



SURVEY OF CHEESE INDUSTRY REVEALS ECONOMIC IMPACT OF PANDEMIC

American Cheese Society urges consumers to think small, buy locally and online to support cheesemakers and farmers

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DENVER, CO – In an effort to better understand the economic impact of coronavirus on the cheese industry, the [American Cheese Society \(ACS\)](#) released a survey to members across the nation titled “COVID-19 Pandemic Impact on the American Cheese Industry: Business Operations.” Conducted in May 2020, the survey compiled data from nearly 1,000 members including producers, distributors and buyers.

“It is important for us to understand how our members and their businesses are coping during this pandemic, as well as how ACS and consumers can help support the industry,” said Marianne Smukowski, board president of ACS. “The unwavering dedication that the community has had in ensuring the safety of employees and consumers has been heartening during these uncertain times.”

Across the industry, members are feeling the impacts of COVID-19. Their distribution channels – often restaurants and other food services – have been decimated by the closures related to the virus. With a reported 58 percent decrease in overall sales, many businesses do not have the financial reserves to sustain themselves for months. Managing cash flow, obtaining financial support, as well as managing staff adds complex challenges that have resulted in 71 percent of survey takers applying for debt relief or financial assistance to stay afloat in this new reality. Thirty percent have either laid off or furloughed employees, and 48 percent have reduced employee hours.

In many cases, members are using this as an opportunity to pause and improve business models, as well as explore new methods to package and distribute their products directly to consumers. The survey shows that 57.5 percent have identified new distribution methods for their products with 51 percent seeing an increase in overall e-commerce sales.

Since COVID-19 shuttered the country, ACS has provided a wealth of resources to support the

cheese industry and has made the decision to shift its previously canceled 37th Annual Conference & Competition to a virtual event; more details will be provided at a later date. Other resources include weekly Fireside Chats with executive director Karen Lundquist, information on food safety, a letter template for members to write to their local representatives, shifting business models, financial relief, navigating home and personal life, and more.

“At the ACS, we are acting quickly to share the creative work our members are doing to sustain their businesses and their communities,” said Lundquist. “Building awareness of the importance of sharing local cheesemakers’ critical role in our food chain, bringing finely crafted products from farm to table, and preserving our American artisan cheese traditions.”

Looking to the future, ACS members agree that there will be a new normal for the artisan cheese industry. Rising to the challenge to find new ways to innovate, they hope to see a positive impact from economic stimulus packages and community efforts on their operations.

American Cheese Society will continue its mission to support its members through developing educational resources and safe networking opportunities to connect the community during these difficult times. In celebration of May’s American Cheese Month, the organization asks consumers to think small and buy locally from artisans and producers.

For American Cheese Society Resources on COVID-19 visit cheesesociety.org/addressing-covid-19/.

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About the American Cheese Society (ACS)

The American Cheese Society’s mission is to build understanding, appreciation, and promotion of artisan, farmstead, and specialty cheeses produced in the Americas. At 2,300 members strong, ACS leads the cheese community through advocacy, education, business development, and networking opportunities. The organization was founded in 1983 by cheesemakers and for cheesemakers. Today, they measure their success by that of their members and the extended industry all while evolving to meet the changing needs of a challenging climate. By offering relevant resources and support, ACS is dedicated to the health and welfare of their constituents throughout the United States. ACS is a 501(c)6 nonprofit association headquartered in Denver, Colo. To learn more about ACS, please visit <http://www.cheesesociety.org> or contact 720-328-2788.