



**Fleur de Teche, Bittersweet Plantation Dairy**, Gonzales, LA: As with the Vache Santé, this is a triple-cream cheese with a thin, flavorful rind. Creamy but not heavy, with a light sweetness on the back end. It doesn't coat the mouth—surprising for a triple-cream—and it is slightly astringent. Try a bite wrapped in a basil leaf.  
[www.jfolses.com/bittersweet\\_dairy](http://www.jfolses.com/bittersweet_dairy)

**Fresh Chèvre, Bonnie Blue Farms**, Waynesboro, TN: Mild, grassy and approachable. Not too pungent or “goaty.” This is a good choice for those who are new to goat cheese. Its cheesecake-like texture contains no grain or grit. A good dessert cheese that goes well with lavender. Use a fork to “grate” it over your salad.  
[www.bonniebluefarm.com](http://www.bonniebluefarm.com)

**Kentucky Bleu, Kenny's Farmhouse Cheese**, Austin, KY: Pink rind. The “blue” is in the rind rather than inside. It is soft and creamy, not crumbly, with a Fontina-like texture. Great to slice and add to a bleu-cheeseburger.  
[www.kennyscountrycheese.com](http://www.kennyscountrycheese.com)

**Barren County Bleu, Kenny's Farmhouse Cheese**, Austin, KY: A crowd pleaser with great bleu flavor, this cheese is creamy and crunchy and lightly crumbly. This is a raw milk cheese, so when it sits out for a bit, it oxidizes and turns pink and yellow, which does nothing to diminish its flavor.  
[www.kennyscountrycheese.com](http://www.kennyscountrycheese.com)

**Cumberland, Locust Grove Farm**, Knoxville, TN: Its garlic, peppercorns and other seasonings make this sheep's milk cheese a good choice for cooking or combining, rather than for eating out-of-hand.  
[www.locustgrovefarm.net](http://www.locustgrovefarm.net)

**Edam, Mississippi State University**, Starkville, MS: This bright orange, wax-encased cheese is milder than some edams; mellow and creamy with a slight chalky edge. Good for mac and cheese and grilled cheese sandwiches.  
[www.mscheese.com](http://www.mscheese.com)

**La Mancha, Locust Grove Farm**, Knoxville, TN: Similar to Spain's famous manchego but softer and creamier. Still, it is firmer than the Appalachian Spring, both of which are made from raw sheep milk.

**Appalachian Spring, Locust Grove Farm**, Knoxville, TN: Smooth, nutty and flavorful gouda-style, sheep's milk cheese. Milder than some sheep's milk cheeses and not as salty. Good for eating out of hand.  
[www.locustgrovefarm.net](http://www.locustgrovefarm.net)

**Montrachet-Style Goat Cheese Log, Fromagerie Bel Chevre**, Elkmont, AL: This American Cheese Society first place award-winning cheese is a bit stronger and drier than the Bonnie Blue. Like most goat cheeses it is tart and chalky—more of what most people expect when they think of goat cheese. A good choice for the dedicated goat cheese lover.  
[www.bellechevre.com](http://www.bellechevre.com)

**Vache Santé (Holy Cow), Bittersweet Plantation Dairy**, Gonzales, LA: This triple-cream cheese is great with honey and nuts, making it a natural for the dessert plate. Its bloomy rind is thin and not at all off-putting for those who usually dodge the rind.  
[www.jfolses.com/bittersweet\\_dairy](http://www.jfolses.com/bittersweet_dairy)

# A WHEY WITH CHEESE

BY CAROL PENN-ROMINE

**R**adio and television pioneer Clifton Fadiman famously proclaimed cheese “milk’s leap toward immortality.” That probably sounds high-falutin’ if your knowledge of cheese begins and ends in a particular grocery aisle. You know the one: It glows an eerie, unnatural orange, lined with cellophane-wrapped slices of a substance that many people slap onto their sandwiches and burgers with nary a second thought. A considerable portion of it fesses up to being a “cheese-like product,” and some of it technically is cheese. It may do the job gluing together a burger so it doesn’t come apart when dropped, but this is hardly a glowing endorsement.

For those who realize there’s more to cheese, thoughts of American-made cheese typically drift toward the bounties of Wisconsin, Vermont, and California. The South isn’t usually the first place that comes to mind. Why is this?

We don’t see too many sheep and goats around the Mid-South, and cattle are raised

more for beef than for dairy. Plus we tend to associate cheese making with cooler climes. A video produced by the Southern Foodways Alliance notes that while many Southern towns historically had creameries, they didn’t engage in the production of cheese. In fact, cheese making is a relatively new pursuit in the South.

