

FRESH HISPANIC-STYLE CHEESES

Adding Authentic Flavor to Latin Dishes and More



California's rich Hispanic culture and heritage help make the state the country's leading producer of Hispanic- or Mexican-style cheese and dairy products. In 2017, a total of 135 million pounds were produced – all bearing the Real California Milk seal, which certifies they are made exclusively from California milk.

Hispanic-style cheeses are available in either fresh or aged. Two of the most popular fresh varieties are Queso Fresco, which is soft, moist and slightly acidic, and Oaxaca, a mild, firm white cheese similar to Mozzarella.

HISPANIC-STYLE CHEESE FACTS

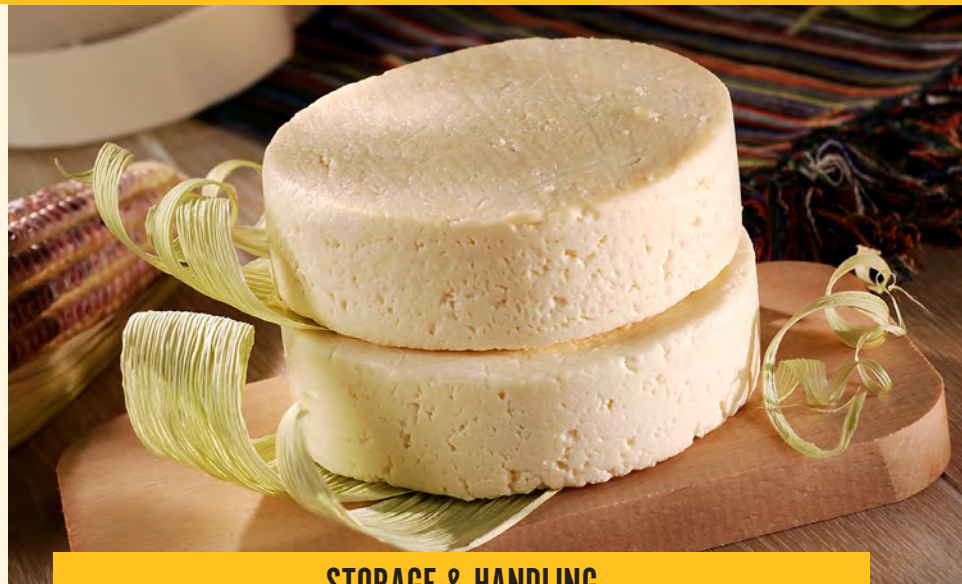
California is the top producer of Hispanic-style cheeses in the nation producing more than 25 varieties and styles. This amounts to approximately 5.4 percent of the total cheese production in the state.

The top four California Hispanic-style cheese producers make more than 20 varieties of Hispanic-style cheeses.

Hispanic-style cheeses are a low-cost way to add authenticity to Latin-inspired dishes.

Besides Queso Fresco and Oaxaca, the other top varieties of fresh Hispanic-style cheeses include:

- Queso Blanco Fresco – popular for frying
- Panela – with a firm texture similar to fresh (or high-moisture) Mozzarella
- Requesón – has a soft, grainy texture similar to Ricotta



STORAGE & HANDLING

- When purchasing cheese, make sure the package is properly and tightly wrapped and sealed, and that the cheese inside looks appealing. Do not use any cheese that looks dry or discolored, as the package seal may be broken. With fresh cheeses, check the freshness date on the package.
- Fresh cheeses should be treated just like milk and kept refrigerated. Many fresh cheeses can last for a few weeks if properly stored, so note the freshness date on the package before you buy. If you detect mold on a fresh cheese, discard it.
- To melt cheese, use a low temperature for a brief time. Add cheese toppings to dishes at the end of baking or broiling and heat just long enough to melt. Soft cheeses have enough water to blend well into beans, side-dishes and fillings.



FOODSERVICE APPLICATIONS

Back-of-the-House

Queso Fresco is a soft, fresh cheese. Like Ricotta, Queso Fresco is easily crumbled or caramelized and the ideal ingredient on enchiladas and tostadas. The cheese is used to add flavor and color to traditional dishes, but also unique flavor for pasta, vegetables, omelets and salads.

Oaxaca makes the perfect topping for pizza as it's very similar to Mozzarella. Shredded, it can top refried beans, tostadas, and soups. Sliced, it melts wonderfully for quesadillas. Building on the popularity of barbeque, chefs add shredded Oaxaca in BBQ chicken quesadillas to attract diners who can't get enough of the smoky favorite.

Front-of-the-House

The popularity of charcuterie boards offers a foundation for Oaxaca and Queso Fresco. Present these cheeses as a substitute for Provolone or Ricotta to drive consumer interest in a Latin-style charcuterie board.

Chunks, crumbles or shreds of Hispanic-style soft cheeses work well on corn salads or to create a Mexican salad with avocado and tomatoes.

WHAT'S TRENDING

Menu Ideas

Fresh Hispanic-style cheeses drive consumer interest on menus in both signature dishes and Limited-Time-Offers. In recent years they have been key ingredients in mainstream fast food items like queso bacon burgers, fries and chicken sandwiches.

