

Cheese Marketing Practice



Brazilian Cheese Makers Break The Law, Win Awards

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On the 11th 12th and 13th of June this year something remarkable happened. Some 30 small family cheese makers from Brazil hid cheese in their suitcases and traveled to France to enter them in the third Mondial du Fromage. Fully one-third of these producers walked away with medals, including the highest honor a cheese can win in the world, a super gold.

In itself, this would be remarkable but is even more so when you consider that every single one of them would be considered to be breaking the law had the government of Brazil discovered what they were doing. Rather than go into a long academic discussion about why this makes no sense, listen to Marly Leite, the winner of the super gold tell it, in her own words:

“In the 1950s my grandparents moved to the region of Araxá from the Serra de Canastra to start their farm, Fazenda Caxambu. They brought with them a recipe for Artisanal Minas cheese handed down to them by their parents, an oral tradition that has lasted close to 300 years and is part of the cultural patrimony of Brazil. Because it was a different region, the cheese came out differently. Since Arti-

sanal Minas Cheese (QMA) is made from raw milk and natural whey starter, it directly reflects the terroir of the micro region in which it is made.

When I and my husband decided to try our hands at the selling of cheese, in 1992, when we got married, we had a few complications. Despite having inherited this wonderful tradition, we had no cows. So we sold the cheeses of other producers in the region. We were the dreaded middlemen. We would collect these cheeses and take them to other cities.

Until recently the sale of cheeses made with raw milk from small producers was illegal in Brazil. Yet, ironically, tons of cheese made from raw milk was and is sold clandestinely. Since the product we sold was a clandestine product we transported it very late in the night, just before sunrise, to avoid being caught. But after five years, the authorities got us, taking all our cheese away from us and destroying it, a total loss. We were desperate, because like so many others, because living in the countryside in Brazil, leaves few other options.

My husband and I were already making cheese at this point, in small quantities. So we decided to try to get it legalized. This was very difficult to do in 1998, especially because no one in the family was a lawyer and we didn't know what

we needed to do. At the time there was no easy access to the Internet.

So we went to our local rural development office in the town of Sacramento where we live, and they told us that if we wanted to make our cheese, which is traditionally aged 18 days, we would have to pasteurize the milk. We couldn't understand how it was possible that there was no way to legalize this wonderful cheese we made, so full of flavor, without having to take the flavor out of it. Traditional cheese that has been made in our state for centuries, long before the introduction of pasteurization and industrial cheesemaking.

We went away deeply saddened. We wanted to make something wonderful and it seemed there was no way we could be allowed to make it. We didn't know, at the time, that there was a law passed in 1954 with which cheeses like ours could be commercialized in the state of Minas Gerais, until one wonderful day a friend of ours brought someone from the rural development office from another city, who brought a copy of the law.

With our hope rekindled we entered into a fight for our right to survive making traditional cheese in the manner it has been made for almost three centuries, and it has been a fight without end. We were able to win the support of the local rural development office in the neighboring town of Araxá. They had a deputy who wanted to ensure that the traditional cheeses of Minas Gerais could once again be sold legally.

Thanks to their support we were able to get an IMA certification in 2006 (the Farming Institute of the State of Minas Gerais.) We were so proud. We like to say to everyone that before we won our certification, we were clandestine and were a little primitive in how we did things, but after the rural development office of Araxá appeared in our lives, we learned to do things better. We proudly talk of our lives before IMA and after.

It was an important thing and improved the quality of our lives. Finally, we could put our product into the supermarket with pride. But we faced a further challenge, being legitimate, our costs were higher, so it was difficult to compete with cheeses that were still being made clandestinely. The consumers want only the lowest price, according to the markets, but we managed to win, slowly but surely, as is the Mineiro Way (someone who lives in Minas Gerais). When people tried our cheeses they loved them, and when we explained our good agricultural practices and high levels of sanitation, they bought them and this was very gratifying.

