

# REAL CALIFORNIA CHEESE

*A Foodservice Favorite Enjoyed All Day Long*



California has produced cheese for as long as it has made wine – more than 200 years. And just like the state’s wines, California cheeses are among the finest in the world. California’s cheesemakers delight palates with new cheese varieties and lead the way in the American cheesemaking renaissance.

Today, more than 50 California cow’s milk cheesemakers produce 250 varieties and styles of award-winning cheeses available and used by restaurant operators and chefs through the U.S. and the world.

## CHEESE FACTS

California cheeses vary in style, flavor and age, but they fall into five main categories: fresh (unripened), soft and soft-ripened, semi-hard and hard, very hard, and spiced and flavored. California produces a wide range of cheeses from Monterey Jack, Mozzarella and Cheddar to artisan blues and Brie.

California is the second largest cheese producing state in the nation, responsible for more than 2.5 billion pounds of cheese in 2017.



California is the largest producer of Mozzarella and Hispanic-style cheeses. The state also produces more Monterey Jack than any other state. This California original is a descendant of a type of cheese produced in the California missions more than 200 years ago.



The Real California Milk seal ensures that the cheese was made using 100% California milk from California’s more than 1,300 dairy farm families.



## STORAGE & HANDLING

When purchasing cheese, make sure the package is properly and tightly wrapped and sealed, and that the cheese inside looks appealing. Keep cheeses in the refrigerator until needed. Once opened, follow these simple guidelines for storing cheese:

- Fresh cheeses can last for a few weeks if properly stored; if you detect mold on a fresh cheese, discard it.
- Soft-ripened cheese will keep for up to several weeks if properly stored. If you plan to use a soft-ripened cheese within a few days, store it in the refrigerator in its original plastic wrap.
- Semi-hard and hard cheeses can remain enjoyable for four to eight weeks if properly stored. If they’re not going to be used in a few days, re-wrap the cheese in parchment or wax paper, which allows the cheese to breathe. Then store the cheese in a covered plastic container or an open resealable-type food storage bag and open the container a few times a week to let in fresh air.
- Very hard cheeses (typically used for grating) are much lower in moisture than other cheeses and will keep for months stored in the same way as semi-hard cheeses.



## FOODSERVICE APPLICATIONS

### Back-of-the-House

Cheese can bring bold flavors and variety to any foodservice daypart and creates an easy way to tap into popular food trends. Use multiple cheeses to add layers of flavor throughout the menu.

Weight is the best method to measure cheese for recipes: 4 ounces of natural cheese equals 1 cup shredded cheese (1 ounce = 1/4 cup).

To melt cheese, use a low temperature for a short time. Hard cheeses, which can withstand higher cooking temperatures versus soft cheeses, are ideal for cooking and baking. Shred, grate or cut cheese into pieces before melting. Minimize stirring, which can cause cheese to become lumpy.

Add cheese toppings to food at the end of baking or broiling and heat just long enough to melt.

Soft and soft-ripened cheeses have enough water to make them blend well into soufflés, custards and fillings; remove the rind before using.

### Front-of-the-House

Foodservice operators have expanded their use of California cheese courses, plates and boards as appetizers and desserts. Serve several varieties in one to 2 oz. servings and include a variation of flavors and textures from fresh to aged.

## CHEESEMAKING PROCESS

Cheese is made by adding acid or starter culture to milk, this causes the sugar in the milk to ferment. Curdling (coagulating) milk causes it to separate into semi-solid curds and liquid whey. The type of cheese produced is determined by a number of factors including the culture, the amount of whey in the curds, how the curd is worked after whey drainage, the amount of pressure applied to the curds, and if the cheese is intended to be fresh or aged.

Fresh cheeses are made from uncooked or cooked curd, drained of whey and formed. For aged cheese, the curds are stirred and, in some cases, heated; then the whey is drained and the curds are salted and pressed to form cheese. Fresh cheeses are consumed immediately while aged cheeses can be ripened for a period of time ranging from weeks to years.

Cheese can be made from whole milk (full fat), 2 percent fat (reduced-fat), 1 percent fat (low-fat), nonfat or a combination of these milks. Some cheeses require that the milk be enriched with cream. Most cheese in the U.S. is made from cow's milk.

