

= Beecher 's Handmade Cheese =

Beecher 's Handmade Cheese is an artisan cheesemaker and retail shop with locations in the Pike Place Market , Seattle , Washington and New York City 's Flatiron District . The company was founded by Kurt Beecher Dammeier in 2003 and opened in the Pike Place Market after Dammeier obtained a difficult to obtain storefront lease in the Market . Because Dammeier had never been a cheesemaker , he sought out the assistance of Brad Sinko , who helped run a family cheese @-@ making business in Oregon . A second location was opened in 2011 in the Flatiron neighborhood of Manhattan in New York City .

Unlike most artisan cheese makers , Beecher 's mainly uses pasteurized milk and operates a high @-@ volume modern production facility , with multiple farms supplying milk . When Beecher 's encountered problems in guaranteeing the standard flavor of the milks they were using to make cheese , the company bought their own herds of dairy cattle and farms to ensure control of the cheese products from beginning to end . Beecher 's uses various cheese cultures when mixing cheeses , so a cheddar cheese produced by Beecher 's may use cultures not normally intended for cheddar cheese production .

Beecher 's Pike Place Market cheese @-@ making facility includes a café , which serves grilled cheese and other items , and a retail shop , which sells both Beecher 's cheeses and others brands from local Pacific Northwest cheesemakers . The New York location is a much larger space . In addition to the production facility , café , and retail space , it also has a full @-@ service restaurant downstairs referred to as The Cellar . Beecher 's also manufactures and sells macaroni and cheese dishes ( and other frozen sides ) , which have received praise in reviews from the national news media . Dammeier and his firm 's cheeses have been featured on national television , including twice on The Martha Stewart Show and once on Oprah , with the " World 's Best " Macaroni and Cheese featured as one of Oprah 's " Favorite Things . " A cookbook by Dammeier , Pure Flavor : 125 Fresh All @-@ American Recipes From The Pacific Northwest , has been published , and incorporates recipes used to make various Beecher 's products and dishes . In addition to their various business endeavors , Beecher 's sponsors the Flagship foundation and Pure Food Kids project , an educational program to teach children in the Seattle public schools system about healthful diets .

= = Founding and history = =

Before founding Beecher 's , Dammeier had never made cheese , and had little direct knowledge of the cheese making business . His self @-@ described " passion " for cheese began during his childhood in Tacoma , Washington , where his family always kept a cheese board piled high with local cheeses . Raised in a family business involving printing and food manufacturing , he decided to open a cheese business after his family sold the printing company . He named it for his great @-@ grandfather , Beecher McKenzie . Dammeier also owns the Seattle @-@ based specialty grocer Pasta & Co. and is a major investor in Pyramid Breweries , Inc . ; other members of his family have stakes in Pyramid as well . Dammeier also founded Bennett 's Pure Food Bistro on nearby Mercer Island , and the food truck Maximus / Minimus , both of which carry many dishes prepared with Beecher 's products . In 2003 , Dammeier opened Beecher 's in Seattle 's Pike Place Market when a rare large retail location became available in the market after the nursery Molbak 's closed its Market location and moved to its current Woodinville , Washington property .

After taking a cheese making course at Washington State University , Dammeier decided he needed to hire someone to work with him as chief cheesemaker . He hired Brad Sinko , a microbiologist , who previously had managed his family cheese business of Bandon Cheese in Oregon , before it was acquired by the Tillamook County Creamery Association . According to Dammeier , the artisanal cheese market was underrepresented in Seattle and Washington , and he opened his business in part to encourage more cheese business to grow in the region . In 2000 , Washington had nine licensed cheesemakers ; this expanded to twenty @-@ eight by 2007 . Dammeier compared the growth he expects in artisan cheese to the United States ' recent growth in

sales of specialty beers :

" If you said the word ' Porter ' 20 years ago , no one in the U.S. would have had any idea you were talking about beer . Twenty years from now , people will know what a washed rind is . "

