

## US cheesemakers unite to address sodium in cheese

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Filed by Shaun Weston

More than 17 leading US cheese companies and manufacturers came together at a Best Practices Task Force meeting, hosted by the Innovation Center for US Dairy, to work on proactively addressing the opportunities and challenges associated with reducing sodium content in cheese.

The group has been working pre-competitively to improve consumers' health and wellness while maintaining strict expectations for food safety and taste.

The group rallied around three important aspects related to the challenge of sodium levels in cheese products: maintaining taste and functionality in lower sodium products, updating process controls in manufacturing, and educating key audiences about the necessary role of sodium in cheese (in terms of the cheesemaking process and food safety/shelf stability).

"Cheese contributes a relatively small amount of sodium to Americans' diets, less than 8%," said Nigel Kirtley, vice president cheese research, development and quality for Kraft Foods, and member of the Health and Wellness Subcommittee for the Innovation Center for US Dairy. "However, industry is steadfast in its commitment to being part of the solution to lowering sodium levels in the diet.

"Innovation efforts are under way that help the industry control and lower sodium. It should not be overlooked that cheese is a nutritious food that contributes calcium, protein, phosphorus and vitamin A to the diet, and it's a nice complement to other food groups that Americans need to be eating more of such as whole grains, vegetables and fruit."

Companies involved in the Best Practices Task Force include:

- Bongards
- Cargill
- Chr Hansen
- Dairy Farmers of America
- Davisco Foods
- Foremost Farms
- Glanbia
- Great Lakes Cheese
- Kraft Foods
- Kroger
- Lactalis
- Land O'Lakes
- Leprino Foods
- Marathon Cheese
- Sargento

- Schreiber Foods
- V&V Supremo Foods.

Academic researchers from Utah State University, University of Wisconsin's Center for Dairy Research and Food Research Institute, California Polytechnic State University and representatives from International Dairy Foods Association and US Dairy Export Council also participated.

The group will continue to work together to address three areas: ensuring food safety, education outreach and process control.

*Source: Innovation Center for US Dairy*

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