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# SPECIALTY CHEESE

*Unique Varieties & Styles a Boon to Foodservice Operators*



California is the nation's leading milk producer and the second-largest producer of cheese – it's home to more than 50 cheesemakers who produce 250 varieties and styles of cow's milk cheeses that carry the Real California Milk seal. These cheeses vary in style, flavor and aging – they range from soft to hard, can be spiced and flavored, washed rind and include artisan, American, European, Hispanic-style and Middle Eastern varieties.

When it comes to cheese, American consumers want authenticity, bold flavor, snack sophistication, information to-go, freshness, tradition and performance. Foodservice operators are building on these opportunities to offer more menu choices with cheese, and also taking advantage of consumer desire for more ethnic and adventurous meal options by serving dishes featuring Real California specialty cheeses.

## SPECIALTY CHEESE FACTS

Of the 250 varieties and styles of cow's milk cheese produced in California, more than 100 are spiced and flavored varieties.

Examples of the most popular Real California specialty cheeses include: Feta, Blue, Burrata, Gouda, Asiago, Mediterranean String Cheese and Ackawi.

The Real California Milk seal ensures that the cheese was made using 100% California milk from California's more than 1,300 dairy farm families.



## STORAGE & HANDLING

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- Fresh cheeses can last for a few weeks if properly stored; if you detect mold on a fresh cheese, discard it.
- Soft-ripened cheese will keep for up to several weeks if properly stored. If you plan to use a soft-ripened cheese within a few days, store it in the refrigerator in its original plastic wrap.
- Semi-hard and hard cheeses can remain enjoyable for four to eight weeks if properly stored. If they're not going to be used in a few days, re-wrap the cheese in parchment or wax paper, which allows the cheese to breathe. Then store the cheese in a covered plastic container or a resealable-type food storage bag and open it a few times a week to let in fresh air.
- Very hard cheeses (typically used for grating) are much lower in moisture than other cheeses and will keep for months stored in the same way as semi-hard cheeses.



## FOODSERVICE APPLICATIONS

### Back-of-the-House

Specialty cheeses bring richness, interest, and craveability to any foodservice daypart. For example, when a menu calls for grated Parmesan, try branching out to other hard California cheeses like aged Gouda, Asiago or Dry Jack. From pastas to pizzas, it's an easy way to bring interest to the menu and the plate.

A best practice is to add cheese as the last ingredient in a sauce or soup and heat until melted. Avoid heating at too high a temperature or the cheese may become rubbery or stringy. Also, minimize stirring, which can cause the cheese to become lumpy. Blue and pungent cheeses should be added sparingly to recipes since they tend to melt quickly and burn easily. In baking, chill cheese before grating and adding to pastry dough.

Most diners enjoy some type of cheese in or on their salad. Expand their options by using bold, distinctive cheeses such as Feta and Pepper Jack. Use flavor-forward cheeses to kick up the flavor, richness, and indulgence factors.

### Front-of-the-House

Patrons enjoy sharing so why not offer them a cheese course, which is appearing on restaurant menus as both an appetizer and dessert. With their intoxicatingly rich, and complex flavor, Real California cheese plates can create a memorable experience with Blue, Teleme, Burrata and many other varieties mixed in charcuterie meats, artisan honey, chutney or toasted nuts.

## WHAT'S TRENDING

### Customers Know Best

Hot and spicy flavors dominate trend forecasts for flavored cheeses such as hot pepper, garlic, habanero and pesto. Operators should look for new globally-inspired spice blends to join the mix including Latin American, Middle Eastern, Southeast Asian and Mediterranean.

### Burrata in a Growth Spurt

Burrata has broken out on burger menus, such as the Burrata Burger with smoked pancetta and caramelized onions. Other burgers feature a version accompanied by Portobello mushrooms, basil-almond pesto, baby arugula and heirloom tomatoes. Chefs are taking the classic heirloom tomato and Burrata salads and dressing them up with prosciutto, arugula and balsamic vinegar. Following on the popularity of Avocado toast, add heirloom tomato and Burrata toast to your menu.

