

Renard's Cheese Breaks Ground On New Operations; Grows Distributor Network

Algoma, WI—Renard's Cheese broke ground last week on Phase 1 of a three-phase expansion that will include a new production facility, and an on-site exact weight cut and wrap and warehouse, driven by a growing demand for the company's products.

Currently operating in a plant built in the 1920s, the new Renard's operation will be a 50,000-square-foot facility that will ultimately increase production to 12 million pounds of cheese per year; warehouse that production on-site; and ease the labor issues in the packaging area with automation.

"Demand has been very good," said Chris Renard, vice president of Renard's Cheese. "Last year we turned down about 6 million pounds of production because we were limited in capacity. The year before that, we turned down 4 million."

"We have added a lot of varieties to our cheese line. We are starting to do a lot of blended cheese. We are not just making plain Cheddar anymore. Demand for these products has really grown."

Chris Renard, Renard's Cheese

Renard's Cheese can only make about 3 million pounds of cheese in its current facility.

In this first phase of the expansion, the company will go from 3 million pounds to 4.5 million pounds. And then in the third phase, Renard's will take the business from 4.5 million pounds to 12 million.

Phase 1 of the expansion will be completed in the spring of 2023, while phase three is set to be completed by the end of 2025.

"The whole idea is being able to handle more capacity to meet demand," said Ann Renard, the company's president.

The company will be adding a wastewater facility that will allow the business to store up to six months of wastewater at one time.

In Phase 2 of the expansion, set to be completed by the summer of 2023, the company is adding to its current warehouse a new exact weight cutting and packaging area that will create efficiencies.

"This is going to allow us to introduce our products into new markets that we haven't been in before," Chris Renard said.

Today, both the storage and packaging operations are being conducted by third-party companies.

"We will be able to store everything in-house rather than off-site, as we do now. It's hard to manage inventory when you are off site," said Chris Renard.

"Our exact weight cuts also have been outsourced," said Ann Renard. "We were having a difficult time getting our orders filled and when we did, we weren't getting the turn-around times that we needed. This will allow us to do storage and cutting and wrapping all under one roof."

Renard's collects their milk from area farms. Going from 30 million pounds of milk to 120 million isn't too much of a worry for the company, said Chris Renard.

"Currently we have our own farms that are hauling to us. But I also have a list of 16 farms on a waiting list," he said. "They call us every two to three months to see where they are on the waiting list."

While the production will increase ultimately to 12 million pounds of cheese, Chris Renard said the goal is to stay artisan.

The company will be adding open vats manufactured by Ullmer's Dairy Equipment and Koss Industrial will be designing new cheese presses. A new trial vat will be included to allow for experimenting with new cheeses.

"We have added a lot of varieties to our cheese line. We are starting to do a lot of blended cheese. We are not just making plain Cheddar anymore," said Chris Renard.

Renard's Cloverleaf Reserve, a blend of Cheddar and Gruyere, is very popular, he said. Renard's Legacy is a blend of Cheddar and Gouda. Terrific Trio is a fusion of Cheddar, Parmesan, and Gouda.

"Demand for these products has really grown," said Chris Renard. "We've created our own style of cheese. Created our own flavors of cheese. We used to have two or three flavors, but now, man, now we have over 50."

Growing Through Distributors

"The quality of cheese has always been excellent," said Chris Renard. "But now, through our marketing, our name is getting out there. People now know who we are and they know our cheese."

Renard's Cheese is made up of Rosewood Dairy, Inc., the manufacturing arm, while Renard's Cheese Store, LLC is the marketing entity of the operation. Located at the mouth of Door County, WI, Renard's Cheese Store is a destination point before heading into Wisconsin's largest tourist area.

"We used to buy about 25 to 30 percent of our own cheese to supply the store," Ann Renard said. "I would say, now, at our retail store and our own routes, we are probably at 15 percent. Growth is



Renard's Cheese broke ground last week on an expansion that will ultimately take the plant from 3 million pounds of cheese to 12 million. **In the above photo are:** Mike Pribek, plant manager; Ann Renard, president; Chris Renard, vice president; Jean Chase, human resource director; and Joni Nessinger, production manager at Renard's Cheese during groundbreaking events.

through our distributors. Rosewood loves partnering with distributors. And that is our goal going forward."

Having made a lot of bulk cheese in the past, it left a lot of work for distributors to do before taking those products to market.

"We are making it easier for our cheese to get to market," Ann Renard said. "Being able to cut and wrap to exact weights makes it easier for distributors to get the cheese to market."

We love to work with distributors versus shipping everything out of our location, she said. "It makes it easier. We want customers to go to their local grocery store and find Renard's Cheese. To do that, we need to work through distributors."

To support those relationships, Renard's has been actively promoting its cheese, attending trade shows, and connecting with distributors directly.

"We're normally a quiet bunch, but we have a terrific story to tell and we make great products. We do a lot more marketing now," said Chris Renard. "That didn't happen before and I think that has been a big reason why our cheese is in

more demand."

Family Tradition

Chris Renard is a third-generation cheese maker. His grandfather, Howard, and father, Gary, ran Renard's until 2014 when Chris and Ann purchased the operation.

In March of this year, the oldest of four daughters, Samantha, came back to the business full-time. The other three are still too young for business talk.

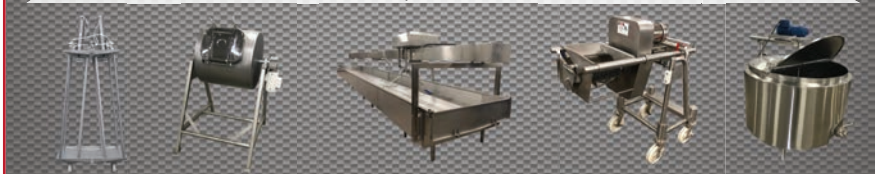
"The plan is for Samantha to take over someday. She will be the fourth generation here," he said.

"When we purchased the business in 2014, we knew a lot of improvements were needed to be made to the business in order to sustain it," Ann Renard said. "That was our commitment and focus at that time. Now our intention is going in the direction of employee-owned. Our business model hasn't totally changed, it's just great that one of the Renard girls came back and will continue along this journey with us."

For more information on Renard's Cheese, visit www.renard-scheese.com

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