

# JASPER HILL FARM



Greensboro, VT



Producer OF THE *Month*



BRATTLEBORO FOOD CO-OP

# Producer OF THE Month

by Jon Megas-Russell



## Editor's note:

This March we successfully completed our first Annual Vermont Cheese Madness event. A delicious 32 Vermont cheeses from 26 different cheesemakers were sampled throughout the month. We presented eight categories for the bracket: cheddar, gouda, bloomy, blue, washed, alpine, tomme, and goat. Each day we offered two cheeses for customers and staff to sample and then vote. The prize: a feature as our June Producer of the Month. On March 31st, Jasper Hill Farm's Alpha Tolman was declared the overall winner. And so, Cheese manager Joe and Marketing manager Jon visited Jasper Hill last month to bring you this feature article.

Enjoy, and thanks to all who voted!

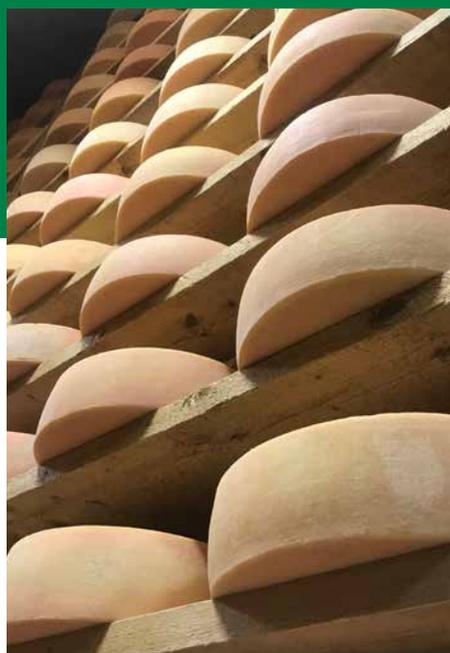


The long journey to Greensboro, VT took Joe and I up Route 91, almost hitting a rafter of turkeys and driving deep into the Northeast Kingdom. Upon arriving at Jasper Hill Farm, the clouds that covered the drive were gone and a gorgeous view of mountain tops and lush pastures welcomed us. As we entered the Farm's office, we presented the team with the first ever Vermont Cheese Madness Championship trophy, which they promptly placed next to their American Cheese Society "Best in Show" trophy. After getting dressed in coats, boots, hair nets, and beard nets along with signing official paper work, we ventured into the Cellars at Jasper Hill Farm, where all of their cheeses are aged. Throughout our tour of the vaults, our guide, Alex, shared stories of farming, history, cheesemaking and aging.

The story begins in 1998 as brothers Andy and Mateo Kehler along with their wives Victoria and Angie pulled together their life savings to purchase what locals called the

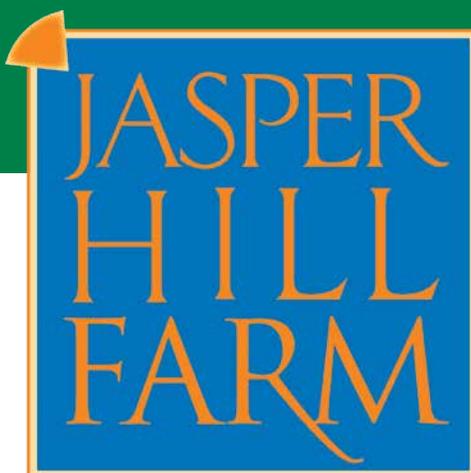
"Old Jasper Hill Farm" in Northern Vermont. From the beginning the Kehlers were looking for "meaningful work in a place that they love with people they love." It was important for them to support Vermont's working landscape and to give back to an area in which their family had enjoyed respite for over 100 years. The concept that they wanted to implement was called value-added agriculture: the practice of transforming a raw material like milk into something more valuable before it leaves the farmer. After looking into tofu-making, sheep milk cheese and beer brewing, they started building a herd of 45 Ayrshire breed cows with the goal of farmstead cheesemaking. Their dream became a reality when they sold their first piece of cheese in the spring of 2003.

While Ayrshires are not a high production breed, their milk has a high solids content and small fat globules, making it exceptional for cheesemaking. The cows are pasture-based which means that in a cold climate the cows are on pasture roughly from May through



October, or as long as weather permits. During the growing season cows graze on lush pasture grasses, and in winter they transition to a ration of dry hay. In fact, Jasper Hill recently built an innovative cropping center designed to dry local forages and avoid fermented feed or trucking in hay from drier climate regions. Year-round, the cows' diet is supplemented with a non-GMO grain ration that maintains digestive health and stabilizes milk components. The consistency of their milk is extremely important for their cheeses and they go to great lengths to ensure a healthy and well-fed herd.

