

# THE BIG CHEESE

An old-fashioned approach to making cheese has an island company turning heads nationally

P.E.I. has a cheese-making powerhouse in its backyard. Amalgamated Dairies Limited, a co-op wholly-owned by 165 P.E.I. dairy producers, saw its 'Dairy Isle' cheese brand take home a boatload of awards recently. Three Dairy Isle cheeses placed in the top three at the British Empire Cheese Show held in Toronto in November of 2017. Dairy Isle cheeses took first place overall in the highest aggregate cheddar score at the show, while Dairy Isle Mild and Sharp cheeses won first place in their respective cheddar categories and the Dairy Isle Medium took home third place.

Those top placings came just a few weeks after ADL's Dairy Isle cheeses claimed one first place finish and a trio of third place finishes at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair. "To have your product judged against your competition and peers in the country and to show that the product you make is top quality, it means a lot to our staff," says Jim Bradley, ADL's CEO.

Summerside-based ADL is a big player in Atlantic Canada's dairy industry. It makes milk, cheese, butter and ice cream. Of the co-op's 300 full-time employees, 100 of them work at its cheese plant operation in Summerside. ADL makes eight million kilograms of cheese annually.

What is it about Dairy Isle cheese that is earning it national accolades? Bradley chalks it up to its old school approach to cheese making. "There is pressure to compete from a cost point of view and make things as inexpensive as you can. Sometimes you can cut corners or there are things you can use to improve yield or the curing time for cheese," he says. "We don't cut any corners or use any artificial enzymes or flavour enhancers. We've made a decision we're not going to compromise quality. People are willing to pay a little more for a premium product."



## Taking the time to get it great

Making award-winning cheddar cheese is time consuming. ADL CEO Jim Bradley says its cheese can take weeks, months and even years to age before it is ready to be sold to customers. "Our cheese is not something you make and turn out overnight," Bradley says. "It's not unlike a distillery. You have to be committed to the process."

Just how committed does ADL have to be? Here is a snapshot of how long it takes three varieties of its Dairy Isle cheddar cheese to age.

MILD	MEDIUM	SHARP/OLD
6-10 weeks	3-6 months	12-18 months

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