- Queso Fresco gives dishes like pasta primavera and au gratin potatoes a rich, creamy texture. Or menu it diced in a watermelon, arugula salad with heirloom tomatoes and a balsamic vinaigrette with basil and mint.
- Oaxaca is delicious in portobello quesadillas and as the main ingredient in "queso fundido," which means molten cheese. And to push the envelope a bit, Oaxaca adds flair to crêpes with corn and zucchini blossoms.

The New Nachos

Nachos on menus are driving trial and exciting consumers. From their introduction in the 1980s, nachos have delighted bar and casual restaurant patrons. In this era of authenticity, chefs are substituting Hispanic-style melting cheeses for old stand-by Cheddar or Monterey Jack.

Cheese & Corn

The latest crossover menu hit is Mexican Street Corn, which is delighting consumers and restaurant managers. Simply roast corn-on-the-cob and serve sprinkled with Queso Fresco, cilantro and chili powder.

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AGED HISPANIC-STYLE CHEESES

So Authentic and Flavorful



California's rich Hispanic culture and heritage help make the state the country's leading producer of Hispanic- or Mexican-style cheese and dairy products. In 2017, a total of 135 million pounds were produced – all bearing the Real California Milk seal, which certifies they are natural cheeses made exclusively from California milk.

Hispanic-style cheeses are produced either aged or fresh. Aged Hispanic-style cheeses, commonly called “añejo” (or “aged”), are different from their “aged” European and American counterparts. Their characteristic dry texture and pungent, sharp flavor comes from being salted, pressed and dried rather than being “aged” for a long time.

California cheesemakers produce a number of aged, semi-firm and firm Hispanic-style cheeses. The two most popular are Cotija, which is a strong, pungent cheese with a distinct sharpness, and Manchego, which is comparable to a creamy, sharp cheddar cheese.

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Hispanic-style cheeses are a low-cost way to add authenticity to Latin-inspired dishes.

Besides Cotija and Manchego, the other top varieties aged Hispanic-style cheeses include:

- Asadero – tangy, similar to Provolone
- Enchilado – dry, crumbly white cheese with a red coating



STORAGE & HANDLING

- When purchasing cheese, make sure the package is properly and tightly wrapped and sealed, and that the cheese inside looks appealing. Do not use any cheese that looks dry or discolored, as the package seal may be broken.
- While fresh cheeses should be treated just like milk and kept refrigerated, semi-hard and hard cheeses will last four to eight weeks if properly stored. After opening consider removing the original plastic wrap and re-wrapping in parchment or wax paper, which allows the cheese to breathe.



FOODSERVICE APPLICATIONS

Back-of-the-House

Americans' palates have expanded and grown more adventurous each year. Chefs are featuring authentic "south-of-the-border" menu items that center on the use of authentic Hispanic-style cheeses. Cooking and garnishing with these cheeses add value and authenticity. A few types of Hispanic-style cheeses will soften but not melt (or flow) when heated or used in cooked dishes. So, it's important to know your cheeses:

- **Asadero** is a mild, firm cheese molded into a log and sold sliced. It is similar to Provolone in its slightly tangy taste and firm texture. It melts well and is used in such dishes as quesadillas and nachos as well as on hamburgers and sandwiches.
- Named after the town of Cotija, Mexico, where it originated, **Cotija** is a firm, very salty cheese similar to a dry Feta. Cotija is available in a wheel or grated and can be used in a similar way to Feta – crumbled and sprinkled as a condiment over soups, salads and beans. It's also ideal with baked gnocchi for a lighter texture and elevated flavor.
- **Enchilado** is a dry, crumbly white cheese distinguished by its colorful reddish appearance, the result of a coating of mild red chili or paprika, which adds a slightly spicy flavor. Crumble or slice onto Mexican foods, soups and salads. In cooked dishes, it softens but does not melt.
- **Manchego** is derived from the famous cheese of La Mancha, Spain, where it's made from sheep's milk. The Hispanic-style version uses low-fat cow's milk and has a mellow, nutty flavor. This firm golden cheese has become popular for blending into gourmet mac & cheese with chorizo and melted onto flatbreads or pizza.

Front-of-the-House

The popularity of charcuterie and cheese flights allows a platform to develop one with Latin flair. All of the añejo cheeses pair beautifully with meats, olives and dried fruit. Chefs use them as snacking or sandwich cheeses, and as an accompaniment to fruit and wine. Two decades ago, mainstream American menus were introduced to Tex-Mex and brought consumers around to spicy foods topped with Hispanic-style cheese. Beef and chicken quesadillas are still popular as well as taco salads and Tex-Mex Chicken Ranch salads.

WHAT'S TRENDING

Popular Pupusas

Pupusas are a hand-formed traditional Salvadoran dish of a thick corn tortilla stuffed with aged Hispanic-style cheese and savory fillings. Great on the grill, these tortillas are becoming more popular on menus. Chefs spread Hispanic-style cheese on pupusas and then serve with traditional ancho sauce or with a sweet vinegar sauce.

Cheese & Corn

The latest crossover menu hit is Mexican Street Corn, which is delighting consumers and restaurant managers. Simply roast corn-on-the-cob and serve sprinkled with a Hispanic-style cheese, cilantro and chili powder.

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