

# GOOD CHEESE

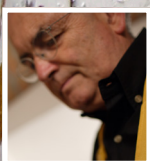


## CUTTING EDGE

Sharp accessories  
and nifty gifts

## HARD TO BEAT?

From Parmesan to Pecorino,  
six Italian classics go  
head-to-head with their  
closest British rivals



## THE OUTER LIMITS

How Italy's Carlo Fiore  
created a new niche for  
ultra-aged cheeses



## SHERIDANS

The Irish champion  
cheesemongers who  
give supermarkets  
a good name



Jørn Hafslund, pictured with his champion cheese Fanaost, didn't have to stray far from home to grasp last year's World Cheese Awards trophy (below)

# Heaven scent

Success smells doubly sweet for Ostegården's Jørn Hafslund. His gouda-style Fanaost not only topped the 2018 World Cheese Awards but the win brought son Magnus back into the family dairy, securing it for the next generation, as the pair told ELYSE GLICKMAN.

PA/Scanpix

**FROM HUMBLE ORIGINS TO WORLD-BEATER**, the story of Fanaost could read like a crowd-pleasing sports movie if its subject were an athlete rather than an exquisite gouda-style cheese.

Farmer Jørn Hafslund never planned for his dairy farm – at Ostegården, 22 kilometers south of Bergen – to become known for artisanal cheese production. When he started cheese-making a dozen years ago it was just a means of using up excess milk.

But many of the right conditions were in place for Fanaost to emerge as champion at the 2018 World Cheese Awards, and for the farm to develop unique expressions of camembert and brie too, plus condiments such as chilli and pear jam.

To begin with, Hafslund notes that his team of 12 cows benefit from the perfect – if hardly level – playing field. They dine on 14 different grasses growing near a rocky, wooded outcrop jutting out into the pure waters of a local fjord.

The resulting milk matures into Fanaost, a mild, round and semi-solid cheese, reminiscent

of gouda, that set itself apart with the World Cheese Awards judges in Bergen last year. Its rich, savoury flavours “really deliver a sense of place,” they noted.

“We’re very proud of the environment around the farm,” says Hafslund, but he also credits the Norwegian Red cow breed. Resistant to illness and with a good disposition, it was developed in the 1930s by crossing several breeds including Norwegian Red-and-White, Red Trondheim and the Red Polled Østland.

“I believe this makes this milk we use very special,” says Hafslund.

Fanaost competed on its own against producers from major-league nations such as France, Holland, Italy, England and Spain at the 2018 World Cheese Awards in Bergen.

The pride of Ostegården Farm was in very good company, given that there were other Norwegian producers with impressive WCA showings, including Stordalen Gardsbruk (with its SuperGold-winning brown cheese) and Tingvolløst, which won the World Champion title with its blue,

Kraftkar, in 2016.

However, with over 3,400 entries, the ascendance of Fanaost was a breath-taking and unforgettable feat, made all the more poignant with the announcement taking place on a stage that was international yet 22 kilometers from the farm.

“I was there ahead of the announcement of the Super Jury,” recalls Hafslund. “We were at the WCA to sell our cheese to cheese lovers, retailers and other attendees. I realised early on that

the competition was so incredibly fierce.” With over 3,000 cheeses competing, any kind of award would have felt like a victory. “My wife, meanwhile, went home before the results were announced because we never thought there was a chance for us to win anything.”

The moment when judges declared Fanaost the winner was understandably overwhelming for Hafslund, as would be the attention his farm and his cheeses would receive in the days and weeks after the announcement.

Although son Magnus, 26, was in the military and at NATO training in Trondheim at the time of the competition, the life-changing word on Fanaost's victory hit him just as powerfully.

“I first read the news on *Verdens Gang*, Norway's largest newspaper, and then received phone messages from my friends,” Magnus says.

“Up until that moment, I wasn't quite sure if I was going to be a cheese-farmer at all.

“However, the realisation struck like lightning from clear skies, that I was going to join the







Magnus Hafslund, pictured with the farm's Norwegian Red cows. News of the WCA win persuaded him to leave the military and throw himself wholeheartedly into the family dairy.



Jan Inge Wiig

family farm. It has ended up being an incredibly positive experience for me.

"It will be exciting to eventually develop my own cheeses. I haven't quite figured out what they're going to be, but I've definitely started to think about it."