Here on our farm we always did

• See Strongin, p. 6

FROM OUR ARCHIVES

50 YEARS AGO

June 30, 1967: Madison—Cheesemaking is slowly being mechanized after many years of hard and tedious labor, UW-Madison food scientist N.F. Olson reported this week. More equipment manufacturers are designing vats and other equipment so that physical labor is reduced during the make process.

Ithaca, NY—Vladimir Krukovsky, noted for research in milk chemistry, will retire this month and become professor emeritus after 33 years at Cornell University. On the faculty of Cornell's food science department since 1933, Krukovsky has done research on the importance of milkfat globules and lipolytic activity in influencing the quality and stability of milk.

25 YEARS AGO

June 26, 1992: Madison—The US Cheese Makers Association this week announced that Linda Leger has been named executive director of the organization, which has recently split from the Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association. Effective July 1, Leger will be leaving her post as WCMA director of member services.

Madison—Farmers Union Milk Marketing Cooperative this week welcomed USDA's determination that Switzerland has been dumping cheese on the US market and called for swift corrective action to halt further economic injury to American dairy farmers and cheese makers from the unfair imports.

10 YEARS AGO

June 29, 2007: Brussels, Belgium—Germany doesn't have to prosecute cheese producers who market some hard cheeses as “Parmesan,” even if the cheese doesn't originate from the countryside around Parma, Italy. However, court officials said that Germany had failed to prove that Parmesan is a generic term different from the already-protected “Parmigiano Reggiano” nomenclature.

Brattleboro, VT—The Grafton Village Cheese Company held a ceremonial ground-breaking here this week at Retreat Farm – home of the company's future cheese production plant. The new plant will increase production from 1.5 million to 3.0 million pounds of cheese annually.

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Strongin

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only a traditional cure in the way that our grandfather had taught us, and the way that had been passed from generation to generation. We heard about a course that a nongovernmental organization, SertaoBras was giving on aging cheeses. They were bringing a French professor named Delphine to teach us how to apply techniques of maturation. I took this course. Afterward, I had a lot of ideas I want to try. I fell in love with the fact that I could use the same cheese that we had been making for generations and aging it differently to come up with a completely different one.

This was in 2016. The woman that organized the class, Débora Perreira then organized a trip for producers to go to the Mundials in Tour in June of 2017, with help from organizations like FAEMG (Federation of Agriculture and Livestock of the State of Minas Gerais). I decided to go, but there was a problem: to be able to transport a cheese out of Brazil, you need a special authorization, but there is no such authorization for cheeses like mine, which are treated by some as contraband. Fearful of having my cheeses confiscated, I wrapped up my cheese and stuffed it into my suitcase. We got on line at the airport terrified

that our cheeses would be confiscated. But they weren't. And when we arrived in France, we already felt we had won a major victory.

But, among the 30 producers who took the trip, 11 went on to win a total of 12 medals. When they posted the results, they posted on a wall, and everyone scrambled to find their result. I was working downstairs at our table talking about Brazilian cheese with the public. My cousin came to me and said 'I have good news. You have not just won a gold, you won a super gold for your cheese Senzala.' This was an extraordinary feeling, and a vindication of many years of struggle.

I am hopeful this incredible conquest by Brazilian cheese makers will come to the attention of government officials, and they will start to attend to the necessities of the small producers who are currently confined by laws that make it almost impossible for the producer to survive without being clandestine, despite using good practices of quality and aging, and having centuries of tradition. There is no justification for this. Scientific studies have shown repeatedly that in our region cheese made artisanally with raw milk only has to be aged for 18 days to be safe just like my forebears have done for centuries.

Perhaps someone might not like the taste of my cheese, Senzala,

even though it won the highest title in the world of cheese. They might think it doesn't taste as good as another cheese, made according to the "official" standards of identity, and that's fine. But as long as we make safe food we should be able to make what we want, how we want to make it, and be able to sell it legally rather than hiding them or traveling in the middle of the night in order to sell them and survive.

