

## A Cheese of One's Own

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There's plenty of cheese in Tillamook, Oregon. The Tillamook Farmers Co-op creamery produces 167,000 pounds of cheese a day. The plant is one of Oregon's top tourist destinations, with visitors lined up to see the co-op's celebrated cheddar on the production line and get a scoop of the company's rich ice cream. So it seems almost improbable that Amy and Rob Seymour would create a boutique cheese operation on their 300-head dairy farm in nearby Cloverdale—especially knowing that the family has been supplying Tillamook for generations, and that Amy was on the co-op's board of directors when they started the venture.

But they did. The vast majority of the Seymours' milk still goes to the Tillamook plant. But the 200 gallons they hold back each day adds a special flavor to the Tillamook County cheese scene—a treat for locals who shop the farmers' markets and for tourists who stop at their Nestucca Bay Creamery shop on Cloverdale's short stretch of U.S. Highway 101.

**Long history.** Amy Seymour's family has been part of the Tillamook County cheese scene since 1876. Back then, Amy's great-grandmother sold her homemade cottage cheese and butter to tourists in the beach town of Neskowin. Seymour's grandparents worked for the Oretown Creamery just south of the farm. After Oretown joined the Tillamook Co-op, the family's milk went north to Tillamook's plant. Amy and her husband Rob took over the farm 37 years ago, which was little surprise.

"Ever since I was young, I just figured I'd end up being a dairy farmer," she says. "That's what I wanted to do."

Rob wasn't a dairy farmer, but growing up in New Zealand, he was surrounded by them. The Seymours' farm shows the influence of decades of visits to New Zealand, including the Holstein-Jersey combination—often called "the Kiwi cross"—that thrives on the rainy pastures of the Pacific Northwest coast.

"In New Zealand, they're breeding for a cow that is good on pasture, that is the right size. When you've got wet soils, you don't want a big cow," Amy explains. "She's the right size, she's bred to convert grass into milk and high components, she's got good fertility—all the things we want."

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About 25 years ago, the Seymours took another page out of the New Zealand playbook and went to seasonal dairying, which gave them time off in the winter for more travel. Along their routes, they found themselves visiting small cheesemakers.

"We'd always say, 'yeah, we could do that. We've got good milk and our cows are out on pasture, so it'd be kind of unique,'" Seymour says. "We said that for about 10 years, and realized we were getting older. If we were going to do it, we needed to do it and not just sit around talking about it. So we took the plunge."

**Variety.** Amy brought it up with her colleagues on the co-op board, who gave their blessing.

"There's a cap on the volume of milk we can take," Seymour says. "It's a generous volume—we're nowhere near that. I see people coming in and kind of knocking Tillamook because it's so big and industrial. But it's a good company and we wouldn't be here if it weren't for them."

Since the launch of Nestucca Bay Creamery in 2017, the Seymours and their cheesemaker, Serene Zwissig, have made a wide range of cheeses. Many of the styles hail from rainy, maritime areas that feel a lot like Tillamook, like caerphilly from Wales and gouda from the Netherlands.

"I figured that anything made in that sort of climate is going to work out here," Seymour says. "It's going to be different, but it's still going to work out."

With a 12-gallon and a 120-gallon vat, Seymour says if she had to do it over, she would have started at double their scale...and about 10 years younger.

"It's a lot of work," she confesses. "All of a sudden, we're thinking, 'a lot of people are retired at this age. Maybe we should be!'"

"It's been fun," she adds. "I think one of the most rewarding parts is that we've added to the local economy and created a business that employs 2-1/2 people. People actually stop in Cloverdale now instead of driving on through. We've been a part of that, having our store there, so that's been really neat to see."