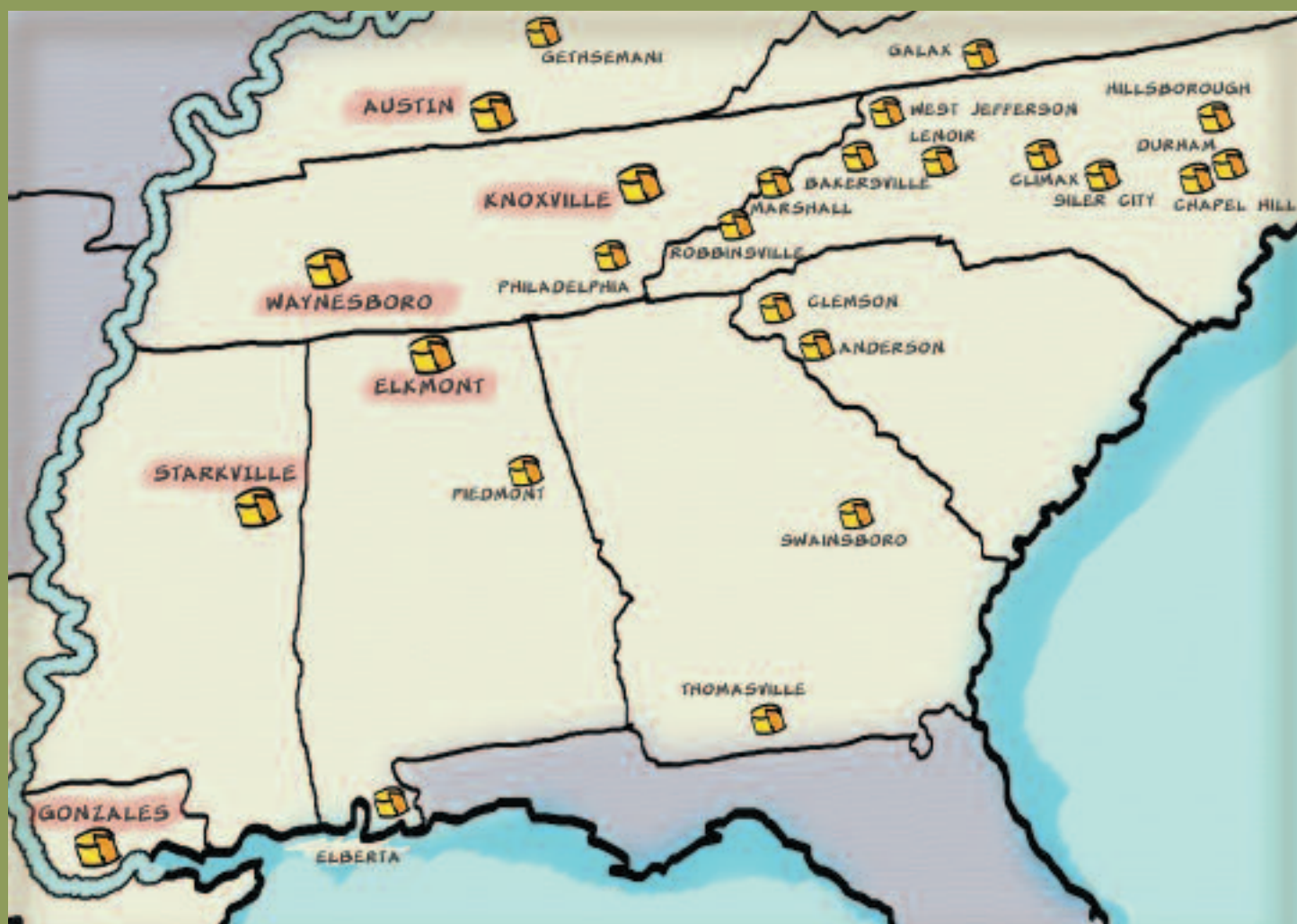
Vicki Dunaway, publisher of *Creamline*, a newsletter which serves artisan milk processors, and creator of [www.smalldairy.com](http://www.smalldairy.com), explains that back in pre-refrigeration days, the hot, humid, and insect-ridden South was not well-suited to safely and successfully producing cheese. She recalls that her grandmother, who grew up on a Virginia dairy farm spoke of eating “clabber,” a dry-curd cottage cheese typically made from cow’s milk and consumed fresh. With refrigeration improvements after World War I came a growing interest in serious cheese production, although Dunaway posits that rising demand for local sources of protein might have had something to do with increased interest in making cheese in the

South during the 1930s and 40s. Before then, northern producers would receive bulk shipments of milk from the South, make cheese from it and then sell the finished product back to those who had provided the milk.