Life has changed for the family on some levels but not all. There's a firm commitment to keeping the farm running like clockwork and not losing sight of the domestic market before getting excited about export opportunities.

While major award-winners switch focus to expanding their range of products, the family is more dedicated to maintaining and improving the Fanaost, brie and camembert variants they spent time developing prior to the win.

Hafslund adds that once consistent production of the three existing cheeses is ensured, they will be in a place to consider product development again.

"Everyday life is characterized by the same routines," he says with humility. "We still get up at 5.50 in the morning to milk our cows.

For me personally, the big change is probably just that there is more of everything. More cheese, more email, more milk, more production, and more staff."

Magnus concurs, saying:

“We can't afford to get sloppy. There's a requirement now to keep quality as high as the cheese that won.”

"There is a lot in everyday life that is routine, as I now have a great deal of responsibility for the farm's business administration and keeping track of orders here and abroad.

"But even with the focus

day-to-day operations require, some things are very different. For example, a Japanese television crew visited our farm, and we realised we would be appearing on a children's educational programme that would be seen by 11 million viewers."

Rather than allow success to spoil him, the farm's patriarch channels the positive energy into finding a greater audience for Fanaost, albeit in a disciplined, grass-roots kind of way.

While the popularity of Fanaost within Norway has led to bigger domestic sales, it took last year's win to get the family thinking about the ways to sell in other countries.

Even with that, however, Hafslund says he wants to take things slowly, ensuring they can keep up with demand while maintaining quality.

Continued affiliation with the Norwegian Farm Cheese Association and its network of artisan producers will, he adds, help Ostegården grow business on its own terms as well as enabling

it to support the efforts of other small Norwegian cheese makers.

He appreciates the ongoing opportunity to brainstorm with other producers whenever a technical or business challenge arises. In effect, he sees himself and Ostegården as part of Team Norway when it comes to the long game.

"It's a change for us to know demand is so good," Hafslund continues, pointing to the fact that Fanaost sold out in UK food shops in the afterglow of the win. "This means we can scale up and think bigger in appropriate ways without taking too much of a risk.

"It's like I've become a celebrity in the cheese universe, and if I travel around to sell my cheese, the stores know who I am.

"We can't afford to get sloppy, and there is a completely different requirement now to keep the quality of cheese as high as the one that won.

"But we don't have performance anxiety — we're just very proud."

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# Ready and waiting

A tricky international trading climate is making exports challenging for US artisan producers. But as ELYSE GLICKMAN reports, the promise of new craft cheeses, unconstrained by tradition – or PDO rules – is an intriguing prospect for European buyers when trade opens up.

**THE UNITED STATES** has long been known as a “great melting pot”, and that’s more true than ever as US consumers and artisan food producers become increasingly global in their outlook.

This, in turn, has inspired a new generation of American cheese producers from coast to coast to find creative ways to fuse Old World techniques with the geographical attributes of their regions.

What ends up being produced – be it rooted in Swiss, Dutch, Italian, French, English or Spanish recipes – is unmistakably American in all the right ways.

At the 2018 World Cheese Awards (WCAs), the US had a banner year, with its artisan cheesemakers taking home 89 awards: eight Super Golds, 25 Golds, 24 Silvers and 32 Bronzes.

While the bloomy, bark-wrapped Harbison, from Cellars At Jasper Hill in Vermont, was named the Best American Cheese, others recognized by the judges in Bergen included Montchevre

Kiss My Ash from Saputo Cheese USA in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (Super Gold), Midnight Moon from Cypress Grove in Arcata, California (Super Gold) and the Muuna Classic Plain cottage cheese from Muuna in New York (Gold).

The collective success of US producers was no small feat considering the inherent challenges of competing with local cheesemakers in Europe, on their own turf, without the same level of

support and subsidies that some European governments provide.

However, under the direction of the US Dairy Export Council (USDEC), the USA Cheese Guild is currently pushing to get producers past those challenges and dispel prevailing myths about American cheese as a singular, bland, and predominantly industrial product.

The US may be the world’s largest cheese producer and exporter but the Guild is educating industry and

cheese lovers about the diversity of the US cheese landscape.

Prime examples are the Guild’s sponsorship of this year’s Best USA Cows’ Milk Cheese trophy at the WCAs, and its ongoing financial and marketing support for producers, helping them participate in trade shows and international competitions.

