

A Full House for Jersey Value-Added 101 Workshop

Conversations at the 2016 AJCA-NAJ annual meetings led to the idea of putting on a farm value-added workshop for any Jersey owner asking, “*Should I process my own milk?*” The goal of **Jersey Value-Added 101** on March 29 and 30 in St. Charles, Mo., was to provide information to members as they explore the possibility of processing their own milk and becoming a value-added operation. Strong interest resulted in participation from 37 producers (21 operations), from 16 states and one producer from Switzerland. The workshop featured three expert and two producer presenters, plus an on-farm processing facility tour. The workshop provided guidance on where to start the process and shared information on a range of products from cheese, fluid milk, and ice cream to butter and yogurt.

John Kokoski of Mapleline Farms LLC and Mark Gillman of Cato Corner Farm kicked off the program by sharing their dairy processing success stories.

John Kokoski took over the six-generation family farm in Hadley, MA in 1980 and phased out the vegetable and tobacco business to focus on dairying. The herd originally numbered 45 Jersey cows in 1995 when John started hauling the milk to be bottled offsite and bringing it back to the farm to be sold in the store-front of the dairy barn. The enterprise was so successful that in 2004, John purchased the processing equipment and relocated it on the farm. Herd expansion quickly followed leading to the current herd size of 135.

Today, Mapleline processes 275,000 lbs. milk per month with 70% produced by the home herd. The

remainder is sourced from three other farms to meet demand. John stressed the importance of ensuring there is a market for what you plan to produce. He gave the example that many people in his area are very health conscious and like sourcing from local producers. Some of his key steps were to evaluate the total market population within a 25-mile radius, determine its make-up, and then figure out a plan for producing the products they want and getting them distributed.

Mark Gillman of Colchester, CT left a career teaching seventh grade English in Baltimore to go back to the farm operated by his mother, Elizabeth MacAlister, when she started making cheese in 1999.

Today, Mark is the head cheesemaker while Elizabeth manages the herd. The dairy milks between 35 and 45 cows year-round and uses all



The group at Marcoot Jersey Creamery Inc.

the milk in the annual production of 55,000 lbs. of handmade cheese. Cato Corner is a closed herd and selects its bulls especially for butter fat and protein. Mark pointed out that cheese is affected by the seasons, and plans for those variations. Winter milk is richer, with more protein and butter fat and ideal for softer cheeses. Summer milk has a complex flavor that works great for aged cheeses. Mark’s goal is to be as consistent as possible with each variety, but understanding and celebrating the handmade characteristics of each cheese. Mark also talked about product marketing and gave examples of his price points given the different distribution avenues, whether the product is sold retail, wholesale, or through a distributor. Mark enjoys making cheese and

stressed producing a product that you enjoy making and can see yourself doing each day.

Marcoot Jersey Creamery Inc., of Greenville, IL, hosted the farm tour. The farm is operated by Amy and Beth Marcoot who took over from their parents, John and Linda Marcoot, in 2009. The daughters decided that a value-added business would best sustain the farm. In 2010, Amy and Beth crafted their first batches of cheese made solely from their Jersey herd. The Marcoot Jersey Creamery is located on the farm with a viewing gallery to the cheese facility, and an open retail store for their products. The Marcoots were able to source valuable used processing machinery while building their operation and mentioned how they are just now growing into the large facility. Currently, the creamery produces 14 artisan cheeses which can be found in over 100 retail shops and high-end restaurants plus the luxury boxes at Busch Stadium, home of the Cardinals, and at the St. Louis Gateway Arch. The Marcoots have built relationships with their customers and kept them informed about their products, creating repeated demand for their cheeses.



Left to right: John Kokoski, NAJ President Dave Endres, Mark Gillman

Three industry experts provided a wealth of technical information and advice to workshop participants.

Neville McNaughton, president of Sanitary Design Industries, has been in the cheese making industry for more than 40 years, both as cheesemaker and consultant. Originally from New Zealand, Neville has worked in some of the industry's top dairy plants and

has judged some of the world's most prestigious cheese competitions. Neville spoke to the group about food safety and designing a processing facility with sanitation as a top priority. A food processing plant needs to consider every aspect of its construction in regards to sanitation, from the ceiling and lights to the floors and drains, and everything in-between. A Food Safety Plan is a key aspect to any business dealing in food production and should be developed first. A food recall will diminish consumer trust and could very well bankrupt a small dairy processing facility.

Independent consultant **James D. Gage** specializes in value-added dairy and local food business development. Previously manager of the Wisconsin Dairy Business Innovation Center, he has worked on business and marketing issues with more than 250 clients over the last 12 years. Jim talked about conducting a market assessment and understanding consumer demand. The assessment should answer questions including: *Who are my customers? How can I assess my market? How can I communicate my message to my consumers?* He also provided the group with information on marketing and sales options for their future dairy products.

Ann Wilkinson specializes in working with emerging food companies, and has extensive experience working with producer-owned organizations. Prior to establishing Origin Farms Consulting, she served as product manager of branded retail and food service products for two major food companies. Ann provided information about developing a business plan and funding opportunities and options for value added producers, stating, "To develop a solid business plan, you need a clear vision of where you want to go, what you want to do, and how you want to do it, and how you will exit." She also reviewed the different grants that they could apply for to fund their new business ventures.

National All-Jersey Inc. thanks everyone involved with the success of first **Jersey Value-Added Workshop**. Based on the positive feedback from participants, NAJ directors and staff will work on developing the concept further in order to continue to help Jersey owners asking, "*Should I process my own milk?*"

The NAJ Equity Newsletter is Published for Supporters of and People Interested In Equitable Milk Pricing

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