

Cato Corner Farm

Cato Corner Farm LLC is a partnership between Elizabeth MacAlister and her son, Mark Gillman. Elizabeth has owned the farm in Colchester, Conn., for 31 years and began milking Jersey cows as a source of milk for her aged, raw milk cheese 13 years ago. Cato Corner became an All-Jersey® producer-distributor in June 2008.



Mark and Elizabeth are self-described “cheese nuts with a fair amount of knowledge about cheese.”

More than a dozen varieties of cheese comprise the product line at Cato Corner, including Bloomsday, Bridgid’s Abbey, Dairyere, Despearado, Drunken Hooligan, Drunk Monk, Dutch Farmstead, Molto Vivace, Vivace, Vivace Bambino, Wise Womanchego, Womanschego and Hooligan, the signature “stinky” cheese that many food lovers consider to be the best of the bunch.

Cato Corner cheeses have a wide distribution, being sold in retail outlets across New England and several other states across the country. They are offered at farmer’s markets in New York City, including the world-famous Union Square Greenmarket, the Grand Army Plaza Greenmarket and the Ft. Greene Artisan and Farmer’s Market, and on the menu at fine restaurants across the city. Customers can also pick up their favorite flavors at a store on the farm that is open on weekends.

Elizabeth added cheese making to her resume as a means for the small, grass-based farm to survive. She took a technical course on cheese making at California Polytechnic State University and a workshop with a Belgian cheese master and then began experimenting on her own.

Cheese making has allowed the business to go far beyond survival. It has given the MacAlisters the chance to work alongside family in a thriving occupation. Mark quit his job as a seventh-grade English teacher in 1999 to join the business full time. Today he makes most of the cheese and oversees its aging while Elizabeth cares for the cows.

The dairy milks 35-45 cows year-round and uses all of its milk in the production of cheese, which equates to 55,000 lbs. of cheese each year. Cheese is made by hand and then aged in an underground cave on the farm. All rinds are natural and have natural surface molds that are integral to developing the full flavor of the cheese.

Generally, firmer-textured cheeses are made in the summer months and creamier cheeses in the winter months. Some cheeses, like Dutch Farmstead and Bridgid's Abbey, are produced year-round, with slight seasonal variations in taste and consistency.

Mark and Elizabeth appreciate the Queen of Quality logo® because it helps them educate consumers about the benefits of their product.

“We love to talk to customers about milk quality, and the Queen of Quality® logo helps to open up this dialogue,” they noted.

Product quality is also apparent in the numerous awards Cato Corner cheeses have won. In 2003, Dutch Farmstead was named one of the top 10 American raw milk cheeses by the Slow Food organization. Two years later, *Saveur* magazine named it one of its 50 favorite American cheeses. The Gallo Family Vineyards awarded its “Never Stop Growing” distinction to Cato Corner Farm in 2006 and also gave a “Gold Medal Award” to Hooligan.

More recently, Dairyere earned third place in its class at the American Cheese Society contest in August and Black Ledge Blue was named outstanding dairy product at the Connecticut Specialty Food Association product competition in February.