According to Angélique Hollister, executive director of the USA Cheese Guild, the current trading environment is limiting access to export opportunities, so the UK and other countries are missing out on what American artisanal producers have to offer.

However, she argues that if those barriers can be overcome, the possibilities for American cheesemakers and enthusiasts from around the globe are endless.

Once regulatory access permits, she says, the Guild will move forward to promote US cheeses in Britain and Europe as it already does via culinary education and retail



Angélique Hollister, USA Cheese Guild

“Cheeses that are original to the US give consumers something they can’t find anywhere else”







Matthew Brichford of Jacobs & Brichford: "I've won seven different awards at the WCAs and that exposure definitely gets you noticed"

promotions in the Middle East, North Asia and Latin America.

"They have really supported our participation in the WCAs, because they're going to pay our shipping this year," says Matthew Brichford, who owns and operates Jacobs & Brichford Farmstead Cheese in southeastern Indiana with wife Leslie Jacobs.

"Even if winning the awards means being sold in just a few shops overseas, and even if we're not dealing with a whole lot of volume, opportunities to compete [in events like the WCAs] certainly lend prestige to our brand and help with advertising and marketing."

Hollister suggests her nation's long history as a melting pot of backgrounds and cultures is one of the selling points for artisanal cheese. Producers have plenty of experience but they're not bound by tradition, leaving them free to create new cheeses that can only be found in the USA.

For the European market in particular, she says, US cheeses allow consumers to experience a fresh twist on a classic. "Whether that comes from rubbing local lavender, or soaking curds in a local stout, cheeses that are original to the US give consumers something they can't find anywhere else."

Lydia Burns, who specialises in

sourcing speciality food products for retailers and restaurants, sees a number of export challenges faced by small US cheese producers, even as they are winning major awards on the international stage.

In addition to distribution costs, which inevitably drive up the retail price of US cheeses abroad, and possible tariffs on the horizon, she says many European producers have the advantage of being generations-old family businesses. Many US producers, in contrast, are just getting off the ground.

"When you're starting a farm [for cheese production] from scratch, the price of your cheese will be higher, based on what the producers are paying for their land, their animals – especially with sheep and goats – and other costs," she says.

"Another advantage European producers have in keeping prices down is access to co-ops, where those making cheeses in the same area can share ageing facilities communally and keep prices lower."

At Zingerman's Creamery near Ann Arbor, Michigan, retail operations manager Tessie Ives-Wilson says the small scale of many US cheesemakers and the costs of

keeping cheese in good condition during transport make it hard for them to compete against classic European-style cheeses on their home turf. But she adds: "The one category I feel is most poised for success in the European market is that of 'American Originals.'"

"Cheeses like Dry Jack, Teleme, and Brick that don't have regional recipes from Europe really represent the innovation and experimentation that US cheesemakers are currently engaged in."

Despite the hurdles, several American cheese-producing pioneers are making inroads into export. Oregon's Rogue Creamery, which has been successfully exporting Rogue River Blue, Smokey Blue, Caveman Blue, and Oregon Blue Cheese since 2007, shows how products with a distinctively New World influence and style can win over fans internationally.

"All these cheeses are distinct but share characteristics in texture, with a fudgy, creamy, buttery mouthfeel and clean notes of sweet cream and pepper, finished with a hint of tang on the palate," says David Gremmels, the president and



## TEN AMERICAN CHEESES TO TRACK DOWN

### Brinza Feta

Karoun Dairies, California  
A white, slightly grainy cows' milk feta.

### Griffin

Sweet Grass Dairy, Georgia  
Made in the style of French farmhouse cheese, but localised by soaking curds in Terminus Porter, a Georgia stout.



### Ameribella

Jacobs & Brichford Cheese, Indiana  
Raw, semi-soft,, inspired by the washed rind cheeses of Northern Italy.

### Everton

Jacobs & Brichford Cheese, Indiana  
Alpine-style, with a firm texture, and savoury-sweet flavour that gets sharper with age.



### Rogue River Blue

Rogue Creamery, Oregon  
A blue made using Basque and Provençal techniques, between the autumn equinox and winter solstice, from Brown Swiss and Holstein cows' milk.

