



Shatto Milk Company Brings Farmstead Cheesemaking To Missouri; Kansas City Clamoring For Locally-Made Cheese

Osborn, MO—A 60 year-old Missouri dairy farm, known largely for its glass-bottled milk, has initiated a farmstead cheesemaking operation that has Kansas City customers eager for locally made artisan cheese.

The three-generation family farm, Shatto Milk Company, is located here about 50 miles north of Kansas City. The company supplies bottled fluid milk in various flavors from white to root beer, as well as butter, ice cream and egg nog in traditional and pumpkin spice varieties.

About a year ago, Shatto Milk began offering Cheddar curds to its customers – which people from Missouri were unfamiliar with, according to Leroy Shatto, owner and chief executive officer, Shatto Milk Company.

“We had over 40,000 people here last year just to see what a damn cow looks like. We let people taste all our products and if they didn’t know who we were or ever try our stuff, they’ll go back to town and buy it.”

Leroy Shatto, owner and CEO, Shatto Milk Company.

The curds were fine-tuned with help from Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker Karl Geissbuhler of Brunkow Cheese, Darlington, WI.

Inevitably, Shatto entered into farmstead cheesemaking to balance the company’s milk supply.

“I have no dairy co-op that will buy extra milk, so it was a way to balance our supply,” Shatto said. “I don’t want to be pouring milk down the drain.”

The company’s herd is now about 300 head – up from 80 cows six years ago. Before eggnog season, Shatto Milk purchased extra cows to fill demand.

“We’ve been so fortunate that people seem to like the stuff more and more,” Shatto said. “When we started, I never thought about doing anything but fluid milk. Now we’re making butter, ice cream, egg nog and cheese.”

The company broke into artisan cheesemaking about six months ago with help through grant funding by the Missouri Department of Agriculture. Shatto Milk was able to conduct a feasibility study and recruit well-known cheese consultant Peter

Dixon for advice.

Shatto Milk’s line of farmstead cheese hit shelves just in time for the holidays. Varieties include fresh and aged Bandaged Cheddar, fresh and aged Gouda, fresh and aged Havarti, and a Port Salut. The company will also be offering a Cheddar-style cheese called “Lilly.”

When the first small batch of cheese was sufficiently aged, it was delivered to Whole Foods Markets in Kansas City. Response so far has been “unbelievable,” Shatto said.

“I can’t age it quickly enough,” he said. “They keep wanting more and more.”

Shatto Milk first offered its cheese in large, aged wheels for stores to cut at will, then delivered pre-cut and packaged cheeses for direct sales.

Nine washed rind wheels of various kinds were delivered to Whole Foods on a Friday. The cheese was shelved and sampled Sunday afternoon, and gone the next day.

“They called me Monday morning and wanted nine more wheels,” Shatto said. “I was there sampling cheese the following Friday and by next Monday, they wanted 14 more rounds. It’s just been crazy.”

As far as competition, there’s no local cow’s milk cheese in Kansas City, Shatto said. That’s why Whole Foods is so interested in us. Since we’re such a small outfit, we try to work very closely with our stores.

We’re almost in trouble now, he said. After Peter left, we started making bigger batches, and now we’re filling up our cheese room but we still have to age it properly. Cheese is aged for at least four months.

“That’s what’s got us in trouble now. We didn’t time it right, but we had no clue this was going to happen,” Shatto said. “Here the holidays are, and some of our cheese isn’t ready to go yet.”

That’s got us in a bit of a predicament, but in about a month we’ll be okay, he said. It’s just too bad we don’t have all our cheese ready for the holidays.

The bulk of Shatto’s milk supply through the new year is devoted to fluid milk and cream for its egg nog, taking milk away from cheesemaking. Slower production periods typically generate about 500 pounds of cheese weekly.

Fortunately, Shatto Milk recently completed production on a new 1,200-foot cheesemaking/dry storage facility. The company equipped the plant with new vacuum seal machines and is searching for a second cheese vat.

“My cheese vat only holds 3,000 pounds of milk, and we’re finding out

that might not be big enough,” Shatto said. “But it works well for shorter runs and experimentation.”

People love when we play with different products, he continued. And now we’re playing with our cheese.

The company has been rubbing its Gouda with locally-roasted ground coffee. There’s also a collaboration between Shatto Milk and Kansas City’s Boulevard Beer for a beer-soaked cheese, and cheese rubbed with cocoa.

Shatto Milk Company currently employs 27 workers to run its entire operation. Gary Campbell and Leroy Shatto are responsible for cheesemaking activities.

Perhaps the greatest challenge of embarking on a farmstead cheese operation is not only gathering enough capital, but gathering strength to handle the increased workload, according to Shatto.

“Of course I’ve had to do more stuff,” he said. “My wife hopes I make some money before I die, and I haven’t done that yet. Every time we start doing well, here I am spending money on a cheese plant.”

Dollars are also being invested in a simulated cheese cave for affinage, which Shatto already declares too small for demand.

I’m amazed by the amount of artisan cheese customers are willing to buy, Shatto said. Of course, we take our products to some of the higher-end stores.

Kansas City customers are demanding locally made foods; we are the local dairy for Kansas City, Shatto said.

Packaging has also been a challenging issue.

“When we first started, Peter had us vacuum-sealing the cheese, and

we found out customers don’t want vacuum-sealed – they want the washed rind. Now we’ve made the transition to exclusively washed-rind cheeses,” Shatto said.

Shatto Milk welcomes hundreds of visitors to its creamery, taking time for tours, tastings and demonstrations.

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The future of Shatto Milk Company is difficult to predict for the next few months, much less the next couple of years.

“Every week is a different deal here,” Shatto said. “Ever since we started six years ago, my head spins every day with new opportunities.”

“I could never have imagined all this happening. I’m not used to things working right – all this stuff has been working right.”

For more information, visit www.shattomilkcompany.com or call (816) 930-3862. r



The cheese makers at Shatto Milk Company cutting curds of their washed-rind artisan cheese. The company’s new line includes fresh and aged Bandaged Cheddar, Gouda, Havarti and Port Salut.