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New Study Offers Insight into the Business of Artisan and Specialty Cheese

Denver, CO (January 17, 2019) – The artisan and specialty cheese industry is evolving, according to the American Cheese Society’s (ACS) newly released reports from its [State of the U.S. Artisan/Specialty Cheese Industry Survey](#). There are nearly 1,000 artisan and specialty cheesemakers in the U.S., researchers found, a number which has increased significantly over past decades. Seventy-six percent of cheesemakers reported annual cheese production of 50,000 pounds or less, indicating that this growing industry largely consists of smaller businesses.

Cheese continues to top U.S. specialty food sales at more than 4 billion dollars in 2017, according to the Specialty Food Association. Yet the artisan and specialty cheese industry is not without challenges – despite overall growth, just 80 percent of cheesemakers operated profitably in 2017, and average profit margins were slim. Ninety-two percent of cheesemakers reported that maintaining profitability is an area of concern. Unsurprisingly, cheesemakers that reported a higher production volume averaged higher gross revenue. However, strong revenue doesn’t necessarily translate to profit. The higher the cheesemaker’s gross revenue, the lower the profit margin on average – evidence that bigger isn’t necessarily better in the artisan and specialty cheese industry.

“Cheesemakers put an incredible amount of passion into creating their products, and these in-depth surveys show just how challenging that work can be,” says ACS Executive Director Nora Weiser. “Unique cheeses made using traditional methods are driving growth in the cheese sector, and engaged consumers who care about local, artisan products are supporting this growth.”

ACS’s reports share findings in the following areas:

- 1) **Report of Key Findings:** Contains highlights from the 2018 survey, including data on demographics, production, marketing, food safety, industry participation, and attitudes and perceptions. (17 pages)
- 2) **Benchmarking Report:** Designed to help cheesemakers assess how their businesses have performed relative to other producers, this report includes data on geography, production methods, production volume, milk types, marketing and distribution practices, and profitability. (30 pages)
- 3) **Food Safety Report:** Includes food safety-related findings such as milk type, aging practices, food safety planning, milk testing, regulatory knowledge, and inspections and audits. (21 pages)

Digital copies of each report are now available for purchase on the [ACS website](#) at the following rates:

- ACS members: \$50 per report, \$125 for all 3 reports
- Non-members: \$295 per report, \$750 for all 3 reports

The first ACS State of the U.S. Artisan/Specialty Cheese Industry Survey was conducted in 2016. The resulting [Report of Key Findings](#) provided a snapshot of the small businesses that form the community of artisan, farmstead, and specialty cheesemakers in America. With the release of its 2018 reports, ACS is expanding significantly upon what has historically been a limited field of data available about these producers.

Researchers at the University of Missouri conducted the biennial survey on behalf of ACS. Funding for the survey was provided by the nonprofit American Cheese Education Foundation. To encourage broad participation, producers who completed the 2018 survey receive a complimentary digital copy of the Benchmarking Report.

Digital copies may be purchased, and media may request a complimentary Report of Key Findings by contacting ACS at 720-328-2788 or [info\(at\)cheesesociety.org](mailto:info(at)cheesesociety.org).

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About the American Cheese Society (ACS)

ACS is the leading organization supporting the understanding, appreciation, and promotion of artisan, farmstead, and specialty cheeses produced in the Americas. At 2,400 members strong, ACS provides advocacy, education, business development, and networking opportunities for cheesemakers, retailers, enthusiasts, and extended industry. ACS strives to continually raise the quality and availability of cheese in the Americas. ACS's certification programs, including the ACS CCP® Exam and the ACS T.A.S.T.E. Test™, encourage improved standards of comprehensive cheese knowledge and service in the cheese industry. Learn more: www.cheesesociety.org.