### Hispanic-Style Cheeses Sizzle

The cuisines of Mexico, Central America and South America are on trend, and California dairy products from these regions have a lot of appeal with American consumers. Loaded fries and potato chips as starters are popular, so consider adding an ethnic slant by way of Hispanic-style cheeses. Substituting Hispanic-style dairy products in traditional salads is one way to spice up a classic Caesar salad with Cotija instead of Parmesan.

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# CHEESE – AMERICAN ORIGINALS

*California Milk Provides a Home-Grown Personality*



Cheese is the foundation for classic restaurant favorites like grilled cheese, mac & cheese, nachos and cheeseburgers. Cheddar, Colby and Monterey Jack are mainstays in the back-of-the-house at all types of restaurants – their versatility and availability make them ideal for main courses, appetizers and snacking. For example, Cheddar is offered as mild, sharp, or extra-sharp, and also white or yellow, giving chefs great flexibility in recipes. Monterey Jack has many flavored versions with Pepper Jack emerging as a key ingredient to give a spicy kick in many dishes.

## AMERICAN ORIGINALS FACTS

California cheesemakers produce more than 350 million pounds of **Cheddar** annually. It's not a type of cheese, but rather a process. The curds are formed into sheets and stacked to promote draining of the whey. They're then cut into little pieces and pressed into molds for uniformity of texture and shape. And don't judge a Cheddar by its color – the orange coloring of many versions comes from annatto seeds; many Cheddars are as creamy-white as the milk from which they came.

**Colby** is similar to mellow cheddar but is not “cheddared.” The whey is replaced by water during cooking, reducing the acidity of the curd and resulting in a moister, milder cheese. Longhorn is Colby with a traditional half-moon shape.

Originating with Franciscan friars in the 18th century, **Monterey Jack** got its name from David Jacks, a land baron who began acquiring farms in Monterey, Calif. He began selling the cheese, queso blanco pais, which became known as Jack's Cheese, and then Monterey Jack's cheese. Today, the cheese is semi-hard, mild and slightly nutty with excellent meltability.

**Dry Jack** was a happy accident that occurred in 1915, when a San Francisco cheese seller forgot about some wheels of fresh Jack in storage. When discovered, they were hard, dry and salty, making them perfect for grating. It's referred to as “America's Parmesan.”

**Teleme** was also invented in Northern California in the early 1900's. The rich flavor, texture and character of the cheese add a tangy burst to dishes from pizza to polenta.



### STORAGE & HANDLING

Most cheeses will maintain their flavor and quality in a refrigerator for extended periods, but use the following guidelines for storing cheese after opening:

- Fresh cheeses should be treated just like milk and kept refrigerated. Many fresh cheeses can last for a few weeks if properly stored, so note the freshness date on the package before you buy. If you detect mold on a fresh cheese, discard it.
- Semi-hard and hard cheeses will last four to eight weeks if properly stored. After opening consider removing the original plastic wrap and re-wrapping in parchment or wax paper, which allows the cheese to breathe.



## FOODSERVICE APPLICATIONS

### Back-of-the-House

From traditional appetizers to sweet desserts, chefs are finding numerous ways to incorporate American originals in their recipes. Add tuna melts, cheese fries, fondue, quesadillas and croquettes to the menu. American cheeses are also great as toppings for salads and baked potatoes, and shredded on Mexican foods. Dry Jack adds a jolt of flavor to salads. Or stuff a melting cheese into the crust of pizzas.

### Front-of-the-House

Nothing says California like a selection of hand-crafted cheeses. Elegant California cheeses are being showcased in cheese courses all across the foodservice spectrum – at restaurants, of course, but also with caterers, delis and in retail. The cheese offerings are offered as appetizers, mid-meal and dessert. California's artisan cheeses bring flavor and luxury to any customer experience.



## WHAT'S TRENDING

### Hot, Hot, Hot

Chefs know that the natural creaminess of cheese is the perfect balance to add heat. In many food categories spicy is hot and the demand for peppers in American-style cheeses keeps growing. Whether Jalapeño, Ghost Peppers or Habanero, foodservice operators are adding spicy jacks and Cheddars as sandwich toppings, stir-ins for soups or melted on potatoes.