Thanks to financing from Dammeier 's other business ventures , Beecher 's had the ability to build up their operations slowly , absorbing the costs of capitalization of the business while experimenting with their cheeses , including the time to age them . " The first vat , " remarked Dammeier , " we threw away . The second vat was really good . " As their work progressed Sinko would adjust the formulas of their cheese processing , the cultures , and the enzymes involved , and increased the average aging time for their Flagship brand to 18 months . However , they only publicly claim 12 months of aging . In their first year of operation , Beecher 's had no aged product of their own to sell , instead building up an inventory of 80 @, @ 000 pounds ( 36 @, @ 000 kg ) of cheese . During that same time , their primary sales were of fresh cheese curds .

= = Milk supplies = =

After their initial founding with one milk supplier , Beecher 's production system has had to expand several times to include more suppliers . As of 2006 , Beecher 's was in the process of purchasing their own farms in Eastern Washington for additional milk production , which will also give them full control over their entire product 's creation . The principal milk supplier is Green Acres Farm in Duvall , Washington , using only hormone @-@ free and antibiotic @-@ free milk . When consistent milk production first became a problem , Beecher 's purchased a herd of 200 cows . The entire dairy herd at Green Acres Farm is owned by Beecher 's , who leases them back to the farm . For the New York production , all Holstein and Jersey milk come directly from Dutch Hollow Farms in upstate New York .

To ensure a standardized flavor for the finished cheeses , and due to there being insufficient space in their facilities for milk separating systems , Sinko said he " went and standardized the herd . " Their initial milk from Holstein cows was sweet , but lacked the fatty content and nuttiness of Jersey cow milk that was part of the product they wanted to create . They were able to eventually balance the two to their satisfaction . Dammeier has described the blend of Holstein and Jersey milk as a " 50 ? 50 mix " . From each farm , all the milk supplied to Beecher 's is from the same herd , to ensure that the flavor of each batch of milk they receive is consistent ( based on the herd 's diet and environment ) .

At times , Beecher 's has encountered challenges in maintaining this uniform standard . For example , when flooding affected one farm , the cows there produced enzymes in their milk that helped their calves to fight off bacteria , but changed the flavor of the milk .

= = Cheese and food manufacturing = =

The cheese factory is housed in a small , glass @-@ walled facility in Seattle 's Pike Place Market , on Pike Place between Stewart Street and Pine Street . The location includes a retail shop and a café that features cheese @-@ based meals . Passers @-@ by in the heavily touristed market can watch the cheese making process . Beecher 's produces over 500 @, @ 000 pounds ( 230 @, @ 000 kg ) of cheese annually . Their manufacturing facility now operates twenty @-@ four hours a day to keep up with their demand . The New York facility is significantly larger than Seattle 's and can produce over three tons of cheese a day .

Sinko admits that the modern facility with large vats of cheese and milk processing would seem to contradict the word " Handmade " in the company name . According to him , all of the cheese is monitored , processed , and prepared by hand , but simply on a larger scale than most artisanal cheesemakers . Unlike most artisan cheeses , Beecher 's is made largely with pasteurized milk . Dammeier believes that many people feel raw milk cheeses taste better due to renowned French cheeses , which were historically made of raw milk because the farms were unable to afford pasteurization . " I 've probably tasted 150 different cheeses this year , and I 'm convinced that raw milk doesn 't create more flavor , " he said , adding that his cheeses have a more consistent taste

from not using raw milk . Nevertheless , Beecher 's offers a raw milk version of their Flagship cheese . The cheeses they produce use no artificial ingredients or preservatives . Beecher 's typically manufactures up to nine different varieties of cheeses each year , including a combination of their staple brands and various seasonal varieties .

