



Cheese Market News®

Demand for holiday gifting of cheese up during pandemic

By Trina La Susa

MADISON, Wis. — With less in-person gatherings during the holidays due to the COVID-19 pandemic, cheese companies and retailers are helping consumers to recreate the holiday experience by diversifying their cheese gift offerings and educating them through virtual classes, tastings and tours.

Cheese purchases have continued to grow amid the pandemic — more recently, consumer habits have shifted from stocking up on staple cheeses to creating a shared experience from afar with cheese gift boxes. This holiday season, cheese companies and retailers around the country are reporting higher sales volumes of cheese gift boxes compared to the previous year.

Jessica Keahey, owner of Sweet Freedom Cheese, an independent artisanal cheese shop in Bentonville, Arkansas, says she has adjusted the shop's offerings for what people need to safely gather and enjoy cheese. Due to the reduced number of gatherings,

she says smaller cheese gift boxes and platters for individuals and couples have been more popular this holiday season versus larger cheese gifts and charcuterie platters that made up a majority of sales the year before.

"We've rolled out smaller cheese gift boxes that serve anywhere from two to eight people, designed for couples and families that are celebrating together and social distancing," Keahey says.

To meet local and federally recommended regulations for social distancing, Keahey says Sweet Freedom Cheese transferred its on-site cheese classes to a virtual platform that has been more convenient for consumers. She plans to continue using this platform to host virtual cheese events to allow family members, friends and corporate team members from all over the globe to participate in educational tastings and cheeseboard events during times where an in-person and on-premise setting wouldn't be possible.

"For corporate gifting, instead of having huge, in-person holiday parties,

we're seeing people wanting to still celebrate and thank their employees, but instead doing it from a virtual channel. We've done a lot of build-a-board kits paired with virtual classes that show how to build a charcuterie board and contain all the components in it — they have been a lot of fun," she says.

Each virtual class at Sweet Freedom Cheese is conducted through an educational standpoint, where the cheesemakers, cheeses and accompaniments are discussed. Keahey says participants receive cuts of cheese, packages of meats, accompaniments and crackers,

Turn to HOLIDAY, page 9

INSIDE

4



Guest Column:
Michael Dykes

5

Ingredient Innovation:
Paz Ingredients focuses on nutrition, integrity as it approaches 25th year

11

Lactalis Canada to acquire Agropur's Ultima Foods

12

Cheese in cold storage slightly up from October

Congress approves stimulus, omnibus bill for fiscal 2021

WASHINGTON — After months of gridlock, this week leaders in the U.S. Senate, House and the Secretary of the Treasury reached bipartisan agreement on a \$900 billion pandemic relief bill, along with a \$1.4 trillion omnibus appropriations bill to fund the government through fiscal year 2021.

The COVID-19 relief would include a second round of direct relief checks for \$600 per person; however, President Trump on Tuesday posted a video calling on Congress to increase that amount to \$2,000 per person or \$4,000 per couple, and he demanded they get rid of "wasteful and unnecessary items" in the legislation.

House Democrats attempted to pass this proposal for \$2,000 by unanimous consent on Thursday, but it was blocked by House Re-

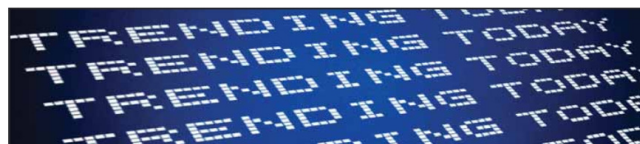
publicans. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., says she will bring the House back to session Monday, when lawmakers will hold a recorded vote on a stand-alone bill to increase the stimulus payments to \$2,000.

"Hopefully by then the president will have already signed the bipartisan and bicameral legislation to keep government open and deliver coronavirus relief," Pelosi says.

House Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., says the Democrats have ignored the president's concerns over tax dollars spent overseas in the government funding bill, and that Republicans will offer a unanimous consent request to revisit the State and Foreign Operations title of the omnibus to address these concerns.

In addition to the stimulus

Turn to BILL, page 11



Experts discuss food trends, how ingredients add value

By Trina La Susa

MADISON, Wis. — Several dairy companies and cooperatives have turned to research and development to improve their profits, going beyond milk, yogurt and cheese to create functional dairy ingredients. Whether it's dairy proteins, milk powder or permeated lactose, dairy ingredients can be used in a wide range of finished products suitable for different countries and consumer groups around the world by understanding trends happening in the food and beverage market today, according to Kristi Saitama, vice president, global ingredients marketing, U.S. Dairy Export Council.