### Cooking with Teleme

Chefs are discovering the quintessential California cheese, Teleme, adding the creamy, luscious cheese to hamburgers, risotto and pizza. It's also delightful with pears or apples as a dessert with a drizzle of honey. Or as a light breakfast on toast or a croissant.

### Elevated Cheese Curds

These bouncy chunks of curdled milk are signature ingredients in poutine, a mound of fries topped with gravy and cheese curds. The once-humble and homey poutine is now being dressed up by chefs who incorporate such high-end ingredients braised short ribs, beef brisket and pulled pork.

### Flavored Cheese

Consumers at retail have made smoked cheese, as well as herb- and vegetable-flavored cheeses, category killers. Chefs are discovering new ways to mellow out American Classic cheeses by adding these subtler flavors to dishes.

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# ITALIAN-STYLE CHEESES

*A Love Affair with Mozzarella and More*



According to a 2018 USDA report, Italian-style cheeses accounted for over five billion pounds of the 12+ billion pounds of cheese produced in the United States in 2017. The proliferation of pizza on menus across the country – no longer limited to Italian restaurants – has helped expand the market for not only Mozzarella, but also Provolone and Parmesan.

Overall, Mozzarella is the No. 1-produced cheese in the country. California cheese processors produced 1.4 billion pounds of this Italian favorite, making the state America's top Mozzarella producer. Within California, Mozzarella accounts for about 59% of the total cheese production. While it has long been known as “the pizza cheese,” foodservice operators are finding multiple ways to incorporate milky, soft, luscious fresh Mozzarella and the firmer, drier, grate-able versions into dishes.

## ITALIAN-STYLE CHEESE FACTS

**Mozzarella** is made in fresh and drier styles; the latter can also be smoked. Both are produced with whole milk or part-skim milk.

**Parmesan** comes from the word “Parmesano,” which means “of or from Parma” in Italian. Parmesan-style cheese made in America incorporates the Old World practices: Cow's milk curds are cooked, salted or brined, and allowed to age for a minimum of 10 months. The longer the aging, the deeper the flavor.

**Provolone** is a semi-hard cheese with a mild, smoky flavor. It gets firmer as it ages. And like Mozzarella, it's a pulled or stretched-curd cheese, and comes in two varieties: dolce (mild, aged 2 to 3 three months) and piccante (aged 6 to 12 months and with a sharp taste).

**Asiago** and **Romano**, which are Italian-style cheeses with a sharp, caramel flavor, are used to add depth of flavor to lasagna and upscale macaroni and cheese, sprinkled on pizza crust, and as grating alternatives to Parmesan.



## STORAGE & HANDLING

Most cheeses will maintain their flavor and quality in a refrigerator for extended periods, but use the following guidelines for storing cheese after opening:

- Fresh cheeses should be treated just like milk and kept refrigerated. Many fresh cheeses can last for a few weeks if properly stored, so note the freshness date on the package before you buy. If you detect mold on a fresh cheese, discard it.
- Soft-ripened cheeses will keep for several weeks if properly stored.
- Semi-hard and hard cheeses will last four to eight weeks if properly stored. After opening consider removing the original plastic wrap and re-wrapping in parchment or wax paper, which allows the cheese to breathe. After re-wrapping a cheese, store in a covered plastic container or resealable food storage bag and open it a couple times a week to let in fresh air.



## FOODSERVICE APPLICATIONS

### Back-of-the-House

Italian-style cheeses are the foundation of pizza as Mozzarella, Provolone and Parmesan are the leading cheese toppings. Many other Italian dishes, such as lasagna, ravioli, and chicken Parmesan, include generous portions of these cheeses.

The Parmesan-laden Caesar salad is *de rigueur*, but that doesn't mean there isn't room for diversification. Change up the greens, from romaine to kale, arugula, even Brussel sprouts leaves, and add grilled salmon or tuna to the Parm party. In lemon Parmesan risotto with asparagus, the assertive cheese complements the tart citrus. Mix fresh Mozzarella with salty ham and honeydew melon for an upscale first course. And mild, creamy Ricotta is a carrier for almost any sweet and savory ingredients.

