



Highlights from the 2024 Artisan Cheese Tasting & Marketplace

cheeseprofessor.com/blog/artisan-cheese-tasting-marketplace-2024
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Ziggy von Frankenberg-Leu of Columbia Cheese and Amy Sherman photo credit Lee Sherman

Volunteers passed out bright orange insulated shopping bags, and glasses of bubbly, and the band played, welcoming the first wave of attendees at the Sonoma County Fairgrounds event center, for the Artisan Cheese Tasting & Marketplace, the sold-out signature event of the 18th California Artisan Cheese Festival on March 24th, 2024.

The festival marketplace attracted 1200 cheese lovers and there were 96 vendors including 24 artisan cheesemakers who offered samples of over 120 types of cheese.

Catching up with friends, and colleagues, meeting cheesemakers, and, of course, trying cheese makes the event a must for cheese fans.



Felice Thorpe photo credit Lee Sherman

One of our first stops was to see Cheese Professor contributor Felice Thorpe who was representing the Pacific Coast Coalition, a dairy business innovation initiative. Grant recipients have included cheesemakers we love such as Point Reyes Farmstead, Nicasio Valley Cheese, and Shooting Star Creamery (read more about Sagittarius from Shooting Star and about the wunderkind cheesemaker, Avery Jones). Thorpe was doling out tastes of scrumptious sea salt caramel Leo! Leo! Gelato.



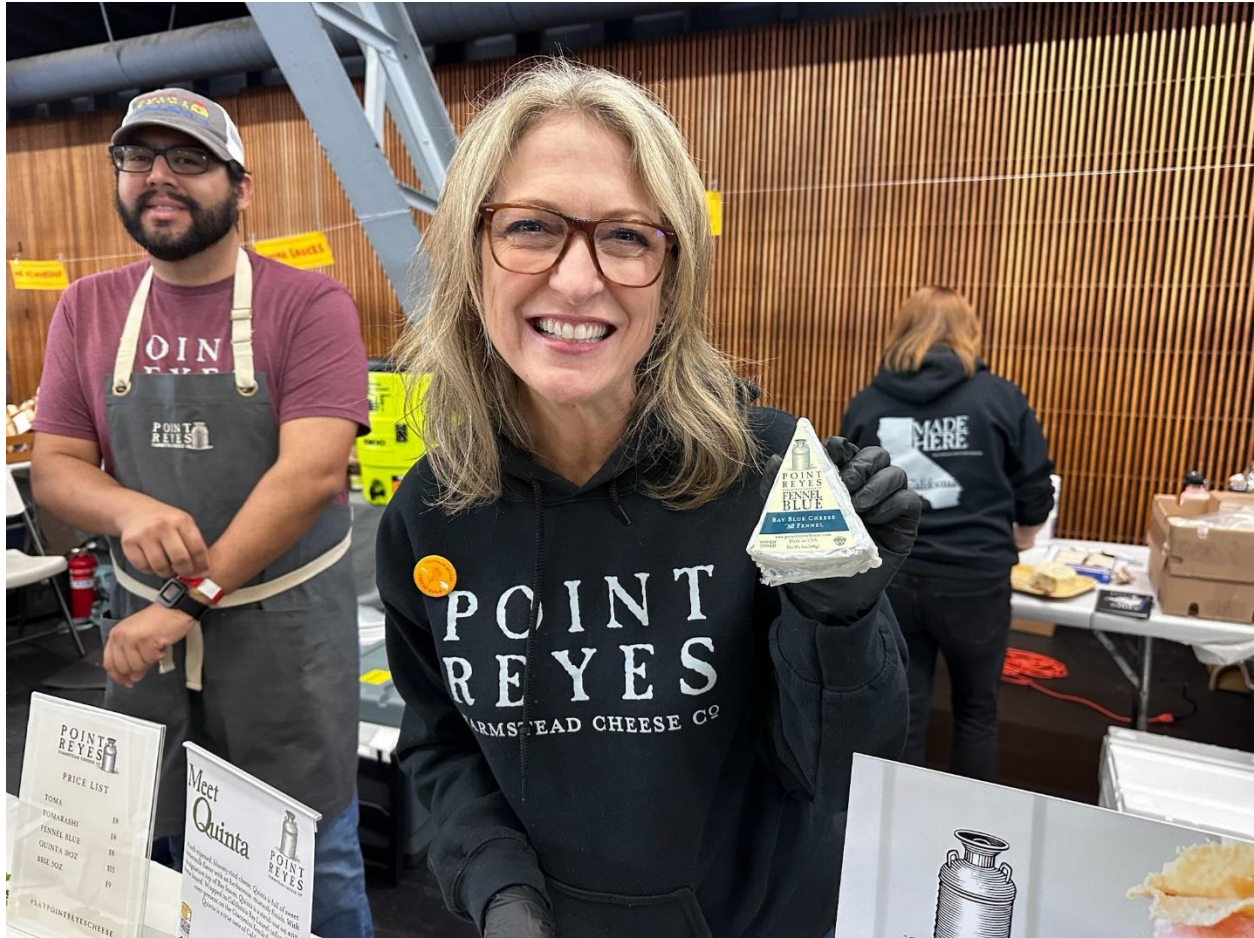
Bettyann Spenker and daughter Sarah Spenker get help sampling cheese photo credit Lee Sherman

