

SPECIALTY CHEESE

Unique Varieties & Styles a Boon to Foodservice Operators



California is the nation's leading milk producer and the second-largest producer of cheese – it's home to more than 50 cheesemakers who produce 250 varieties and styles of cow's milk cheeses that carry the Real California Milk seal. These cheeses vary in style, flavor and aging – they range from soft to hard, can be spiced and flavored, washed rind and include artisan, American, European, Hispanic-style and Middle Eastern varieties.

When it comes to cheese, American consumers want authenticity, bold flavor, snack sophistication, information to-go, freshness, tradition and performance. Foodservice operators are building on these opportunities to offer more menu choices with cheese, and also taking advantage of consumer desire for more ethnic and adventurous meal options by serving dishes featuring Real California specialty cheeses.

SPECIALTY CHEESE FACTS

Of the 250 varieties and styles of cow's milk cheese produced in California, more than 100 are spiced and flavored varieties.

Examples of the most popular Real California specialty cheeses include: Feta, Blue, Burrata, Gouda, Asiago, Mediterranean String Cheese and Ackawi.

The Real California Milk seal ensures that the cheese was made using 100% California milk from California's more than 1,300 dairy farm families.



STORAGE & HANDLING

When purchasing cheese, make sure the package is properly and tightly wrapped and sealed, and that the cheese inside looks appealing. Keep cheeses in the refrigerator until needed. Once opened, follow these simple guidelines for storing cheese:

- Fresh cheeses can last for a few weeks if properly stored; if you detect mold on a fresh cheese, discard it.
- Soft-ripened cheese will keep for up to several weeks if properly stored. If you plan to use a soft-ripened cheese within a few days, store it in the refrigerator in its original plastic wrap.
- Semi-hard and hard cheeses can remain enjoyable for four to eight weeks if properly stored. If they're not going to be used in a few days, re-wrap the cheese in parchment or wax paper, which allows the cheese to breathe. Then store the cheese in a covered plastic container or a resealable-type food storage bag and open it a few times a week to let in fresh air.
- Very hard cheeses (typically used for grating) are much lower in moisture than other cheeses and will keep for months stored in the same way as semi-hard cheeses.



FOODSERVICE APPLICATIONS

Back-of-the-House

Specialty cheeses bring richness, interest, and craveability to any foodservice daypart. For example, when a menu calls for grated Parmesan, try branching out to other hard California cheeses like aged Gouda, Asiago or Dry Jack. From pastas to pizzas, it's an easy way to bring interest to the menu and the plate.

A best practice is to add cheese as the last ingredient in a sauce or soup and heat until melted. Avoid heating at too high a temperature or the cheese may become rubbery or stringy. Also, minimize stirring, which can cause the cheese to become lumpy. Blue and pungent cheeses should be added sparingly to recipes since they tend to melt quickly and burn easily. In baking, chill cheese before grating and adding to pastry dough.

Most diners enjoy some type of cheese in or on their salad. Expand their options by using bold, distinctive cheeses such as Feta and Pepper Jack. Use flavor-forward cheeses to kick up the flavor, richness, and indulgence factors.

Front-of-the-House

Patrons enjoy sharing so why not offer them a cheese course, which is appearing on restaurant menus as both an appetizer and dessert. With their intoxicatingly rich, and complex flavor, Real California cheese plates can create a memorable experience with Blue, Teleme, Burrata and many other varieties mixed in charcuterie meats, artisan honey, chutney or toasted nuts.

WHAT'S TRENDING

Customers Know Best

Hot and spicy flavors dominate trend forecasts for flavored cheeses such as hot pepper, garlic, habanero and pesto. Operators should look for new globally-inspired spice blends to join the mix including Latin American, Middle Eastern, Southeast Asian and Mediterranean.

Burrata in a Growth Spurt

Burrata has broken out on burger menus, such as the Burrata Burger with smoked pancetta and caramelized onions. Other burgers feature a version accompanied by Portobello mushrooms, basil-almond pesto, baby arugula and heirloom tomatoes. Chefs are taking the classic heirloom tomato and Burrata salads and dressing them up with prosciutto, arugula and balsamic vinegar. Following on the popularity of Avocado toast, add heirloom tomato and Burrata toast to your menu.

Hispanic-Style Cheeses Sizzle

The cuisines of Mexico, Central America and South America are on trend, and California dairy products from these regions have a lot of appeal with American consumers. Loaded fries and potato chips as starters are popular, so consider adding an ethnic slant by way of Hispanic-style cheeses. Substituting Hispanic-style dairy products in traditional salads is one way to spice up a classic Caesar salad with Cotija instead of Parmesan.

© California Milk Advisory Board. An Instrumentality of the California Department of Food and Agriculture.



For more information about CMAB Foodservice:
209.883.6455 (MILK) | businessdevelopment@cmab.net | www.RealCaliforniaMilk.com/Foodservice