

## All-Natural Cheese Meets Consumer Demands

**B**uckeye Grove Farm Cheese, located in Beallsville, Ohio, has seemingly found overnight success marketing its farmhouse cheese to consumers.

Since company founders Jake and Dixie Scheiderer sold their first wedge of All-Natural Grassland Cheese in June 2004, they have become a regular vendor at four farmers markets and a wholesale distributor to three high-end retail markets across Ohio. Customers from Maryland to California have purchased Buckeye Grove Farm Cheese through the internet and the on-site cheese store. Most tellingly, the couple has a ready market for all the cheese it plans to produce through next year.

And though success has come quickly, it has not come by chance. It is founded on years of preparation, a commitment to quality and marketing the right product to the right audience.

The Scheiderer's product line is six varieties of cheeses that are made from raw milk from Registered Jersey™ cows grazed on pasture. The farm is one of a handful of cheese makers licensed by the Ohio Department of Agriculture to use unpasteurized milk in the production of cheese. Buckeye Grove Farm Cheese fits the needs of consumers that are becoming more concerned about where and how their food is produced and desire a less-processed, more-nutrient-dense product.

### The Cows

Jake and Dixie Scheiderer started the cheese company when they handed over the reins for care of the Buckeye Grove Registered Jersey herd to their eldest son, Al, and his wife, Renae, in December 2003.

The herd has been bred and developed by five generations of the Scheiderer family, beginning with the Jerseys milked by Jacob Scheiderer in Union County, Ohio, in 1867. The herd was moved to a farm in Plain City, Ohio, in 1941, then to its current home in Beallsville in 1977.

The 60-cow herd produces about 2,500 lbs. of milk per week for cheese production and the balance of the milk is sold to

United Dairy.

### The Cheese

Six varieties of hard and semi-hard cheeses are made by a method Dixie calls "the Old-World style." This method involves a lot of hand labor, so quantities are limited to what she and Jake can produce in six cheese-making sessions each month.



"We start making cheese as soon as the milk comes from the cow," Dixie explained. "Nutrition is best when it is



The Scheiderer family owns and operates Buckeye Grove Farm and makes six varieties of cheese that are distributed wholesale and direct to consumers. Left to right are Renae, Al, Jake and Dixie, with six-month-old Emily.

made right away. We don't heat the milk any higher than 104 degrees Fahrenheit; otherwise the enzymes and vitamins would be destroyed."

"Our cheese has no calcium chloride, sodium nitrite, sorbates, dyes, antibiotics, added hormones, vegetable products, or powdered milk," Dixie remarked. "No

hormones are used in our feed or our breeding program."

The ingredients label on a wheel of Buckeye Grove Farm Cheese would simply read: whole Jersey milk, cheese culture, enzymes and salt.

Milk is delivered direct from the barn to the cheese house and poured into a 280-gallon stainless steel vat. Cheese culture and rennet are added. After a gel-like mass of curds and whey forms, cutters are pushed by hand in the vat to prepare the mass for separation. The whey is pumped out of the cheese vat and the curd is placed into molds, where it is pressed. The wheels of cheese are then placed in brine for a period of time, removed, patted dry, date-stamped and placed on wooden shelves in a cool, long-aging room. After a couple weeks, wheels are hand-waxed and returned to cool storage for aging.

The first 60 days of aging is the aging process is to kill bacteria. The second stage of aging is for flavor and ranges from six months to two years, depending on variety. Since raw-milk cheese ages twice as fast as pasteurized cheese, it must be watched closely.

### Start with Quality

You need to start with good ingredients to get a good product, Dixie summed. "This starts by controlling the milk," she said. "Ten tests are run on the milk before we begin to make cheese. And we don't make cheese from milk if the somatic cell count (SCC) is above 250,000."

By all indications, this rarely happens at Buckeye Grove Farm. The SCCs from USDA for herd pick-ups on November 4, 6, 8 and 12 were 162, 136, 98 and 91 (in thousands), respectively. Remarkably, these counts come on a group of cows that are predominantly late in their lactation.

Al and Renae keep a very close eye on SCCs, checking the count from USDA every couple of days by remote phone access. An electronic mastitis monitor, the Wescor Mas-D-Tec, helps the Scheiderers

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## Buckeye Grove Farm

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check each cow for subclinical mastitis once a month. The monitor estimates subclinical mastitis based on the level of electrical conductivity in the milk and provides results in seconds.

Al and Renae also weigh each cow's milk once a month using Waikato milk meters and test for components using the Babcock Test and lactometer readings.