It is my hope that our Brazilian cheeses that are so honored outside of Brazil, will be allowed to enter the Mundials in 2019 with the full support of the Brazilian people. It's my hope that our government will feel proud for us, being hard-working people, rural survivors who have suffered repression but still had the ideas and creativity to make cheese considered among the best in the world.

Producers in Brazil, at risk and in clandestine situations, should never have to experience the fear we did when leaving Brazil in order to compete and win in international competitions, simply because they try to produce traditional cheese with raw milk. I hope that our achievements will be glorified, and in 2019 our cheeses will be legalized."

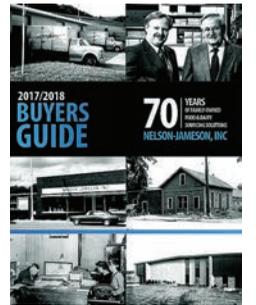
I can only imagine 50 years ago, when mass production and ultimately unscientific laws devastated small family cheese producers in the US, that someone felt emotions very much the same. As in its report on world agriculture in 2009, the UN noted, the rules that apply to mass production do not apply to artisanal production and are too costly for small producers to survive.

We need to focus on good process and a less antagonistic, more collaborative approach to food safety. ^{DS}

Nelson-Jameson Releases 70th Anniversary Edition Of Its Buyer's Guide

Marshfield, WI—Nelson-Jameson, Inc. has announced the release of the 70th anniversary edition of its Buyer's Guide.

This year's catalog has expanded by over 200 pages, including significant growth of the company's popular color-coded and metal detectable programs.



Nelson-Jameson's color-coded catalog will be bound into the Buyer's Guide once again, which offers an additional 52 pages of color-coded products.

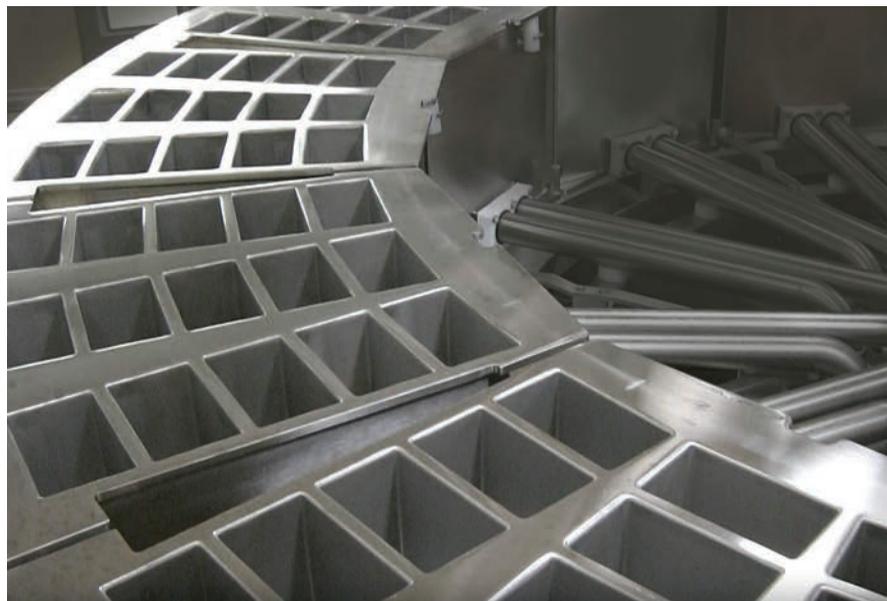
The simple "How to Order" boxes, terminology and other guides are available throughout the catalog to help provide customers with a one-stop source to find the right products for their applications.

In all, the new Buyer's Guide includes nearly 900 pages of products, helpful guides and technical information.

Nelson-Jameson has been an integrated supplier for the dairy and food industries since 1947.

Nelson-Jameson product lines include safety and personnel, production and material handling, sanitation and janitorial, processing and flow control, laboratory and QA/QC, and bulk packaging and ingredients.

For more information, or to order a copy of the Buyer's Guide, contact Nelson-Jameson customer service at (800) 826-8302 or visit www.nelsonjameson.com.



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