At the Beecher 's facility , their process for cheese manufacturing is multi @-@ staged . Thousands of gallons of milk are hose @-@ fed from delivery trucks into the manufacturing area , where it is heated to complete the pasteurization of the milk . The heated milk is processed into a stainless steel trough , and the temperature further increased , while the first live cheese cultures and rennet , a coagulant , are added to the developing mixture . According to Amir Rosenblatt , a cheesemaker at Beecher 's , the heating and cheese temperatures used in their cooking process are tightly controlled through the sustainable technology of steam power . " A variation of half a degree [ in the pasteurization process ] can change the flavor of the cheese , " he said . Cheesemakers use stainless steel " rakes " to then gather the milk mixture , before allowing it to settle briefly , at which point the cheese is cut repeatedly by hand until it achieves a yogurt @-@ like texture and substance . This process is repeated often , until a desired consistency is reached . The mixture is then drawn away to a new trough where most of the remaining water and whey is drained from the cheese . While the whey is continually pulled from the cheese , cheesemakers constantly separate the cheese by hand into smaller and small stacks of cheese curds , which form as the whey is removed . To complete the curding , a large amount of salt is added to cure the cheese and draw still more whey from it . The curds are finally cut into portions , filled into cheese molds , stacked on top of each other , and the remaining excess moisture is forced from the cheese with a constant 60 pounds ( 27 kg ) of pressure for at least 24 hours , before the finished cheese is stored to age . For every 10 pounds ( 10 kilograms ) of milk and whey , Beecher 's will typically create 1 pound ( 1 kilogram ) of finished cheese .

Beecher 's cheeses differ from similar cheeses in that they mix cheese growth cultures in unusual ways . For example , their signature " Flagship " cheese includes cultures typically used for non @-@ cheddar cheeses , such as Gruyère and Emmental , changing the nature , flavor , and texture of their cheddar . Flagship cheese is produced using a cheddaring process , but owing to a different taste , Beecher 's does not call this cheese cheddar . The cheese has been described as having a " sweet finish and creamy texture " unlike the tangier cheddars , owing to this being one of the cheeses they create with a mixture of different cheese cultures . After being prepared in 40 pounds ( 18 kg ) blocks and aged for approximately one year , the Flagship ? unlike cheddars ? lacks a rind , is moister , resembles butter visually , and carries a milky aroma due to being aged in plastic bags . A variant called " Flagship Reserve " is aged in cheese cloth in 18 pounds ( 8 @. 2 kg ) sizes on racks in open air , and is rubbed with butter while being turned daily . This preparation method causes the Reserve to lose up to 12 % of its initial weight by the time it is completed . The Reserve is aged for a shorter amount of time , leading to a sharper , nuttier taste and texture , according to Food & Wine Magazine . Of the 500 @, @ 000 pounds ( 230 @, @ 000 kg ) of cheese they produce annually , approximately 200 @, @ 000 pounds ( 91 @, @ 000 kg ) will be Flagship , and only 15 @, @ 000 pounds ( 6 @, @ 800 kg ) will be Flagship Reserve .

Additionally , Beecher 's is in the process of developing new types of crackers , designed to not overpower the taste of the cheese with which they are paired .

= = Retail sales and cheese shop = =

Beecher 's features a gourmet cheese shop and café in both their Pike Place Market and Flatiron facility . It is considered an anchor of the Pike Place Market , and has become a tourist attraction in its own right . During the day , crowds typically gather in the store , watching through windows as the cheesemakers prepare batches of cheese .

A portion of the cheese curds used in the manufacturing process is set aside to sell directly to visitors at the retail store . The principal cheeses created and sold by Beecher 's are their Flagship and Flagship Reserve varieties ; " Just Jack " , a form of Monterey Jack cheese ; " Blank Slate " , a type of cream cheese ; unpasteurized , raw @-@ milk versions of their Flagship cheeses , and

different cheeses seasoned and flavored with spices and herbs . Some of their seasonal varieties have included cheeses similar to Brie .