### Front-of-the-House

Parmesan grated over warm pasta dishes are must-offers to customers. The deep, nutty flavor of this cheese adds depth to just about any pasta dish. The Mozzarella, tomato and basil salad known as *Caprese*, has graduated from specialty summer to an everyday salad on the menu.



## WHAT'S TRENDING

### Burrata Booming

Diners on the West and East coasts discovered Burrata a decade or more ago, and now Middle America has access to this unctuously rich and silky cheese, thanks to overnight shipping. Burrata ("battered" in Italian) is a pouch filled with Mozzarella and fresh cream. Cut into the pouch and milky decadence spills onto the plate. It's great with a drizzle of olive oil and a grind of pepper, but truly shines when served with juicy tomatoes and fresh greens, and smeared on garlic-rubbed, grilled bread. Burrata is also becoming more popular on pizza.

### Ricotta for Breakfast

Yogurt and cereal will never be replaced as breakfast staples, but a bowl of Ricotta cheese with fresh fruit, drizzled with honey and topped with crunchy granola, is a smart addition to any menu. Given the popularity of avocado toast, chefs have added toast items with Ricotta as a base. These new items are topped with sun-dried tomatoes, olive blends and capers and olive oil.

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# MEDITERRANEAN-STYLE CHEESES

*Middle East Inspires California's Dairy Delights*



The emergence of Greek-style yogurt set the American food world on fire, and opened doors for other Mediterranean dairy products, particularly cheeses. While Feta is as beloved as ever, there is more to Mediterranean cheese than the salty, crumbly Feta that's sprinkled over salads, marinated in herbs and olive oil, and used as a foundation ingredient for baked spanakopita spinach pie.

California dairy processors are adapting cow's milk to replicate the flavors of traditional cheeses from Greece, Lebanon, Syria, Persia (Iran) and elsewhere along the Mediterranean Sea to create new varieties and tie the Old World to New.

## MEDITERRANEAN-STYLE CHEESE FACTS

**Feta** is a Greek invention, said to be one of the oldest cheeses known to humankind. The word Feta comes from the Italian word "fetta," meaning slice, to fit the cheese into barrels for brining. A salty brine is key to Feta cheese production, giving it a tangy snap and savory salinity.

**Ackawi** is a semi-firm, unripened cow's milk cheese with a mild flavor and a smooth, yet firm texture. As one of the oldest cheeses produced in Lebanon and Syria, Ackawi is salty and white like Feta, yet softer in texture and ideal for enjoyment at the table with bread and fruit.

**Halloumi** has a firm texture and high melting point, so it can be easily grilled and fried. It's ideal for topping salads, adding creaminess to gyro-style lamb and chicken sandwiches, and as a salty contrast to prosciutto-wrapped melon. Fry it until golden brown and top it with tomato sauce, as one would polenta.

**Labneh** (also known as labane and labanah) is a "yogurt cheese" made by draining thick, full-fat yogurt overnight in cloth. It's similar to Greek yogurt and traditionally eaten at breakfast. The main difference between the two yogurts is the texture. Labneh is thicker because it is highly concentrated. Labneh is used as a yogurt spread and is commonly paired with pita bread, toast, and veggies. It's also an excellent substitute for cream cheese.



### STORAGE & HANDLING

When purchasing cheese, make sure the package is properly and tightly wrapped and sealed, and that the cheese inside looks appealing. Do not purchase any cheese that looks dry or discolored, as the package seal may be broken. Most cheeses will maintain their flavor and quality in a refrigerator for extended periods, but use the following guidelines for storing cheese after opening:

- Fresh cheeses should be treated just like milk and kept refrigerated. Many fresh cheeses can last for a few weeks if properly stored, so note the freshness date on the package before you buy. If you detect mold on a fresh cheese, discard it.
- Soft-ripened cheeses will keep for up to several weeks if properly stored.