### Rogue Smokey Blue

Rogue Creamery, Oregon  
A blue cheese gently and slowly cold-smoked over shells from Oregon. Hazelnuts infuse it with an added layer of flavour and terroir

### Barely Buzzed

Beehive Cheese, Utah  
Cheddar hand-rubbed with espresso.

### Cabot Clothbound cheddar

Jasper Hill Farm, Vermont  
Lard-coated and cloth-bound, Cabot is ripened in a specially calibrated vault.

### il Giardino Asiago Vecchio

Saputo Specialty Cheese, Wisconsin  
Made in the style of a traditional Italian Asiago cheese, but aged for longer.



### Whole milk feta

Maplebrook Farm, Vermont  
Crafted in small batches from 100% Vermont cows' milk, and available in block-style or crumbled.





David Gremmels of Rogue Creamery, whose wins at the World Cheese Awards helped open up exports of US artisan cheese

cheesemaker at Rogue Creamery.

Even with the inherent appeal of Rogue Creamery's products for foreign markets, it took a mix of wins in the WCS and a few other measures to carve out a trail from Oregon to shops in the UK – one that could also help future WCA winners and other independent cheesemakers.

In 2003, says Gremmels, Rogue River Blue was awarded best American Cheese, Best Blue in the World and Reserve Champion overall. That created demand in Europe for Rogue River Blue, but it took nearly four years before the USDA came up with a health certificate to export raw milk cheese into the EU.

"That said, the standards for creating organic cheeses like ours are strict and present real hurdles in exporting," Gremmels adds.

"The importer and distributor must be registered with the USDA TRACES program. There are few importers and distributors worldwide who are willing to add this level of scrutiny for keeping Organic Cheeses segregated from conventional cheeses.

"This is a high bar worth getting registered for."

At Jacobs & Brichford Farmstead Cheese, Leslie Jacobs

and Matthew Brichford have been playing the long game, with the support of USDEC, to find export markets for their portfolio, which Brichford describes as "European-style cheeses with a definitive New World twist".

Since the family made contact with USDEC at an American Cheese Society conference some years back, they have been impressed with its efforts to build overseas markets for American cheeses. "I've won seven different awards at the World Cheese Awards, and that exposure definitely gets you noticed," Brichford says in a Midwestern, matter-of-fact way.

"While we haven't been contacted by exporters other than USDEC, we are very much amenable to working with the right one to get our cheeses into new markets.

"While most of our cheeses probably travel well, I am playing around with format of our JQ – a mold-ripened thing that falls between a brie and a camembert, and won a Silver at the WCAs a couple of years ago – to give it a little more shelf life should the opportunity to export come around."

"There's always room in the

market for something new, for a little adventure, and I think that's where American cheeses can fill a gap," says Maize Jacobs-Brichford, who assists her family in marketing the cheese portfolio. She reiterates the family enterprise is committed to slow, steady and smart growth.

"Basically, we riff on European styles of cheeses, and nobody else in America is necessarily doing it the way we do it."

Free of any PDO ties to a precise European recipe, they can be "a little more playful" and create something really original.

"Our Ameribella, for example, may be based on the northern Italian Taleggio style, but it's not going to taste exactly like it. Our Everton is not going to duplicate the Alpine styles that it's based on.

"This is intentional, as we want cheese lovers to enjoy our playful experiments, resulting in something fresh and different."

The USA Cheese Guild's Hollister says innovation presents the biggest opportunity for US cheesemakers. By pushing traditional limits, she says, they can come up with "new and elegant flavour combinations and presentations of cheeses that can't

be found anywhere else".

The Guild, she adds, is helping the world see that quality cheeses are not geography-specific or country-dependent – for example, by promoting the fact that all 50 US states now produce award-winning cheeses.

Lydia Burns, who previously served as senior procurement manager for retailer Pastoral Artisan Cheese Bread & Wine in Chicago, concurs with Hollister and others that while American producers can't yet compete with Europeans for tradition and history, it's potentially exciting that they are less restricted by Protected Designation of Origin rules.

"As a European consumer, if you're looking for a cheese that you've never experienced before, you'll realize that there's a lot of that happening in America," Burns says.

While there is innovation among Europe's cheesemakers, she says, their US counterparts, scattered across a vast country, are each developing products with a specific identity and terroir. "A craft cheddar from Vermont or Wisconsin will be very different from a cheddar made in the UK."

[uscheeseguild.org](http://uscheeseguild.org)