The Pike Place Market store now sells roughly thirty @-@ five other local artisan cheese brands , in addition to the various Beecher 's products . The Pike Place Market location also offers classes to the public about cheese making , cheese history , and the pairing of wine with cheese . The collection of Pacific Northwest cheeses on sale at the retail store has been described as the best in the entire region by Will O 'Donnell in Northwest Magazine . In keeping with Dammeier 's idea that his cheese business should encourage the growth of the artisan cheese businesses in the area , the Beecher 's retail store makes special efforts to feature and sell cheeses from new and small Northwest cheesemakers . The Flatiron location incorporates the Northwest influence its cheesecake , but carries a significant number of Northeast artisanal cheeses .

Beecher 's products are sold in retail stores throughout the country at well @-@ known artisanal cheese vendors such as the shops of Murray Klein and the international Artisanal Cheese retail company . Beecher 's also uses the services of PeriShip to ensure their products arrive to customers across the United States .

= = Macaroni and cheese = =

Beecher 's retail shop in the Pike Place Market sells over 17 @, @ 000 orders of Dammeier 's macaroni and cheese dish annually . The recipe is featured in a 2007 cookbook , Pure Flavor : 125 Fresh All @-@ American Recipes From The Pacific Northwest , which Dammeier wrote with Laura Holmes Haddad . Both The New York Times and The Washington Post gave it reviews described as " rave " , according to MSNBC news . Dammeier says the key to the success of their macaroni and cheese is to undercook the pasta by half , so that it softens from cheese sauces in baking with a béchamel sauce . The recipe , named simply " World 's Best Mac & Cheese " , has been prepared by Dammeier during guest appearances on several television programs . On August 19 , 2008 , Beecher 's facility and cheese was featured on The Martha Stewart Show , and Dammeier prepared his macaroni and cheese dish with Stewart on the program . The " World 's Best Mac & Cheese " was also featured as one of Oprah 's " Favorite Things , " and a second time on " The Martha Stewart Show . "

= = Awards and recognition = =

In 2007 , Beecher 's was the winner of the American Cheese Society awards for their cheddar cheese . At the World Cheese Awards in 2007 , Beecher 's " Marco Polo " cheese won a gold medal , and at the American Cheesemaker Awards in Newport Beach , California , they took first place , also in 2007 . Beecher 's also came in as the runner up for Best In Show at the 2007 World Cheese Society competition , in a field of 1 @, @ 207 competitors . Beecher 's again won a top award from the American Cheese Society for their Marco Polo cheese in 2008 . According to Laura Werlin , author of The New American Cheese : Profiles of America 's Great Cheesemakers , their Flagship cheese is " everything a cheddar should be - and more . "

= = Pure Food Kids = =

Beecher 's and Dammeier also fund and develop " Pure Food Kids : A Recipe for Healthy Eating " , an outreach and educational program , run by the Pure Food Kids Foundation , for elementary and middle @-@ school children in the Seattle Public Schools , with the goal of teaching children about healthful foods and eating habits . The program was initially developed by Dammeier and his wife Leslie , after they learned about and were unhappy with the state of school cafeteria meals in Seattle , where their three children attended public school . Established in 2005 , 1 % of the total sales for Beecher 's and Dammeier 's other business , Bennet 's Pure Food , Maximus / Minimus , and Pasta & Co . , are used to fund the Pure Food Kids program . The Pure Food Kids program is staffed by trained volunteers , including Dammeier himself .

Fourth through sixth grade elementary school children are educated on the effects of food additives , eating healthful foods , reading food labels , and about marketing of food aimed at children . According to Chip Wood , co @-@ founder of the Northeast Foundation for Children , fourth through sixth grade children will typically be between the ages of 9 and 12 years old . The program is provided at no cost to the children and their families . To date , over 15 @,@ 000 children have participated in the educational program . Pure Food Kids is taught in classrooms , after @-@ school events , and at Parent @-@ Teacher Association events , with all supplies and materials provided by Beecher 's , although there is explicitly no promotion or use of any products from any of Dammeier 's businesses .