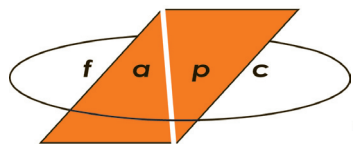


Food & Agricultural Products Center



FLASH!!

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY™

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Say Christian Cheese Please

STILLWATER, Okla. – Tucked away in Kingfisher, Okla. is a cheese company that is becoming known to the world. Christian Cheese may be small, but the demand for its product is not.

George Christian and his wife, LaWanna, have been in the dairy business for 44 years, but seven years ago they decided to enter the cheese market. One of the main reasons for entering this market was to make the dairy more profitable.

When Christian was ready to market and sell his cheese, he contacted Jim Brooks, business planning and marketing specialist for the Food & Agricultural Products Center. Brooks was able to assist Christian in placing his products in the market.

“Jim has just sort of been a voice that if I needed to know something, he was there,” Christian said.

Brooks has assisted Christian in identifying potential customers for his cheese products, helped schedule in-store demonstrations and trade shows and introduced Christian to buyers in the state and a variety of sources for his package and supply materials.

Christian makes about 3,000 pounds of cheese per month and uses milk that comes from his cows. He ships his products to all 50 states and internationally. Orders and inquiries have come from England, Indonesia and Turkey.

Christian Cheese makes more than 19 different types of cheddar cheese. From plain yellow cheese to garlic,

sage and wine cheese, a person is almost guaranteed to find something he or she likes.

The wine cheeses have wine from Oklahoma and Kansas vineyards laced throughout the cheese. Curds are also available in several different flavors. The Christians also have special packages available. A complete list of products and prices can be found at www.christiancheese.com.

Christian began making cheese after remodeling an old milking barn and buying equipment.

“I placed an ad in the *High Plains Journal* and was contacted two weeks later,” Christian said. “A company in Montana was closing, and the owner offered to sale his equipment to me.”

Fortunately, Christian had a friend who was in the trucking business and lived in Montana. After the friend had checked and approved the equipment, he loaded it on his semi and brought it to Oklahoma.

“We got a really good deal, and we’re still using the equipment I bought,” Christian said.

Christian learned how to make his cheese from a German family from Mexico and Steve Zeng from Langston University. He hired the family to help on the farm, and they kept encouraging Christian to make cheese.

Christian began making Hispanic cheese, but it did not turn out well. Christian then contacted Zeng for help.

Zing makes goat cheese at Langston University, and he showed Christian how to make different varieties of cheddar and colby.

The process of making cheese starts with milk from Christian's cows. After the milk is pasteurized, the cheese making begins.

For cheddar, the process takes about nine to 10 hours. Once the cheese is made, it is pressed and placed in the cold room. The cold room has a temperature of 36 to 38 degrees.

The specialty cheeses take about 12 hours to make. These cheeses stay in the cold room for one week. Sharp cheese is kept in the cold room for six to eight months.

The cheese curds are a product of non-pressed cheese. Once the curds have been taken from the cheese, they are kept in the cold room.

Christian Cheese products are carried in 35 to 40 Oklahoma stores. These stores range from Enid to Stillwater to Kingfisher.

Christian Cheese has been featured on the Food Network and *Discover Oklahoma*. The Food Network

highlighted the company on its Food Finds program. Christian Cheese was one of three Oklahoma companies showcased.

Brooks said there are several reasons that Christian has been successful. One of the most important reasons is the consistency and quality of his cheese products.

"George is very particular in all areas of his dairy operation, from the feeding and milking of the cows, the processing of the milk and finally the making of the cheese," Brooks said. "I believe once people get to know George and his wife, they sense their dedication to what they are doing and feel very comfortable in purchasing their cheese products. George is also very aware of how important service is to those customers who stock his cheese, and he is always willing to provide that personal attention that many companies choose to ignore."

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Jim Brooks is a business planning and marketing specialist at the FAPC. He may be contacted at (405) 744-6071 or brookjw@okstate.edu .

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