The Dairy Talent Pool Is Endless. How Do We Expand It?

Today's Presentation

Through conversation with a panel of dairy professionals, we'll explore key questions, including: who is currently left out of the dairy workforce, what barriers are keeping people out, and what can we learn from those who have successfully navigated these obstacles to create more accessible pathways?

Our goals are to facilitate constructive dialogue and strategize ways to cultivate a more inclusive and dynamic dairy workforce, ensuring a vibrant and sustainable future for the industry.

Agela Abdullah

PRESIDENT OF THE CHEESE CULTURE COALITION

Before working in the cheese industry Agela was a cook at Michelin-starred restaurants, and for James Beard nominated chefs. In 2008 she took a part-time job as a cheesemonger and has been working in, and connected to the cheese world ever since.

Agela is the President of the Cheese Culture Coalition, a nonprofit dedicated to making the cheese industry more inclusive and equitable through education and grant programs.

She writes a column for Culture magazine, does freelance work for Good Food Jobs, and is a member of the Guilde Internationale des Fromagers.

Agela works as a marketing specialist. She currently lives in Chicago and is the caretaker of two cats and a sourdough starter.

Kyra James

FOOD EDUCATOR, BIZ CONSULTANT

Professional Food Educator, American Cheese Society education committee vice-chair, and Certified Cheese Professional, Kyra James is an innovator in the food industry with 12+ years of experience introducing consumers to the world of artisan cheese and specialty goods. After receiving her Master's in Gastronomy, Kyra honed her skills as a cheesemonger, food/beverage curriculum developer + tasting event specialist; through her work with industry leaders such as Formaggio Kitchen and Culture Magazine. In 2020, Kyra's passions for sharing the understanding of our food systems and drive to build food equity in America led her to launch Own Your Funk - a business consulting + experience brand working to empower a NEW, more diverse, artisan food consumer through self empowerment. Her efforts continue as an active cheese industry community member; serving as a founding board member of the Cheese Culture Coalition. When not disrupting a homogenized industry, Kyra works in her CT hometown's public education system in addition to volunteering as a youth track and field events coach and at the Museum of Food & Drink (NYC).

“We owe it to our nation to tell the most complete, honest picture of how we got to where we are”

CHRISTY CLARK-PUJARA
CHAIR, DEPT. OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

>2%

OF ALL AMERICANS LIVE ON FARMS

90%+

LACTOSE SENSITIVE (BIPOC)

75%

BIPOC FARMERS UNAWARE OF USDA PROGRAMS

Breaking Barriers

$1.2T

buying power

30%

trendsetters

7x

#shoplocal

Greselda Powel

NYC TRAINING & CURRICULUM MANAGER, MURRAY'S CHEESE, LLC

After 28 years as a Telecommunications engineer with a major technology corporation, I qualified for retirement. However, I decided to continue working until I was laid off four months later. This major life change led me to something more fulfilling, cheese.

I spent 2+ years learning about cheeses and cheesemaking via seminars, cheesemaking classes, meeting cheesemakers and an affinage internship. The final step of this learning journey was becoming a cheesemonger for Whole Foods and Murray's Cheese.

It was through mongering where I gained an appreciation for cheeses made in the US and the need for supporting smaller producers with unique products. I learned mongers are the voice of the cheesemaker and possess a very important role in keeping this industry vibrant. Supporting the education and career growth of mongers within the industry is a means of supporting the long-term viability of the industry.

Where To Find And Grow Staffing Resources

Lisa Lopez

CHEESEMAKER APPRENTICE

Lisa Marie Lopez previously served on the board of The Cheese Culture Coalition for two years as the Social Director and resides in San Antonio Texas. In 2022 she transitioned from her corporate job as a Contract Negotiator to become a full-time cheesemaker. To gain additional industry knowledge while working as a cheesemaker Lisa has worked as a brand ambassador at various expos around Texas for Rouge Creamery and Forever Cheese, and as an Event Host for Antonelli's Cheese Shop.

Lisa's ultimate goal is to establish a micro farmstead creamery, dedicated to the production of Latin American-inspired raw milk cheese. She is currently focused on acquiring the requisite hands-on experience in the fields of cheesemaking, affinage, and husbandry over the forthcoming years. By accomplishing this feat, Lisa will become the first Mexican American woman to operate a raw milk farmstead creamery in Texas.

Leslie McCrorey-Wells

RESTAURANTEUR, FARMER, EDUCATOR, SHEEP FARMER, RENAISSANCE WOMAN

Leslie McCrorey Wells is the co-owner of Burlington restaurants Pizzeria Verità, Trattoria Delia and Sotto Enoteca. After graduating from the University of Vermont, she split her time between New Haven, CT, where she worked in Adult Education and Distance Learning, and Vermont, where she completed a Master of Arts in History at UVM. Leslie has served on the boards of the Burlington Intervale Center, the Fleming Museum, and the Governor's Commission on the Future of Vermont Agriculture. Currently, she serves on the board of the Flynn Center for the Performing Arts, Clemmons Family Farm and on the Leadership Council of Vermont Independent Restaurants. She, and her partner Rick, operate a micro-farm in Grand Isle where they raise sheep and produce crops for her restaurants.

Thank you!

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