Ashe County Cheese in North Carolina began production in 1930, followed by the agricultural campuses of Mississippi State University in 1938 and Clemson University in 1941. French Trappist monks, who migrated to North America in 1848 and brought their Port-Salut cheese-making traditions with them, began selling their Gethsemani Farms cheese to the public in 1945. Still, cheese making didn’t really catch on in the South until a few decades later. A handful of producers opened for business in the 1980s and a few more in the 1990s. The past decade has seen the addition of more than a dozen new producers, as the interest in artisanal cheese catches on.

While a respectable amount of Southern cheese is produced from cow’s milk and a smattering from sheep’s milk, most is made with goat’s milk, thanks to changing percep-





# Southern Cheesemakers

MAP ILLUSTRATION BY ANDREW ROMINE

## Gethsemani Farms

3642 Monks Road, Gethsemani, KY  
800-549-0912 • [www.gethsemanifarms.org](http://www.gethsemanifarms.org)  
Trappist semi-soft cheeses

## Sweetwater Valley Farms

17988 W. Lee Highway, Philadelphia, TN  
865-458-9192 • [www.sweetwatervalley.com](http://www.sweetwatervalley.com)  
Cow's milk cheeses—cheddar, colby, jack

## Mountain View Dairy

94 Masters Way, Piedmont, AL  
256-591-1466 • [www.mvcheesery.com](http://www.mvcheesery.com)  
Goat's milk cheeses—feta and chevre

## Sweet Home Farm

27107 Schoen Rd., Elberta, AL  
251-986-5663  
On-farm sales only cow's milk cheeses

## Sweet Grass Dairy

19635 US Highway 19 N, Thomasville, GA  
229-227-0752 • [www.sweetgrassdairy.com](http://www.sweetgrassdairy.com)  
Cow and goat's milk cheese—tomme, green hill camembert-style, blue

## Flat Creek Lodge

367 Bishop Chapel Church Rd., Swainsboro, GA  
478-237-3474 • [www.flatcreeklodge.com](http://www.flatcreeklodge.com)  
Sheep and cow's milk cheese—natural rind cheddar, farmstead blue, feta and leiden

## Meadow Creek Dairy

6380 Meadow Creek Rd., Galax, VA  
276-236-2776 • [www.meadowcreekdairy.com](http://www.meadowcreekdairy.com)  
Cow's milk cheeses—Grayson (similar to Tagglio or French Livarot), Appalachian and Mountaineer

## Split Creek Farm

3806 Centerville Rd., Anderson, SC  
864-287-3921 • [www.splitcreek.com](http://www.splitcreek.com)  
Goat's milk cheese, fudge and yogurt

## Clemson Blue Cheese

Clemson University • 800-599-0181  
Cow's milk blue cheese available in wheels, wedges and crumbles

## Yellow Branch Farm

36 Yellow Branch Circle, Robbinsville, NC  
828-479-6710 • [www.yellowbranch.com](http://www.yellowbranch.com)  
Cow's milk farmstead, natural rind cheese

## Spinning Spider Creamery

4717 East Fork Rd., Marshall, NC  
828-689-5508 • [www.spinningspidercreamery.com](http://www.spinningspidercreamery.com)  
Goat's milk cheeses—fresh, bloomy rind, and raw milk aged

## OakMoon Creamery and Farm

452 Roan View Drive, Bakersville, NC  
828-688-4683  
Rustic aged goat cheeses and fresh goat cheese

## Ripshin Goat Dairy

1865 Highway 268, Lenoir, NC • 828-758-0906  
On dairy sales only—goat's milk cheeses

## Ashe County Cheese

106 E Main Street, West Jefferson, NC  
800-445-1378 • [www.ashecountycheese.com](http://www.ashecountycheese.com)  
Cow's milk cheese (cheddar) and butter

#### Goat Lady Dairy

3515 Jess Hackett Rd., Climax, NC  
336-824-2163 • [www.goatladydairy.com](http://www.goatladydairy.com)  
Goat's milk—fresh and feta cheese

#### Celebrity Dairy

2106 Mt. Vernon-Hickory Mtn Rd., Siler City, NC  
919-742-5176 • [www.celebritydairy.com](http://www.celebritydairy.com)  
On farm sales only—goat's milk cheeses