## FOODSERVICE APPLICATIONS

### Back-of-the-House

Chefs and bar managers should consider adding “mezze” plates to menus. Feta, hummus, roasted red peppers, Kalamata olives, almonds and a drizzle of olive oil pack a huge flavor punch as a shared first course and make for a substantial bar offering. Consider replacing de rigueur sandwich cheeses such as Jack and Provolone with more tantalizing Halloumi. Savory pies such as spanakopita are popular in Mediterranean cuisine – chefs can create their own savory fillings with greens, herbs and fresh cheeses like Feta.

### Front-of-the-House

Put on a show with flaming saganaki, a Greek appetizer of Feta or Halloumi cheese fried in a pan, flambéed tableside, doused with a squeeze of fresh lemon juice and served with bread. Suggest high-acid white wines to match the spectacle and increase profits. Absent the flames, Mediterranean-style cheeses, offered as appetizers or part of meal-ending cheese plates, add new and intriguing flavors to adventurous, pleasure-seeking diners.



## WHAT'S TRENDING

### Cheese & Hummus Pairings

Following the popularity of hummus bars in London, U.S. restaurateurs are introducing this chickpea, garlic- and tahini-laced dip to menus in myriad ways. Hummus has opened the doors to non-Middle Eastern restaurants and grocers to introduce Mediterranean-style cheeses to their offerings. The cheeses are accompanying hummus in dishes as a replacement for mayo in sandwiches, a creamy base for an heirloom tomato salad, and an easy yet complex dip for pita chips.

### Cheese – A Healthy Choice

Healthy food trends provide foodservice operators with opportunities to attract and keep customers. The popularity of the “Mediterranean” diet has resulted in the opening of a number of new chain restaurants in recent years. Promoting Mediterranean dishes with portions of fish, vegetables, olives, and Mediterranean-style cheeses will boost business.

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# FRESH HISPANIC-STYLE CHEESES

*Adding Authentic Flavor to Latin Dishes and More*



California's rich Hispanic culture and heritage help make the state the country's leading producer of Hispanic- or Mexican-style cheese and dairy products. In 2017, a total of 135 million pounds were produced – all bearing the Real California Milk seal, which certifies they are made exclusively from California milk.

Hispanic-style cheeses are available in either fresh or aged. Two of the most popular fresh varieties are Queso Fresco, which is soft, moist and slightly acidic, and Oaxaca, a mild, firm white cheese similar to Mozzarella.

## HISPANIC-STYLE CHEESE FACTS

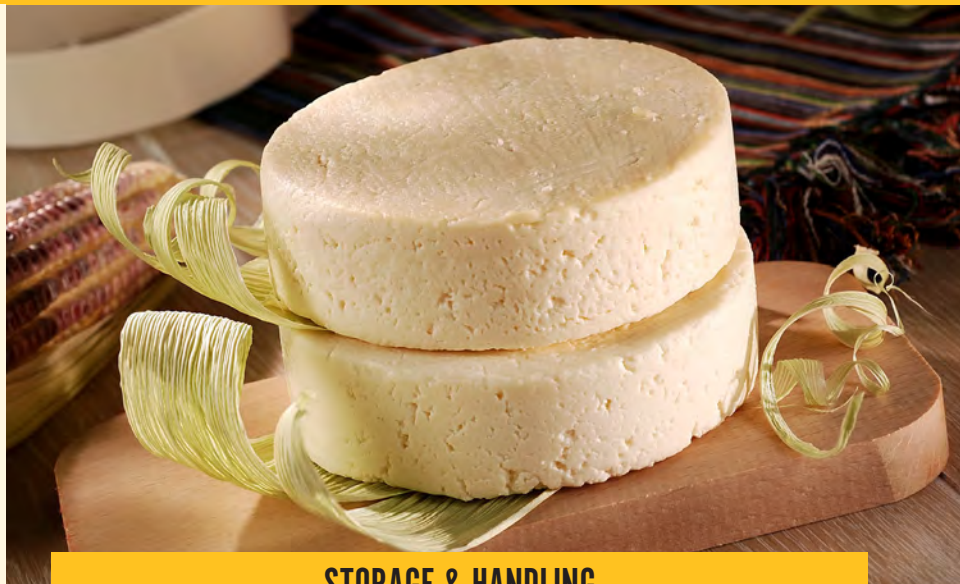
California is the top producer of Hispanic-style cheeses in the nation producing more than 25 varieties and styles. This amounts to approximately 5.4 percent of the total cheese production in the state.

