



MSU Offers Famous Cheese With Less Fat

Photos by Jim Lytle

By Tricia Hopper

As common as cowbells and bulldogs, Mississippi State University's bright red Edam cheese "cannon ball" is easily recognized at tailgates and parties across the state and beyond.

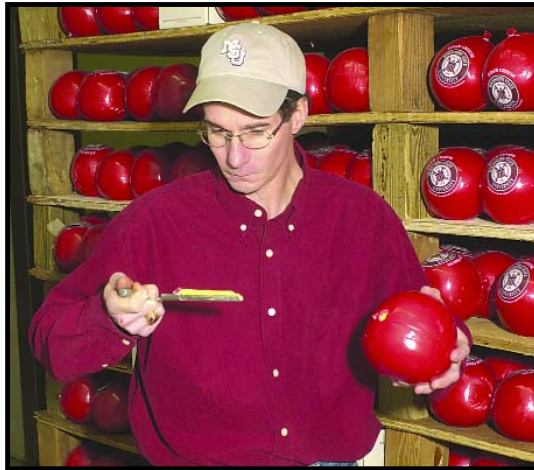
Ever since Edam cheese was first introduced on the Starkville campus in 1938, fans of this dairy delight have made it a university hallmark. The Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station's Sales Store sold about 42,000 regular Edam cheese balls during the 2002 Christmas holiday season.

As the times have changed, however, so has the cheese. In a health-conscious society, people have become more wary of fat intake, which spurred the Department of Food Science and Technology into researching and manufacturing a reduced-fat Edam cheese ball. During last year's holiday sales, the MAFES Sales Store sold more than 1,800 reduced-fat cheese balls.

"We realize that because of nutritional practices, some people might prefer reduced-fat cheese. Thus, lots of research went into developing a quality version with a similar flavor to a regular cheese," said Charles White, professor and head of the Department of Food Science and Technology.

Flavor is the key in creating a reduced-fat version of the Edam cheese. David Hall, manager of the Dairy Manufacturing Plant and a former National Champion Taster (1986), has worked for companies such as Kraft, Dean Foods and Luvel Dairy. He brings his tasting expertise to the table to ensure that every reduced-fat batch of cheese meets the flavor standard.

"There is very little difference in the regular and the reduced-fat cheeses other than the reduced-fat version is a little firmer," Hall said.



Dairy Manufacturing Plant Manager David Hall checks a sample from an Edam cheese ball.

The same process is used in making both cheeses, only a different percent of milk fat is used. For the regular cheese, 3.2 percent fat milk is used, whereas the reduced fat cheese uses milk with 1.8 percent fat.

"It's the same idea as when you go to the grocery store and you buy 2 percent milk or you buy a low-fat milk," Hall said. "The difference is the percentage of fat in the milk that is used, which produces a reduction of fat in the cheese."

The reduced-fat Edam cheese has about one-third less fat content than the regular, while still maintaining flavor quality. With little difference in texture, flavor or color, the reduced-fat cheese makes a nutritious party food for the otherwise fattening holiday season.

Consumers will find a slight difference in the price of the two cheeses. The reduced-fat Edam cheese is \$1 more at \$16 per ball. Each Edam cheese ball weighs 3 pounds and is dipped in red wax to minimize mold growth.

Customers interested in purchasing a cheese ball can call the MAFES Sales Store at (662) 325-2338. Other cheese products available are cheddar cheese blocks, vallagret wheels, jalapeno pepper cheese blocks, crocks of cheese spread, and crocks of jalapeno pepper cheese spread.