

Wisconsin Cheesemaker Looks Beyond Organic, Earns Food Alliance Certification for Social and Environmental Performance

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Annie's Homegrown Praises Cedar Grove's Sustainable Practices

PLAIN, Wis.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Cedar Grove Cheese, a family-owned company in operation since 1878, is the first food processor in the Midwest to meet comprehensive standards for sustainable practices established by Food Alliance, a national nonprofit that provides third-party certification throughout North America. The certification assures buyers of the company's safe and fair working conditions, conservation of energy and water, reduction and recycling of waste, and other sustainable practices. Thirteen dairy farms were also certified for standards that include labor conditions, humane animal treatment, and conservation of soil and water, enabling them to supply Cedar Grove Cheese with milk for Food Alliance certified cheeses.

Cedar Grove processes approximately 130,000 pounds of milk a day, producing more than 4 million pounds of traditional and specialty cheeses per year. The company is already known for its commitments to sustainable agriculture. In 1993, with support from its dairy suppliers, Cedar Grove was the first cheese maker in the U.S. to market cheese made with milk from cows that were not treated with recombinant bovine growth hormone (rBGH). In 2001, Cedar Grove further distinguished its products by pledging to make its cheeses without the use of genetically modified organisms.

"Food Alliance certification is an important and logical step for us," said Bob Wills, owner of Cedar Grove Cheese. "Expectations for transparency in the food industry are increasing. It used to be enough to collect affidavits from suppliers. With more companies making marketing claims about their 'natural' products, we want to give our customers the maximum assurance of a third-party audit."

That's good news for companies like Annie's Homegrown, which uses Cedar Grove cheese in its line of natural and organic macaroni and cheese products. "It's always attractive when a supplier proactively helps us fulfill our mission," said John Foraker, CEO of Annie's Homegrown. "Since the beginning, Annie's has been dedicated to protecting the planet and being a responsible corporate citizen. One way we show that commitment is by supporting farmers that demonstrate strong environmental stewardship. We've long been proud to work with Cedar Grove; the Food Alliance certification gives us added confidence in our suppliers."

Cedar Grove is not abandoning its organic line, but looking to give its fast-growing natural product lines added distinction. "As organic goes mainstream, we have to continue to differentiate our products in a way that looks more broadly at how food is raised and processed," Wills said. "Consumers are growing concerned about other important issues, like humane animal treatment, that aren't currently addressed under organic standards. If we want to talk about sustainability, we have to go beyond organic. Food Alliance gives us that."

"It's significant for Food Alliance to see a leading national brand like Annie's able to trace its supply chain all the way to the farm. It's exactly the result we're working to achieve," said Scott Exo, Executive Director of Food Alliance. "When we get away from the commodity model of agriculture, we create communication and reward systems that can promote real sustainability."

"Cedar Grove Cheese deserves a lot of credit for this accomplishment," said Jim Ennis, Director of Food Alliance Midwest. "The standards are high and the inspection process is rigorous. As the first Food Alliance Certified processor in the Midwest, Cedar Grove has really raised the bar."

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection provided financial support to help the dairy farms and Cedar Grove make the move to Food Alliance certification through its Value Added Dairy Initiative grant program. This program helps farmers and processors to become financially successful and environmentally responsible.

More About Food Alliance

Food Alliance is a nonprofit organization that certifies farms, ranches, and food handlers (including processors and distributors) for sustainable agricultural and production practices. Businesses that meet Food Alliance's standards, as determined by a third-party site inspection, use certification to make credible claims for social and environmental responsibility, differentiating their products and strengthening their brands. The certification standards are available at www.foodalliance.org.

Food Alliance launched its certification program in 1998 in Portland, Oregon, with a single apple grower selling in three area grocery stores. Today, there are over 270 Food Alliance certified farms and ranches in 17 U.S. states, Canada and Mexico. These producers manage more than 4.3 million acres of range and farm land, raising beef, lamb, pork, dairy products, mushrooms, wheat, legumes, and a wide variety of fresh market fruits and vegetables. Food Alliance has also certified three distribution facilities and 12 processors offering cheeses, dried beans and lentils, and frozen and canned fruits and vegetables. Food Alliance has offices in Oregon, Minnesota and California.

More About Cedar Grove

Owners Bob Wills and Beth Nachreiner purchased Cedar Grove Cheese from Beth's parents in 1989 and are passionately committed to making superior, turned-by-hand cheese from grass-fed cows. We make the best traditional and specialty cheese you've ever tasted -- without artificial growth hormones, animal enzymes, or genetically modified ingredients. We want all our customers to continue to enjoy our quality cheeses. Our first of its kind in a cheese plant, Cedar Grove also incorporates a wastewater treatment facility called the "Living Machine." Located in a greenhouse, the earthy-friendly Living Machine has the ability to clean all wash water from the manufacturing facility in an environmentally responsible way.

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