To ensure that milk is healthy, Buckeye Grove Farm follows a strict vaccination and biosecurity plan. The barns are closed to visitors from November first until the cattle are turned out in the spring. Bangs certification and TB accreditation have been maintained since 1961. The herd has attained Level 5 of the state's voluntary Johne's Disease program. The herd is closed, having added just one or two female purchases over the past 20 years. And it has a strict terms of sale, bringing no animals back into the herd after they've left.

### Living with the Land

One of the unique qualities of Buckeye Grove Farm Cheese is that it is made from milk from cows grazed on pasture, a practice that is born as much from necessity as invention. The farm is situated on 230 acres in southeast Ohio, about 12 miles from the West Virginia border. The steep hills, thick woods and abundant wildlife make for beautiful scenery, but difficult farming.

Buckeye Grove Farm practices sustainable green earth methods, which strive to impact the environment as little as possible while producing feed for the cows.

"My plows have stayed in the same spot since 1994," Al remarked. "Grass is the best crop here."

The herd is intensively grazed on 60 acres of indigenous grass and clover from late April through November. About 80 acres are used to produce grass balage. Grazing and an occasional clipping control weeds, and manure is the only source of fertilizer.

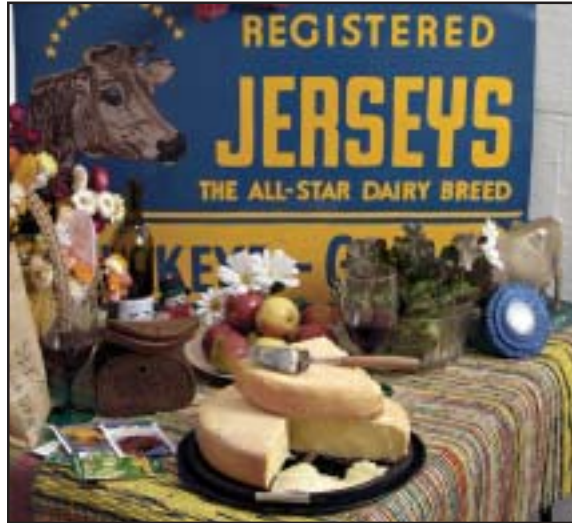
Cheese is generally made when the cows are grazing. "The best nutritional levels come from cheese that is made in the fall, when the grass is best," Dixie remarked.

As well, there is a marked difference in the appearance of grassland cheese and

feedlot cheese, which is made from milk from cows fed a high-concentrate ration. Grassland cheese is more golden in color.

### Do Your Homework

Although Dixie has made soft and cottage cheese for the family for more than 20 years, she and Jake spent countless hours of research before



Munsterzilla is one of six Old-World style cheeses made by Buckeye Grove Farm Cheese. The original farm sign shows that the Scheiderers are proud to make their cheese from wholesome, nutritious Registered Jersey milk.



Jake and Dixie pose with wheels of Gouda in cold storage. Photos above by Larry Hamel-Lambert.

becoming professional cheese makers. The couple traveled to cheese houses in New York, Vermont and Canada to learn many of the Old-World style techniques they use today.

Dixie became certified from The Ohio State University in the methods of HACCP

(Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point). HACCP is a globally accepted method for producing a safe food product by controlling production at various critical stages.

As well, Jake and Dixie contacted the Ohio Department of Agriculture to make sure the facility they built could pass inspection and the product they made could be licensed.

Work with your inspectors and follow regulations, no matter what, Dixie advised. "Our inspector is the reason we're here today."

"Regulations protect the market," she added. "We do not promote raw fluid milk, raw butter, raw fresh cheese or untested dairy products for human or animal consumption. We do support the effort to find regulated means of making these products available."

"Although there is a demand for raw milk, it is bad for our business. One person selling a gallon of raw milk under the table jeopardizes us all. We want all Ohio farmstead cheesemakers to have a 'clean face' always."

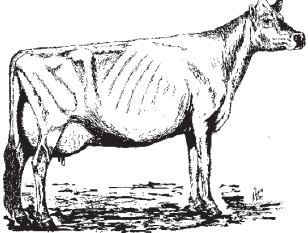
Dixie also advises that anyone planning a cheese-making venture study the market.

"Ninety percent of success is the market," Dixie noted. "There are five to six hundred kinds of cheeses out there. The consumer has lots of choices. Many cheese makers don't succeed because their product is not different enough."

For Buckeye Grove Farm Cheese, the grassland-unpasteurized approach to making a nutritious, delicious cheese is what makes their product unique and is a part of the reason for their success. The other part is keeping their herd of Registered Jersey cows healthy

and happy.

For information on the cheese and the Ohio Grassland Cheesemakers Guild, visit [www.buckeyegrovefarmcheese.com](http://www.buckeyegrovefarmcheese.com). For more information on the farm and the Scheiderer family, visit <http://users.1stnet.bgfjersey.com>.



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