The only thing better than cheese is wine and cheese. Something the producers of both, the Spenker family knows a thing about, so it was great to meet Bettyann and Sarah of Spenker Family Farm, a part of Spenker Winery. While their fresh chevre with dill and garlic is an award-winning crowd-pleaser, we fell for the aged goat cheese Mt. Diablo's Sunset.



Omer Seltzer of Mt. Eitan photo credit Lee Sherman

Speaking of aged goat cheese, we were also impressed with those from cheesemaker Omer Seltzer. His company Mt Eitan Cheese sells mostly at farmer's markets and local markets. We tried the soft grape leaf wrapped Gefen and the harder Tamar.



Jill Giacomini Basch of Point Reyes Farmstead Cheese with Fennel Blue photo credit Lee Sherman

We are big fans of Point Reyes Farmstead Cheese and were very excited to try the new Fennel Blue made with fennel seed and Bay Blue. It's got a lovely sweet licorice flavor that really complements the saltiness of the blue. Released in limited quantities just last month, it is going to be a go-to salad cheese when it gets greater distribution in May.



Bellwether Farm Sheep Cheese photo credit Lee Sherman

Bellwether Farms was one of the first producers we featured in 2020 in a story about ricotta, a cheese they are famous for making. We got a chance to try their fresh Bellwether Sheep Cheese, which is also available with Sonoma herbs. Available for just the last 2 ½ years or so, this cheese is delightfully smooth and mildly flavored with less tang than fresh goat cheese.



Jessica and Matt of Oakdale Cheese

It was nice to finally meet Jessica and Matt of Oakdale Cheese. We were already a fan of their Cumin Gouda which was featured in a summer cheese pairing story, but really enjoyed trying their latest cheese, a habanero gouda and their award-winning 15-18 month aged Stanislaus Reserve. It was sweet, crunchy, and crumbly.



Fiscalini Balsamic Onion Cheddar photo credit Lee Sherman

We featured Fiscalini back in 2022. They make a variety of cheeses that are original versions of classic cheeses including Cheddar. Their newest cheese, Balsamic Onion Cheddar has a long, sweet onion finish. It would be terrific on a cheese plate but we imagine it would be fantastic melted on a burger.



Jeff and Susan Mall photo credit Lee Sherman

It wasn't all cheese at the marketplace. A popular booth was Volo Chocolate, a company we profiled at the Chocolate Professor. Jeff and Susan Mall were sampling chocolate that they produce from small batches of cacao and selling the bars at a steady clip. We got a chance to try their latest innovation a seasonal Raspberry Cream Cheesecake bar which combines raspberries and graham crackers and has the subtle flavor of an actual cheesecake.



Stephanie Rosenbaum Klassen photo credit Lee Sherman

We were also happy to see Stephanie Rosenbaum Klassen who shared her insider view of Gold Ridge Farm Organic Farm olive oil over at the Olive Oil Professor and was offering samples of the precious oil to attendees. Like artisan cheese, locally made extra virgin olive oil is another staple of the wine country lifestyle.



Cheesemonger Evan Schermer

Whether you attend an hour early with a VIP ticket or with a general admission ticket, the show is a place where both consumers and those in the industry can indulge in their love for artisan cheeses. While most are from California there was one from each Utah and Washington state as well. The marketplace is always a "grate" experience for all!