Saitama, along with Professor Dolores O'Riordan, lead principal investigator, University College Dublin's Food for Health Ireland, and Liz Moskow, principal, Bread & Circus Ltd., discussed which food and beverage trends could

benefit from the inclusion of dairy ingredients, and what companies can do to create profitable, innovative products that consumers will want to buy during a recent webinar hosted by *Dairy Reporter* and sponsored by Edlong, Dupont Nutrition & Biosciences and Cargill.

Moskow, a marketing strategy and business development expert specializing in trend forecasts, says some of the biggest trends that tie into dairy include sustainability, as well as wellness of cows, antibiotic-free, clean label and waste reduction. She notes that whey is one of the upcycled products from the beginning that is continuing to resurge and have more of a moment in the marketplace.

"I'd be remiss not to mention the plant-based revolution that's happening now. Specifically within that macro trend, there's the micro trend of 50/50 products, which is blending plant-based ingredients with animal-based

Turn to TRENDS, page 8

NEWS/BUSINESS

HOLIDAY

Continued from page 1

and then can watch staff build a board virtually and follow along.

Keahey says she recognizes the value in e-commerce and shipping, and Sweet Freedom Cheese at the start of the year expanded its online presence to include limited e-commerce items such as gift cards; however, the bulk of cheese sales have been done at the brick-and-mortar store and via pickup orders and contactless deliveries. Looking ahead to 2021, Keahey says the cheese shop will continue exploring the logistics and labor requirements of shipping larger volumes of cheese through the cold chain.

"Speaking with other independent cheese shop owners in the United States, the ones that have had an established e-commerce program before or at the start of the pandemic have reported seeing a big uptick in sales, some saying that they shipped more in one week than last year, the whole month of December combined," Keahey says. "Industrywide we're seeing that people really want to send food gifts to other people. Our shop has had requests from the United Kingdom and from New Zealand to gift cheeses from halfway across the globe to people in our local community. We've been seeing a lot more of that than we certainly did last year."

At Jasper Hill Farm, Greensboro, Vermont, e-commerce has been the strongest channel for cheese sales since the start of the pandemic. Zoe Brickley, director of sales and marketing, Jasper Hill, says the company is seeing a higher volume of gifting, which before the pandemic wasn't one of its focuses, but will continue to be a focus going into 2021.

"So far this holiday season, our customers have embraced our gift boxes as people are looking to recreate a holiday experience even if they can't get together with friends and family. For example, we've seen more people order gift boxes in bulk and send them to their friends and family for cheese and wine happy hours over Zoom," Brickley says. "On that same note, online corporate events have also proven popular as companies who now can't host holiday parties are sending dozens of gift boxes, including custom ones, to employees and clients."

Jasper Hill now offers nine curated cheese collections, which include The Cheese Baller, The Vermont, The Full Spread, The Ripe & Ready, The True Connoisseur, The Après Ski, The Diversion and A Collection to Celebrate. In an homage to the moment, Brickley says Jasper Hill changed the name of its meat and cheese box to the "Wurst Käse Scenario," which includes a wedge of Landaff cheese, a tray of house-made mac and cheese, Vermont Wagyu ground beef, fresh pork sausage with Bayley Hazen Blue, fresh salt and pepper sausage, uncured bacon, Canadian bacon and Higgins Hot Sauce "Skillet Scrapings."

"We launched our exact weight line and it has been especially helpful this

holiday season for our retail partners since, in many instances, they don't have the same staffing levels they normally would to cut our cheese to order. It also meant less hand cutting and wrapping for our team in preparation for the large volumes of gifts we're shipping," Brickley says.

In November, Jasper Hill launched its fourth Victory Cheese Box of 2020, The Victory Lap, to help support local cheesemakers as well as distributors, cheese shops and restaurants through the COVID-19 pandemic. Established earlier this year, Victory Cheese is a grassroots collective comprised of cheese professionals across the country who have come together amid the coronavirus pandemic to help save the U.S. specialty cheese industry. The task force includes a spectrum of industry organizations, producers, distributors, retailers and thought leaders.

Brickley says Jasper Hill doubled the number of orders it could accommodate from its summer runs, and The Victory Lap still sold out in a week or so. She says it's been heartening to see such an enthusiastic response to the #chooseitortoloseit, share the love concept.

"In 2021, as things hopefully normalize, these smaller-scale producers' sales channels will recover and they can go back to relying on full-wheel sales to shops and restaurants. But depending on the need we see expressed, we would be happy to do another lap," Brickley says.

