

Manwaring Cheese

It would appear that all roads in Rigby, Idaho, led to cheese for Dale Mortimer and Blake Manwaring. Mortimer, a second generation devout Jersey breeder, and Manwaring, a second generation cheese maker, have always had a similar interest in the dairy industry but it was not until the summer of 2011 that the pair realized just how much they had in common.

Though the two families had been associated for years, the partnership was formed when Manwaring approached Mortimer about using his herd of Jerseys as the sole milk provider for the cheese plant he was developing. Mortimer had been tossing around the idea of developing a niche market to take advantage of the high-quality Jersey milk, so he not only accepted Manwaring's idea, he proposed they become partners.

The cheese facility is located three miles from Mortimer's Jersey herd. He currently milks a herd of 55 Registered Jerseys and has a rolling herd average of 14,000 pounds milk with a 4.9% fat test and a 3.8% protein test. While the cheese plant operates a part-time status, turning out products twice a week, Mortimer only sends about 10% of his total milk to the process, the rest goes to a component marketing order. Having been in the value-added product business for some time, Manwaring knew exactly what type of cheese plant he wanted to build. The result was a very unique and consumer friendly building that frequently plays host to local groups of students and interested consumers.

While Manwaring brought expert cheese skills to the table, Mortimer suggested they jump in with both feet and not only promote the unique cheeses being produced, but the unique taste that Jersey milk products hold over their counterparts. The duo immediately became Queen of Quality® producers, showcasing the label not only on their products and marketing, but throughout the cheese plant.

“I knew people would be able to tell how much better the cheese was,” said Mortimer of their decision to use the Queen of Quality® label. “I wanted to highlight the difference not only in the quality of our products, but in the quality of the cow delivering the product.”

Mortimer knew that the overall value of All Jersey milk was much more than that of non-Jersey milk and wanted to promote that to their customers.

“I wanted people to identify with our cheese,” he said. “One people try it, they become attached to it.”

Manwaring Cheese currently has eight different varieties being sold in their online store, www.manwaringcheese.com, and in select local retail outlets and markets. People throughout the country can log on and purchase Caraway, Dill, Green Onion, Horseradish Bacon, Jalapeno, Smoked Chipotle, Tuscan Rub and Plain Cheddar Cheese, all offered in two sizes.

“Blake is always trying out different flavors, and the customers really respond to the creativity of the product,” said Mortimer, who also noted that his cheese maker partner can taste the difference from the Jersey milk, and see the difference in pounds of cheese produced.

“That is something us Jersey breeders have known for years, though,” laughed Mortimer.

That knowledge is what led to Mortimer to his interest in cheese making. He wanted to be able to determine his own prices and set the value of his products instead of having them set for him.

While Mortimer does not work at the cheese plant every day, he does have the opportunity to get feedback from his neighbors in Rigby who approach him to talk about the flavorful and unique cheeses. They are hoping that positive impression carries over to other consumers interested in specialty cheeses and judges of cheese contests as they gear up to begin competing this year.

