



Say Cheese!

Artisanal cheeses made the old-fashioned way
here in the Valley are becoming famous
the world over

By Jorge S. Arango

Photographed by
Michael Polito

"It's the most rebellious thing I could have chosen to do," says Beatrice Berle. "It's a huge political movement." What, you might ask, is she talking about? Attending an antiwar demonstration in Washington? Circulating a petition calling for the legalization of marijuana? Joining the Taliban?

No. Berle is referring to goat farming. And it is indeed part of a revolution of ever-increasing proportions in this country. Fed up with *E. coli* and bird flu scares, artificial additives like bovine growth hormone and foods whose flavor has been hybridized or bred right out of them, Americans are craving real, unadulterated food. And in the Hudson Valley, no industry better reflects the progress of that movement than cheese making. The region is becoming famous for its artisanal cheeses, made the old-fashioned way — that is, from milk that comes from livestock (goats, cows, sheep) fed on hay and grains grown on the farm where they live.

It's a concept known in wine-making as *terroir*, which refers to the specific character imparted to a wine (or, in this case, a cheese) by the particular local landscape and microclimate in which it is produced. Even if they were to use the exact same

recipe, a cheese made on Berle's 600-acre farm in Hoosick, Rensselaer County, will not taste like an identically produced cheese at, say, Sprout Creek Farm in Poughkeepsie. The reason is that the source material for the cheese — the grasses fed to the livestock that produces the milk from which the cheese is made — will have different qualities

depending on how the soils were built up over the years, what fertilizer was used, how much rain fell, how cool or warm the nights were, and so on. "The goal," says Berle, "is to have as little nutrients leave the farm as possible." Everything is part of a self-sustaining system, where the key is maintaining a balance.

It was arguably Coach Farm in Galatinville, Columbia County — which was established in 1984 — that pioneered the Hudson Valley artisanal cheese movement. Since then, many other farms have followed suit, with their operations varying in scale. Today, the area's cheeses are world-renowned, consistently winning awards at competitions. Here, in alphabetical order, are the farms in our region that make the tastiest goat, sheep, and cow milk cheeses. ▶▶

Shot on location
at Valley Restaurant
at The Garrison

Styling by
Executive Chef
Jeff Raider



Berle Farm

HOOSICK, RENSSELAER COUNTY

Beatrice Berle started producing goat cheeses in 1996, using the milk of 40 Saanen goats raised on her 600 acres. The types of cheeses available at any one time varies because, she says, "the milk changes throughout the year." Berle and partner Jim Buckley grow all their own grains and hay, even what's used for the animals' bedding. The farm's main goal is to make enough cheese to support the local community, so availability is limited. Her cheeses are Aurora Certified Organic, a designation accredited by the USDA. (It prohibits the use of all synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, all antibiotics, genetic engineering, irradiation, and sewage sludge in production. Animals must also have access to the outdoors and be fed 100 percent organic feed that contains no animal by-products or hormones.)

On their cheese plate: St. Paulin (a raw-milk washed-rind cheese), Craig Mahaol (a raw-milk Scottish style, similar to cheddar), English Tradition (a delicious raw-milk semi-soft cheese that tastes like a Doux de Montagne), an herbed farmer's cheese, a spreadable Crowdie (tart and fresh-tasting), and a soft ripened cheese (made around the holidays).

Coach Farm

PINE PLAINS, DUTCHESS COUNTY

Lillian and Miles Cahn, who owned the small leather factory that made it big in the 1980s with the Coach bag, bought an abandoned farm as a weekend retreat in 1983. Already in their 60s, they decided to get a few goats, hoping to produce just enough cheese for city restaurants and farmers' markets to pay their property taxes. In his book, *The Perils and Pleasures of Domesticating Goat Cheese*, Miles Cahn writes that if he had to choose one word to describe that decision, "it would have to be NAÏVETE, spelled out in big capital letters." Eventually, they sold Coach Leatherwear to the Sara Lee Corporation, moved to the farm, and brought a cheese maker from France to teach them how to make artisanal cheese. The herd now numbers more than 1,000 Alpine goats. From their pasteurized milk, Coach produces about 20 varieties of cheese (as well as drinkable yogurt) that are available all over the country.

On their cheese plate: A prolific variety that includes fresh cheeses like The Log (a classic Montrachet-like chèvre available plain or rolled in black pepper, herbs or dill), as well as aged varieties with edible rinds like the green peppercorn-studded Cone, a caraway round, and even grating sticks. There are also reduced-fat versions of some of the fresh cheeses. But the newest and most indulgent is a Triple Cream cheese produced in limited quantities that is as buttery and sinful as a French St. André.