Aside from e-commerce, she notes that independent cheese shops have been invaluable ambassadors for Jasper Hill's cheeses, even if they're not its biggest customers from a volume perspective. She says these shops have adapted and their community of customers have rallied around them in support.

In addition to broadening corporate events to emphasize virtual tastings, Brickley adds that Jasper Hill has hosted around a half dozen virtual events throughout the pandemic, including a cave tour, a deep dive into the history of hard cheeses with Dr. Paul Kindstedt and a recent class on plating a cheeseboard during the holidays.

Crave Brothers Farmstead Cheese LLC, Waterloo, Wisconsin, has been connecting virtually with its consumers using social media to share updates on its cheeses, recipes and what is happening on the farm. Debbie Crave, vice president, Crave Brothers, says consumers are at home cooking with cheese, and it is important to give them new recipe ideas for using Crave Brothers fresh cheeses.

"People are still at home cooking with cheese for their immediate families. They are trying new recipes and adventuring into new concepts as they have more time," Crave says. "During the holidays, people want special desserts and they use a lot of Mascarpone. We have several unique recipes on our website for Mascarpone holiday ideas including our famous chocolate Mascarpone pie, chocolate Mascarpone truffles, mini trifles and whoopie pies."

To help shoppers know what to look for, Crave notes Crave Brothers has participated in some television segments featuring its gift boxes and it has partnered with Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin for its holiday cheese gift campaign.

"Our cheese factory and farm staff are proud to be part of the frontline workforce."

Debbie Crave
CRAVE BROTHERS
FARMSTEAD CHEESE

With people staying home, Crave notes there has been an increase in e-commerce sales for gift boxes and cheeses, as well as demand for easy, contact-free ordering and shipping directly to homes.

"We are selling a lot more gift boxes and cheeses online, and we are glad we can offer our new Chocolate Mascarpone to consumers through our online sales," Crave says. "We do miss the opportunity of in-store demonstrations where consumers can taste and buy."

The company says it has been hoping to bring people together through its selection of fresh cheese and three gift

boxes for the holidays: Crave Chocolate Mascarpone Pie Kit, Crave Cheese Samplers gift box and Crave Mascarpone Caramel Sauce with Candied Pecans gift box.

The Crave Chocolate Mascarpone Pie Kit is a gift that includes all the ingredients to make a Chocolate Mascarpone Pie, including two containers of Mascarpone cheese, dark chocolate chips and a chocolate cookie pie crust.

The Crave Cheese Samplers gift box features Wisconsin cheese classics, including Cheddar Cheese Curds, a container of Marinated Fresh Mozzarella and two coils of Farmer's Rope String Cheese, along with two containers of Crave's Mascarpone, which has more than 36 honors to its name.

Crave Brothers also offers the Crave Mascarpone Caramel Sauce with Candied Pecans gift box, which includes two containers of Crave Brothers Mascarpone, a jar of Treat Candied Pecans from Madison, Wisconsin, and a recipe to make Mascarpone Caramel Sauce for drizzling over ice cream, pies or cakes.

"Our cheese factory and farm staff are proud to be part of the frontline workforce, working every day to get nutritious food in grocery stores," Crave says. "We are lucky to have dedicated, hard-working employees, including many family members. We've worked extra hours and weekends to meet orders." CMN

Jasper Hill unveils Sherry Gray medallion

GREENSBORO, Vt. — Jasper Hill Farm recently debuted Sherry Gray, a double-cream, ash-ripened medallion made with grass-fed cow's milk and additional cream from Monument Farms in Vermont's Champlain Valley.

Sherry Gray, named in honor of a treasured member of the local Greensboro, Vermont, community, features

black ash peeking through a frosty layer of delicate bloom. Jasper Hill says flavors of cultured cream dominate, with subtle hints of fresh button mushrooms and a warm, nutty finish that lingers on the palate.

For more information, visit <https://www.jasperhillfarm.com/sherry-gray>. CMN

Give your **supply chain** a health check

WOW Logistics Consulting Services will cut costs by uncovering inefficiencies.



- ✓ Detailed roadmap of solutions with predicted ROI
- ✓ Experienced engineering team
- ✓ Broad view of industry best practices
- ✓ Advanced analytical tools to track project success

WOW
LOGISTICS

800-236-3565 | wowlogistics.com

Let WOW **identify** your greatest **opportunities** for a more **streamlined** system.

For more information please visit www.wowlogistics.com