



Growing Sales Prompt Tumalo Farms To Build Additional Plant, Aging Facility, Develop New Cow's Milk Cheeses

Aswell of cheese orders and insufficient goat's milk supply has inspired award-winning specialty cheese manufacturer Tumalo Farms to launch a major expansion project and embark on a new product line.

In March, the three year-old company took First Runner Up at the 2009 US Championship Cheese Contest with its flagship goat's milk cheese, Tumalo Classico.

Just one month later, owner Flavio DeCastilhos announced plans to expand the goat's milk cheese operation by building an additional plant and aging facility on the current 84-acre premises to develop new, original cow's cheese using organic milk supplied by a neighboring dairy.

The project includes an additional 2,500 square feet of production space – tripling the company's manufacturing capability. Tumalo Farms also added an aging cellar for bloomy rind cheese affinage.

The project is slated for completion by the end of the month, weather permitting.

Expansion was necessary due to high demand for Tumalo Farms' existing line of goat's milk cheese, and the company's endeavor to fill a market gap for bloomy rind cow's milk styles. Like Brie and Camembert, the white exterior of bloomy rind styles have a mold growth of *Penicillium Candidum*.

"As much as the cheese is being produced in the US, a lot of it is still imported," DeCastilhos said. "We find it's a niche we can operate in with a combination of new opportunity, high demand for existing products, and the fact that we don't have

enough milk that we produce ourselves."

So we decided to increase the size of the facility and will source cows' milk from a nearby farm – a certified organic producer, DeCastilhos said.

Tumalo Farms' herd of French Alpine and Saagen goats is currently approaching 500 head. Last year, the company received organic milk from roughly 200 animals from the herd, and is expecting to double its milk production in 2009.

Still, the farmstead operation can't produce enough goat milk to keep up with demand.

"We're in an area where there's only one other producer nearby," DeCastilhos said. "Being at 3,500 feet, there's not a whole lot of dairies around – period."

"We wanted to increase the goat's milk, but we don't have anyone to produce the milk for us – other than ourselves," he said. "Using cow's milk is the only way we can actually grow."

Adapting to the difference of manufacturing cheese using cow's milk provided additional challenges.

"Cow's milk is very different than goat's milk," DeCastilhos said. "Goat's milk is a lot more delicate and fragile because it's naturally homogenized and it has less lactose."

Tumalo Farms will use cow's milk to make bloomy rind cheeses – a completely different manufacturing process than the hard goat's milk Gouda-style varieties Tumalo is known for.

"We've spent a long time working out recipes, and what we've been missing up until now is the correct environment to ripen that kind of cheese," DeCastilhos said.

Tumalo Farms' new aging cellar will feature a higher humidity level and a slightly lower temperature than what the company was previously employing to properly age the bloomy rind cheeses.

A staff of about 10 people keep operations running, including cheesemaking and animal care. The company is targeting to make cheese five days per week.

Tumalo Farms' expansion into new types and styles of cheeses will elevate not just the company name, but overall reputation of central Oregon and the Pacific Northwest as a premier artisan milk producing and cheesemaking region, said David Gremmels, co-owner of Rogue

Creamery, Central Point, OR, and current president of the American Cheese Society.

"What Flavio DeCastilhos has accomplished in just three years is exemplary," Gremmels said.

Brazilian-born and educated in the US, DeCastilhos originally studied chemistry and computer science, which led him to a 20-year career in Silicon Valley, CA.

Upon returning to the US, he bought the 84-acre former pumice mine near Bend, OR, in 2004 and initiated construction on the farmstead dairy. The operation earned its cheesemaking license in 2005.

During that time DeCastilhos did a lot of experimentation to tweak cheese recipes in the way he wanted.

For example, a lot of work was done on Tumalo's Classico, and some trials with spices and flavors like the local microbrew used to make Tumalo's Pond Hopper.

The process is similar to what the company is currently doing with bloomy rinds – beginning with a basic recipe and continuing with necessary modifications, DeCastilhos said, starting with the types of bacteria to temperatures and humidity levels.

"Every cheese has its own requirements, from bacterial activity to temperature and humidity," he said.

We're trying to create something representative of Oregon's terrior, because we have some very interesting characteristics in the area – great alfalfa, orchard grass, deep well water, and a slightly dry environment, DeCastilhos said.

"All those factors seem to allow us to create a very unique set of cheeses," he said. "We're trying to make modifications that resemble the environment we live in."

The farm also reflects DeCastilhos' significant investments in modern barns, automated milking stations and separate areas for males, and pregnant and milking goats. The cheese building has separate rooms for holding milk in stainless steel tanks and making cheese.

And the main cellar is built into the side of a hill, designed with high-technology systems to control temperature and humidity, which are constantly monitored.

Tumalo Farms is primarily a local cheese producer with distribution extending into the Northwest and California, with a handful of customers in cities like New York, New Orleans and Chicago.

"Right now, we just don't have enough product to send out too far," DeCastilhos said.

Two interesting things came out of this year's US Championship Cheese Contest, according to DeCastilhos. One, that this honor is the highest any Oregon cheese has ever been bestowed in this competition, and two – Tumalo Classico happens to be made with goat's milk.

Usually in these competitions you receive a set of comments from the judges, and all 14 of our entries came back with the same comment – "It did not taste like goat," DeCastilhos said.

We'd like to be known as the premiere artisan cheese manufacturer in the country...our goal is to create a very high-end product that people are willing to pay for. In return, they get a superb cheese that can't be imported.

—Flavio DeCastilhos,
Tumalo Farms

"Most people tend to understand goat's milk cheese as very pungent," he said. "The reason we don't have that in our cheese is because of the quality we incorporate in the manufacturing process."

It has to do with how long you store the milk in the storage tank, he continued.

"We want to stay in the niche we've created," DeCastilhos said. "I think this is a pretty unique opportunity for goat's milk because people are finally learning some of the benefits – the fact that it contains less lactose and it's easier to digest."

Currently, Tumalo Farms is Oregon's third or fourth largest specialty cheese producer, "which doesn't mean a lot because we're so small," DeCastilhos said.

"Eventually, we'd like to be known as the premiere artisan cheese manufacturer in the country," he said. "That's a pretty tall order, but then again, we're on track. We're not going to be in every store out there, but our goal is to create a very high-end product that people are willing to pay for. In return, they get a superb cheese that can't be imported. That's our goal."

For more details, contact Tumalo Farms at (541)-350-3718 or visit www.tumalofarms.com.

