Cheese Making

VFTH

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A cheese lab that’s been in the works at WKU for more than four years is now up and running.

Amy Bingham takes us inside the facility in this week’s View from the Hill.

Hilltopper Creamery is the name of the cheese making operation. From the milk of the dairy cows all the way to the packaging and labels, it’s a product made from start to finish at the university farm.

Gary Beu was hired to oversee the cheese lab in January.

“I spent two days figuring out what we had that way I could figure out what we needed.”

After more than three months of inspections and training, the long awaited day of cheese making finally came.

“April 19th we made our first batch of cheese here.”

“It was good. The inspectors loved it. Everybody that tasted it loved it.”

Right now cheese production takes place only on Wednesdays with the help of up to five students.

“I never thought before that day I’d be in the dairy industry or be making cheese. Now I’ve made every batch except for one. Pretty neat opportunity I’ve been given.”

After bringing over the milk and pasteurizing it , a vegetable rennit is added.

“It coagulates the milk into like custard.”

From there it’s a lot of hurry up and wait as it takes several steps to morph into cheese form.

“We cut custard curd back and forth.”

“When we cut it whey falls out of it.”

“Then we cut it into square blocks.”

Ag education student Ben Benton hopes to replicate a process like this someday in the classroom.

“It would be cool to do a food science class, freshman ag class, food safety or food science.”

The cheese has to age 60 days before it’s packaged up to sell.

Beu says he’s just happy to see the project get off the ground.

“I was semi retired and had the opportunity to make this work and its working. I’m having a ball.”

Production is expected to increase to two days a week when the fall semester begins to get inventory ready for the holidays. Hilltopper Creamery will soon be launching a website that will feature an on-line store and nationwide shipping.

With this week’s View from the Hill, I’m Amy Bingham.

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