The top four California Hispanic-style cheese producers make more than 20 varieties of Hispanic-style cheeses.

Hispanic-style cheeses are a low-cost way to add authenticity to Latin-inspired dishes.

Besides Queso Fresco and Oaxaca, the other top varieties of fresh Hispanic-style cheeses include:

- Queso Blanco Fresco – popular for frying
- Panela – with a firm texture similar to fresh (or high-moisture) Mozzarella
- Requesón – has a soft, grainy texture similar to Ricotta



## STORAGE & HANDLING

- When purchasing cheese, make sure the package is properly and tightly wrapped and sealed, and that the cheese inside looks appealing. Do not use any cheese that looks dry or discolored, as the package seal may be broken. With fresh cheeses, check the freshness date on the package.
- Fresh cheeses should be treated just like milk and kept refrigerated. Many fresh cheeses can last for a few weeks if properly stored, so note the freshness date on the package before you buy. If you detect mold on a fresh cheese, discard it.
- To melt cheese, use a low temperature for a brief time. Add cheese toppings to dishes at the end of baking or broiling and heat just long enough to melt. Soft cheeses have enough water to blend well into beans, side-dishes and fillings.



## FOODSERVICE APPLICATIONS

### Back-of-the-House

Queso Fresco is a soft, fresh cheese. Like Ricotta, Queso Fresco is easily crumbled or caramelized and the ideal ingredient on enchiladas and tostadas. The cheese is used to add flavor and color to traditional dishes, but also unique flavor for pasta, vegetables, omelets and salads.

Oaxaca makes the perfect topping for pizza as it's very similar to Mozzarella. Shredded, it can top refried beans, tostadas, and soups. Sliced, it melts wonderfully for quesadillas. Building on the popularity of barbecue, chefs add shredded Oaxaca in BBQ chicken quesadillas to attract diners who can't get enough of the smoky favorite.

### Front-of-the-House

The popularity of charcuterie boards offers a foundation for Oaxaca and Queso Fresco. Present these cheeses as a substitute for Provolone or Ricotta to drive consumer interest in a Latin-style charcuterie board.

Chunks, crumbles or shreds of Hispanic-style soft cheeses work well on corn salads or to create a Mexican salad with avocado and tomatoes.

## WHAT'S TRENDING

### Menu Ideas

Fresh Hispanic-style cheeses drive consumer interest on menus in both signature dishes and Limited-Time-Offers. In recent years they have been key ingredients in mainstream fast food items like queso bacon burgers, fries and chicken sandwiches.

- Queso Fresco gives dishes like pasta primavera and au gratin potatoes a rich, creamy texture. Or menu it diced in a watermelon, arugula salad with heirloom tomatoes and a balsamic vinaigrette with basil and mint.
- Oaxaca is delicious in portobello quesadillas and as the main ingredient in "queso fundido," which means molten cheese. And to push the envelope a bit, Oaxaca adds flair to crêpes with corn and zucchini blossoms.

### The New Nachos

Nachos on menus are driving trial and exciting consumers. From their introduction in the 1980s, nachos have delighted bar and casual restaurant patrons. In this era of authenticity, chefs are substituting Hispanic-style melting cheeses for old stand-by Cheddar or Monterey Jack.

### Cheese & Corn

The latest crossover menu hit is Mexican Street Corn, which is delighting consumers and restaurant managers. Simply roast corn-on-the-cob and serve sprinkled with Queso Fresco, cilantro and chili powder.

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# AGED HISPANIC-STYLE CHEESES

*So Authentic and Flavorful*



California's rich Hispanic culture and heritage help make the state the country's leading producer of Hispanic- or Mexican-style cheese and dairy products. In 2017, a total of 135 million pounds were produced – all bearing the Real California Milk seal, which certifies they are natural cheeses made exclusively from California milk.

Hispanic-style cheeses are produced either aged or fresh. Aged Hispanic-style cheeses, commonly called “añejo” (or “aged”), are different from their “aged” European and American counterparts. Their characteristic dry texture and pungent, sharp flavor comes from being salted, pressed and dried rather than being “aged” for a long time.