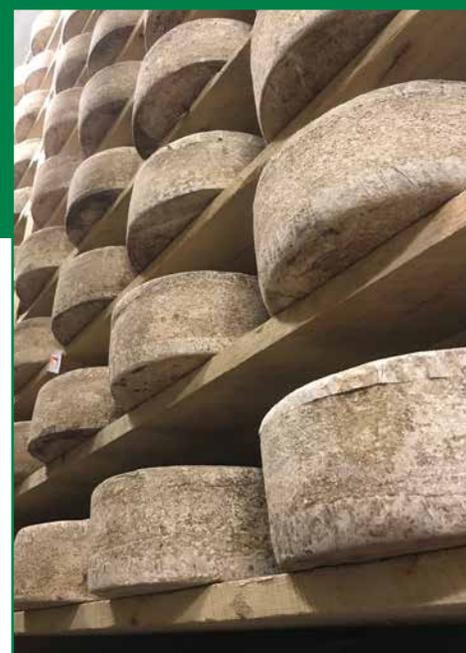
After some early, unexpected success ripening cheese in the cellar of the creamery for neighboring Cabot Creamery, the Kehlers took a leap and invested in a massive underground ripening facility. They experienced how difficult farmstead cheesemaking of cave-aged cheese can be first hand, and jumped at the opportunity to create a piece of infrastructure that could support aspiring cheesemakers nearby. Since its completion in 2008, the Cellars have taken on cheeses from three other farmstead producers who



were all able to then transform their milk into value-added cheese. These farms can focus on quality milk and cheesemaking, while leaving the labor of ripening and sales to the Cellars team.

As we entered into Vault 1 it was made very clear that there are three essentials to cheesemaking: cleanliness; milk quality; environment. Whether it be in the pastures and barns for the cows, the cheesemaking house, or the aging vaults, a deep pride is taken in cleanliness and environment. This keen eye for detail allows for happy cows, immaculate making and aging conditions, appropriate humidity control or complete hay drying for the cows feed to deliver excellent cheese. With these goals being prioritized, Jasper Hill Farm delivers a consistent, rich and delicious flavor that we've come to expect.

It was fascinating to visit each vault and experience varying levels of humidity, many different types of cheese wheels and interact with the different cheese agers and makers who were ensuring the process was exemplary. Outlined here are the cheeses and their locations. Many of these cheeses age for a minimum of 60 days and upwards of two years. Each cheese has a unique process for aging that differs based on the style



of cheese, whether it's raw milk or pasteurized, the type of brine solution, and the humidity within the vault. Note that they will not sell the cheese until it is ready, no matter how long that may take. They never force the aging process, respecting that the natural dynamic process will deliver the best, most consistent and unique results.

**VAULT 1:** Weybridge, Harbison, Little Hosmer, Moses Sleeper. Aging process for their entire lifespan.

**VAULT 2:** Alpha Tolman. Washed with a brine solution during the early aging process.

**VAULT 3:** Alpha Tolman. Flipping, aging, and research during the latter aging process.

**VAULT 4:** Cheddar. For larding, flipping and aging of Cabot and Shelburne Clothbound.

**VAULT 5:** Cheddar. For late brushing, larding in some cases, flipping and aging of Cabot and Cave-Aged Cheddar Blocks.

**VAULT 6:** Winnimere, Willoughby, Oma. Also, research and development cheeses.

**VAULT 7:** Bayley Hazen and Landaff. Salting, flipping, and the entire aging process.

Paul, Alpha Tolman cheesemaker



As we entered Vault #2, we happened upon cheesemaker Paul. He is the person responsible for the making and aging process of Alpha Tolman, or as he stated, “the entire life span.” He makes the cheese at the Vermont Food Venture center and then transports it to the Cellars at Jasper Hill Farm where the cheese begins its aging process in Vault #2. He washes the cheese with a brine solution until it obtains a specific tacky, peach colored exterior, which indicates it’s time for aging in Vault #3. In Vault #3 he and other team members brush and flip the cheese to further the aging process. Alpha Tolman is aged for up to two years and a minimum of 12 months. However, each batch of cheese is a bit different and Paul and other members of the team are consistently tasting throughout the process to ensure they are monitoring its delicious flavors. As an example, the wheels of Alpha Tolman that won Vermont Cheese Madness at our Co-op were aged for just over a year when we received it.

Jasper Hill Farm is excited about technology and sees it as a way to be efficient, grow their business, and continue to offer enjoyable working conditions for their staff. In order to do so they recently implemented a robot in Vault #3 to brush and flip Alpha Tolman. With over 3,000 wheels of Alpha in Vault #3 you can imagine the size and scope of that job, especially since Paul and his team would be doing this job high up on lifts. Paul programs the robot to flip and brush the cheeses in the dark, overnight. It allows for more consistent pressure to be applied to the wheels during brushing—something one cannot obtain from a human hand. This then allows Paul and his team to do the finer work around Jasper Hill Farm such as making, washing, and properly monitoring the first span of the aging process. While technology is new to cheesemaking and may not be met with open arms by all, Paul loves the robot. He views it as something that can elevate their cheesemaking, their ability to provide more excellent

work situations, and improve the quality of their cheeses.

As we spoke of increasing capacity and where Jasper Hill Farm growth was headed Alex was very excited about a goat farm very near Jasper Hill, Bridgman Hill Farm, that they had purchased. With this delicious goat milk, they are testing multiple sizes, styles and offerings with a keen interest in developing a goat milk camembert. Stay tuned for a Jasper Hill goat cheese offering once they have perfected a recipe that will please your taste buds. They are also beginning to offer a line of Vermont-raised and -aged salamis which pair very well with many of their cheeses. Beyond new products they have additional aging space in three different vaults, and they would like to ramp up production where feasible. With more cheese being made they will be able to hire more local folks and hopefully continue to build the local Northeast Kingdom economy.



**Join us on Friday, June 14, 3-6pm and Saturday, June 29, 11am-2pm to meet some of the Jasper Hill Farm team and taste their delicious cheese offerings. Also look for delicious sale pricing throughout June and beyond on many Jasper Hill Farm offerings.**