Gaga for goat cheese: Coach Farms wide variety (opposite) includes both fresh and aged selections

Consider these facts the next time you're savoring your favorite cheese:

It takes 10 pounds — or five quarts — of milk to make one pound of cheese.

Most cheeses come from the milk of cows, goats, or sheep. The most popular is cow's milk: its varied fat content allows it to be made into over 300 varieties of cheese in the U.S. alone.

Known for its white color, goat's milk cheese has a tangy flavor when fresh, and an earthier note when aged. It is the most easily digestible of the three milks.

Less well known in this country, sheep's milk cheeses have a nutty, earthy flavor.

The process of making cheese starts when the solids in the milk (called curds) are separated from the liquid (whey). The cheese's consistency depends on how much whey the cheese maker drains from the curds. Cottage cheese, for example, contains a fair amount of whey; Parmesan has very little.

Smile! Eating cheese after meals or as a snack has been shown to reduce tooth decay.

What makes blue cheese blue? *Penicillium Roqueforti*, a "good" mold derived from the penicillin used to fight infections.

Eating cheese made with raw, or unpasteurized, milk is perfectly safe as long as it has been aged for at least 60 days.

If you're starting to crave a plate of Stilton or Brie, you're probably a turophile — a person who loves cheese.

Many Valley-made cheeses are available in local specialty stores. If you can't find what you want, call the farm for the store nearest you. Also check out www.nycheese.org.

Berle Farm 518-686-3249; Honest Weight Food Co-op (Albany); depending on the time of year, also at Organic Connections (Westchester) and Hawthorne Valley Farm (Columbia); by mail order, and on site.

Coach Farm 518-398-5325, www.coachfarm.com; Widely available, including Adam's Fairacre Farms (Dutchess, Orange, Ulster), Whole Foods and Food Emporium (Westchester), and many small markets throughout the Valley.

Hawthorne Valley Farm 518-672-7500, www.hawthornevalleyfarm.com; New York City Green Market in Union Square and at the on-site Hawthorne Valley Farm store. Occasionally by mail order.

Lynnhaven 845-744-6089, www.lynnhavenubians.com; Farmer's markets in Nyack (Rockland), New York City, occasionally Kingston and Saugerties (Ulster); by mail order and on site by appointment. The Web site is geared toward selling the livestock, not the cheese.

Old Chatham Sheepherding Company 888-SHEEP-60 or 518-794-7733, www.blacksheepcheese.com; Honest Weight Food Co-op (Albany), Adam's Fairacre Farm (Dutchess, Orange, Ulster), Hawthorne Valley Farm and Old Chatham Country Store (Columbia), Mother Earth stores (Dutchess, Ulster), by mail order and on site.

Sprout Creek Farm 845-485-9885, www.sproutcreekfarm.org; Adams Fairacre Farms (Dutchess, Orange, Ulster), The Cheese Plate (Ulster), Honest Weight Food Co-op (Albany) and farm markets in Cold Spring, (Putnam), Rhinebeck (Dutchess), and Poughkeepsie; by mail order and on site.

Cheese It!

Where to Buy



Hawthorne Valley Farm

GHENT, COLUMBIA COUNTY

Truth be told, this was the real pioneer of artisanal cheese-making in the Valley, having started around 1979. But Hawthorne Valley is a conscientiously smaller proposition, with a deliberately lower profile than Coach. Its operation is based on the tenets of biodynamic agriculture, a "spiritual science" that arose around 1928. All its products are "Demeter-Certified Biodynamic" (similar to the Aurora certification, but emphasizing working in harmony with the earth as a whole, trying to maintain a balance between the farmer and the larger universe). Its 60-odd dairy cows, grazing over 400 acres, produce milk that is made into many cheeses.

On their cheese plate: Various raw-milk varieties, including Alpine (a rinded Swiss), cheddar (nicely sharp) and Edamer (like a Gouda), as well as pasteurized varieties such as Quark (similar to sour cream) and ricotta.

Cheese with a conscience: Hawthorne Valley's selections (left) are made in balance with nature

PLATTER (PHOTO LEFT)
COURTESY OF PIER ONE, POUGHKEEPSIE



Lynnhaven

PINE BUSH, ULSTER COUNTY

Lynn Fleming raised Thoroughbred horses for years before her employer decided in 1989 to raise goats instead. Initially, she recalls, "I said no way. I detested goats." But once she started doing it, "I absolutely fell in love." Today, Fleming raises goats mainly to show and sell. But last January she got her cheese-making license, and customers have responded to her cheeses enthusiastically. "I control everything from the birth of the goat to the cheese," she says. "The trick is having the milk as fresh as possible."

