

Spring Brook Farm

The past three years, Spring Brook Farm of Reading, Vt., has focused on making its single variety of cheese—Tarentaise—the best it can be. The work has paid off as the All-Jersey cheese is one of the country’s most-heralded cheeses. In 2010, Tarentaise earned a gold medal in its class at the World Championship Cheese Contest in Madison, Wis., the World Jersey Cheese Contest on the Isle of Jersey and the World Cheese Awards in Birmingham, England. At the granddaddy of all U.S. cheese contests—the American Cheese Society Competition—it earned a gold medal in its class and then was named third best of show. Last month, Tarentaise won a gold medal in the U.S. Championship Cheese Contest in Green Bay, Wis.

The Jersey cow and Tarentaise are a match-made-in-heaven. That is because the recipe for Tarentaise was developed with the Jersey cow in mind by John and Janine Putnam, who traveled to France in search of a cheese that would suit Vermont’s climate and milk from their herd of Jersey cows at Thistle Hill Farm. After much research and help from a French cheese maker, they developed Tarentaise, a raw-milk, semi-hard, washed-rind alpine cheese. As demand grew, the Putnams collaborated with Spring Brook Farm to increase production.

Today, cheese is made at both Spring Brook Farm and Thistle Hill Farm, with subtle differences in flavor between the two cheeses. The head cheese maker at Spring Brook Farm is Jeremy Stephenson.

Tarentaise is made in a state-of-the-art alpine cheese making facility on the farm. Milk flows from the barn to the cheese house in a pipeline by means of gravity so the delicate structure of the milk is maintained. Cheese is stirred by hand in French copper vats using no preservatives, synthetic flavors, additives or wax. Cheese wheels are aged at a steady



temperature of 50 degrees for a minimum of five months. The wheels are turned twice a week and washed with a morge solution which contains a culture that is beneficial to the ripening of the cheese. Before they leave the room, they will be turned at least 60 times. Access to the cheese room is restricted so harmful bacteria are not introduced.

Cheese is sold to distributors that sell it to specialty food shops and grocery chains across the country, including Whole Foods. Spring Brook Farm also sells direct to a number of specialty food shops and stores, including the high-end grocer, Wegmans.

The Registered Jersey herd at Spring Brook Farm has a purpose in addition to supplying milk for award-winning Tarentaise. It also is a teaching tool for the Farms for City Kids Foundation, which has been providing a rural experience for pre-adolescents from New York, Boston and Vermont since 1994.

The herd is enrolled on REAP and has a 2010 lactation average of 17,834 lbs. milk, 854 lbs. fat and 634 lbs. protein. All of the milk produced by the 36 milking cows is used to create Tarentaise at a yield of about 6,500 lbs. cheese annually.

The 1,000-acre farm in the central part of the state is also home to other livestock, including horses, sheep, goats, chickens, turkeys and pigs. The farm also raises vegetables and fruits and makes 400-600 gallons of maple syrup each year. Spring Brook Farm has received a Dairy of Distinction award from the Vermont Department of Agriculture for its beautiful farmstead every year since 2006 and earned a perfect score in 2010.



First place award-winner Tarentaise at the 2013 American Cheese Society Festival of Cheese