California cheesemakers produce a number of aged, semi-firm and firm Hispanic-style cheeses. The two most popular are Cotija, which is a strong, pungent cheese with a distinct sharpness, and Manchego, which is comparable to a creamy, sharp cheddar cheese.

## HISPANIC-STYLE CHEESE FACTS

California is the top producer of Hispanic-style cheeses in the nation producing more than 25 varieties and styles. This amounts to approximately 5.4 percent of the total cheese production in the state.

The top four California Hispanic-style cheese producers make more than 20 varieties of Hispanic-style cheeses.

Hispanic-style cheeses are a low-cost way to add authenticity to Latin-inspired dishes.

Besides Cotija and Manchego, the other top varieties aged Hispanic-style cheeses include:

- Asadero – tangy, similar to Provolone
- Enchilado – dry, crumbly white cheese with a red coating



## STORAGE & HANDLING

- When purchasing cheese, make sure the package is properly and tightly wrapped and sealed, and that the cheese inside looks appealing. Do not use any cheese that looks dry or discolored, as the package seal may be broken.
- While fresh cheeses should be treated just like milk and kept refrigerated, semi-hard and hard cheeses will last four to eight weeks if properly stored. After opening consider removing the original plastic wrap and re-wrapping in parchment or wax paper, which allows the cheese to breathe.



## FOODSERVICE APPLICATIONS

### Back-of-the-House

Americans' palates have expanded and grown more adventurous each year. Chefs are featuring authentic "south-of-the-border" menu items that center on the use of authentic Hispanic-style cheeses. Cooking and garnishing with these cheeses add value and authenticity. A few types of Hispanic-style cheeses will soften but not melt (or flow) when heated or used in cooked dishes. So, it's important to know your cheeses:

- **Asadero** is a mild, firm cheese molded into a log and sold sliced. It is similar to Provolone in its slightly tangy taste and firm texture. It melts well and is used in such dishes as quesadillas and nachos as well as on hamburgers and sandwiches.
- Named after the town of Cotija, Mexico, where it originated, **Cotija** is a firm, very salty cheese similar to a dry Feta. Cotija is available in a wheel or grated and can be used in a similar way to Feta – crumbled and sprinkled as a condiment over soups, salads and beans. It's also ideal with baked gnocchi for a lighter texture and elevated flavor.
- **Enchilado** is a dry, crumbly white cheese distinguished by its colorful reddish appearance, the result of a coating of mild red chili or paprika, which adds a slightly spicy flavor. Crumble or slice onto Mexican foods, soups and salads. In cooked dishes, it softens but does not melt.
- **Manchego** is derived from the famous cheese of La Mancha, Spain, where it's made from sheep's milk. The Hispanic-style version uses low-fat cow's milk and has a mellow, nutty flavor. This firm golden cheese has become popular for blending into gourmet mac & cheese with chorizo and melted onto flatbreads or pizza.

### Front-of-the-House

The popularity of charcuterie and cheese flights allows a platform to develop one with Latin flair. All of the añejo cheeses pair beautifully with meats, olives and dried fruit. Chefs use them as snacking or sandwich cheeses, and as an accompaniment to fruit and wine. Two decades ago, mainstream American menus were introduced to Tex-Mex and brought consumers around to spicy foods topped with Hispanic-style cheese. Beef and chicken quesadillas are still popular as well as taco salads and Tex-Mex Chicken Ranch salads.

## WHAT'S TRENDING

### Popular Pupusas

Pupusas are a hand-formed traditional Salvadoran dish of a thick corn tortilla stuffed with aged Hispanic-style cheese and savory fillings. Great on the grill, these tortillas are becoming more popular on menus. Chefs spread Hispanic-style cheese on pupusas and then serve with traditional ancho sauce or with a sweet vinegar sauce.

### Cheese & Corn

The latest crossover menu hit is Mexican Street Corn, which is delighting consumers and restaurant managers. Simply roast corn-on-the-cob and serve sprinkled with a Hispanic-style cheese, cilantro and chili powder.

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