On their cheese plate: a mild feta and a classic soft goat cheese that is fresh-tasting on its own, but serves as a foil for other treatments — rolled into bocconcini and marinated in garlic, herbs and sun-dried tomatoes (rich and full-bodied from the marinade, this one is the best); a spreadable cheese with roasted red peppers and pesto (good on crackers and in sandwiches); and a spreadable honey-orange-walnut cheese (a little odd, but good on a toasted bagel).

Above: Lynnhaven's goat cheeses come dressed up with red peppers, herbs, and other seasonings

Tired of dessert? Perish the thought! But cheese also makes a fine ending to a meal — and who's to say you can't have both? The following are some Valley restaurants that serve locally made cheeses.

Depuy Canal House High Falls (Ulster), 845-687-7700; www.depuycanalhouse.net. Also includes a cheese course in their seven-course meal.

Freelance Cafe & Wine Bar Piermont (Rockland) 845-365-3250; www.xaviars.com

The French Corner Stone Ridge (Ulster) 845-687-0810; www.frcorner.com

Le Chambord Hopewell Junction (Dutchess) 845-221-1941; www.lechambord.com

New World Home Cooking Saugerties (Ulster) 845-246-0900; www.newworldhomecooking.com Offers a special cheese menu.

Old Drovers Inn Dover Plains (Dutchess) 845-832-9311; www.olddroversinn.com

Restaurant X & Bully Boy Bar Congers (Rockland) 845-268-6555; www.xaviars.com. Offers a broad selection of cheeses, including local varieties.

Terrapin, Rhinebeck (Dutchess), 845-876-3330; www.terrapinrestaurant.com. Cheese plate offered seasonally.

Xaviar's at Piermont Piermont (Rockland) 845-359-7007; www.xaviars.com

The Culinary Institute of America Hyde Park (Dutchess) 845-471-6608; www.ciachef.edu

Both the American Bounty and Escoffier restaurants offer cheese plates.

Valley Restaurant at the Garrison Garrison (Putnam) 845-424-2339; www.thegarrison.com

Now
Serving

Old Chatham Shepherding Company

OLD CHATHAM, COLUMBIA COUNTY

In 1994, Tom Clark had two jobs: investment firm president, and milkman. But this unusual career combination led to one of the most successful cheese operations in the Hudson Valley. Since 1993 — when Clark and his wife, Nancy, sold milk from 150 sheep to a local creamery — Old Chatham Shepherding

Company has become the largest sheep dairy in America and an award-winning, nationally recognized brand name. The picture-perfect 600-acre farm stocks some 1,200 East Friesian cross-bred sheep who graze on "organically managed" pastures. Their milk is pasteurized and made into many exquisite varieties of cheese, some

(like the popular Hudson Valley Camembert) mixed with cow's milk — free of bovine growth hormone — from a neighboring farm.

On their cheese plate: Hudson Valley Camembert (creamy and rich as any from Normandy), Ewe's Blue (outstanding Roquefort-style cheese, though it's less salty and more mellow), Peppered Shepherd (with a slightly flaky, triple-cream-cheese-like texture flecked with freshly ground black pepper), ricotta (part cow's milk) and feta.

Right: Prize-winning wedges from Old Chatham Shepherding Company picture-perfect farm



Sprout Creek Farm

POUGHKEEPSIE, DUTCHESS COUNTY

This farm was started in 1990 by two nuns from the Religious of the Sacred Heart, Sr. Margo Morris and Sr. Sue Rogers, who had created and run a similar operation in Connecticut. Their motives were, and still are, less financial than educational. Concerned about the narrow worldview and shallow values of their students, they

began an outreach program to teach kids responsibility, commitment, and social conscience through the experience of farming.

Today, over 5,000 school children visit Sprout Creek each year, some from as far away as San Francisco.

Money from the creamery and shop is plowed right back into the farm and its programs. One of the miracles of Sprout Creek is that it also makes excellent cheese

from both cow and goat milk, and all the milk is produced using sustainable farming methods.

On their cheese plate: Barat (a firm, mellow cow's milk cheese named for Sacred Heart founder Madeleine Sophie Barat), Ouray (a popular cow's milk cheese with a sharp bite and a pleasantly bitter finish), Toussaint (cow's milk, with a balanced flavor, at once buttery, nutty and sharp). There is also ricotta, a spreadable cow's milk cheese, and Sophie (an aged goat). To come: Pandora, a washed-rind goat and cow's milk blend. ■

Educational and edible: Schoolkids tend the cows that produce the milk for Sprout Creek's cheeses (left)

