheese made from milk that has not been pasteurized must be aged at least 60 days before it can be sold in the United States (Werlin 158).

washed-rind cheese: A type of cheese that is washed periodically in a brine solution in order to promote rind growth, keep the cheese moist and develop flavor. The rind may be washed in water, brine, cider, beer, spirits, wine, etc. and each type of wash imparts its own unique flavor (Werlin 158).