#### Hillsborough Cheese Company

3121 Rippy Lane, Hillsborough, NC  
919-644-6358 • On farm sales only—goat and cow's milk cheeses

#### La Casa dei Formaggi

3409 Cromwell Rd., Durham NC  
919-403-8775 • [lacasadeiformaggi.blogspot.com](http://lacasadeiformaggi.blogspot.com)  
On farm sales only—Raw milk semi-hard cheeses

#### Chapel Hill Creamery

615 Chapel Hill Creamery Road, Chapel Hill, NC  
919-967-3757  
On farm sales only • Cow's milk mozzarella, camembert, feta and farmers' cheese

Featured on the cheeseboard on page 16  
(highlighted in pink on the map):

**Bittersweet Plantation** Gonzales, LA  
800-256-2433 • [www.jfolse.com/bittersweet\\_dairy](http://www.jfolse.com/bittersweet_dairy)  
Goat, cow and mixed milk cheese, yogurt, butter

**Bonnie Blue Farms** Waynesboro, TN  
931-722-4628 • [www.bonniebluefarm.com](http://www.bonniebluefarm.com)  
Goats milk cheeses available at the Memphis Farmers' Market and at Miss Cordelia's Grocery

**Kenny's Farmhouse Cheese**, Austin, KY  
888-571-4029 • [www.kennyscountrycheese.com](http://www.kennyscountrycheese.com)  
Cow's milk cheddar, blue, jack, asiago, colby, gouda, havarti and swiss

**Locust Grove**, Knoxville, TN  
865-388-4123 • [www.locustgrovefarm.net](http://www.locustgrovefarm.net)  
Sheep's milk cheeses

**Fromagerie Bel Chevre**, Elkmont, AL  
256-423-2238 • [www.bellechevre.com](http://www.bellechevre.com)  
Goat's milk cheeses  
Available at Whole Foods Market, Memphis

**Mississippi State Cheese**, Starkville, MS  
662-325-2338 • [www.mscheese.com](http://www.mscheese.com)  
Edam and cheddar

tions. As Dunaway explains, goats used to be kept primarily for brush cleanup, so the idea of consuming milk products from nature's little vacuum cleaners didn't hold much appeal for the average Southerner. Add to this the poverty perception: In the past, goat owners tended to be those who were too poor to afford cattle or the land required for their grazing. Anyone who consumed goat's milk and cheese most likely did so out of necessity rather than preference.

Today, however, there is increased interest in raising goats for cheese, as consumers on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line clamor for it. Goat cheese features prominently on many a high-class restaurant menu—seared and served on salad, crumbled over pizza and stuffed into everything from chicken to cannoli. Call it goat *chic*, if you will.

The very aspects of goat ownership that once branded people as being poor now make it easier for artisans to get into the business. Goats are less expensive to buy, feed, and care for than cattle or sheep, and they don't require significant grazing land. Since the back-to-the-land trend began in the 1970s, a lot of people have begun making goat cheese at home, and Dunaway notes that there has been a noticeable shift among those hobbyists who now make cheese professionally.

"It may be because some of the regulations were more lax in the South, because there just weren't many small-scale cheese makers around to regulate," she says. "In fact, in Virginia, for a long time 'milk' was defined as the product of a bovine in cheese regulations, so the goat cheese makers believed they didn't have to comply with processing rules, although this has been corrected in recent years."

Refreshingly, the emphasis seems not to be on expansion and on being big, bigger, biggest.

"In North Carolina, Goat Lady Dairy and Celebrity Dairy have been instrumental in helping other goat cheese producers in the region get started," says Dunaway, "largely because neither dairy wanted to grow too

much and because there was plenty of market." She notes in particular the robust tradition of producing show goats in North Carolina, which has encouraged the exchange of information among producers of goat's milk, that is, when they're not busy competing against each other in county fairs.

So now we can make up for lost time. One taste of a good handcrafted cheese—whether it is made of cow's, sheep's or goat's milk—is sufficient to convince the average fromage lover to forswear all mass-produced facsimiles in favor of quality cheese made in small batches by hand and close to home. *eM*

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Carol Penn-Romine grew up on a farm in northwest Tennessee and lived in Memphis for 15 years before moving to Los Angeles, where she is a chef, writer and culinary tour guide. You can visit her company, Hungry Passport Culinary Adventures at [www.hungrypassport.com](http://www.hungrypassport.com).



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