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ABOUT CYPRESS GROVE CHEVRE

Beginnings

As beginnings go, this one was inauspicious: a mother sought the freshest, healthiest milk for her growing children who were allergic to dairy from cows. What better source than raising her own goats? But then, an unexpected turn of events: her herd starts winning awards and she quickly becomes known as America's leading Alpine dairy goat breeder. Her goats are happy, healthy and productive – and before she knows it they're turning out far more milk than her family can possibly drink.

What to do with such a bountiful surplus? What else: turn on the kitchen stove and start stirring up recipes for cheese. Sell the lovingly handmade batches to the area's most discerning chefs and retailers. As demand grows, take the leap from hobbyist to full-time entrepreneur by founding Cypress Grove Chevre in 1983. Spend the next 26 years developing cheeses that win troves of awards and that (most gratifying) people truly seem to love.

A New Kind of American Cheese

Mary Keehn never planned to become a cheesemaker, much less an industry pioneer. She never expected her cheeses would help define a region – Humboldt County in Northern California – that today is regarded as a mecca for artisanal cheesemaking. Like many successful entrepreneurs, Mary's journey, and that of Cypress Grove Chevre, began with the single step of becoming a small dairy farmer. Her affinity for farm life and knowledge of biology and chemistry unfurled organically to the next step of making cheese.

"I tried my hand at cheesemaking because I loved to cook and I had a lot of extra milk on hand," says Keehn. "After a few rounds of trial and error, the cheese started turning out. I shared it with my family and friends. Eventually, word spread, and then I started selling to chefs. It took on a life of its own."

A Sense of Place

A sense of place has always defined Cypress Grove Chevre, which is located in Arcata, California, nearly 300 miles north of San Francisco in craggy, coastal Humboldt County where the ancient, towering Redwoods meet the Pacific Ocean. Where Bigfoot may still roam. Where the fog rolls in off the Pacific with a frequency second only to London. This singular sense of place is known as "terroir" – the subtle local influences in the flavor of food and wine.

Cypress Grove Chevre – Background

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“Terroir is the nuance of a region that is subtly expressed in food and wine,” says Keehn. “It’s what gives a cheese complexity and mystery. The process is not magic, but rather a series of carefully managed choices, from the quality of milk to land preservation.”

To express a local terroir, Mary, and her talented team work closely with a network of local dairies that supply the highest quality milk for Cypress Grove Chevre cheeses. These family-owned dairies raise goats that thrive in the coastal climate and graze on natural vegetation. Cypress Grove also works closely with farmers and local government to nurture and preserve farmland.

“We’re part of a tight knit community, so it’s always come naturally for us to engage in sustainable business practices,” says Keehn. “From stewarding the land to creating a market for local dairy families to earn a decent living from their milk, it’s all part of a holistic picture for us.”

Coming of Age

Today, Cypress Grove Chevre is regarded as an industry pioneer whose leadership helped put American cheesemaking on the national (and international) map. Mary is among a generation of cheesemakers – many of them women – whose passion for an authentic rural life and making handcrafted cheeses of exceptional quality literally created a category for specialty cheese in this country.

“When we entered the market, the only goat cheese you could buy was from Europe,” said Keehn. “Cypress Grove was one of a really dedicated community of cheesemakers in California and across the country that built a market for a new kind of American cheese.”

Cypress Grove is renowned for its fresh chevre varieties, but also for a thoughtfully designed line of fresh, soft-ripened and aged original cheeses, including top-selling Humboldt Fog, Purple Haze, Midnight Moon, and its newest sensation, Truffle Tremor. Cypress Grove’s cheeses are featured on the country’s top restaurant menus and by the most discriminating retailers.

Much like California wine, cheese had to evolve for years to gain respect and recognition on an international stage. Over the years, Cypress Grove’s cheeses have consistently garnered top awards from the American Cheese Society, the World Cheese Awards (London), the U.S. Cheese Championship (Wisconsin), and the National Association for the Specialty Food Trade (NASFT). Humboldt Fog has garnered First Place honors from the American Cheese Society three times since 1998. In 2007, the NASFT awarded Cypress Grove Chevre its coveted Outstanding Product Line award. And in 2009 Cypress Grove’s newest addition, Truffle Tremor, won first-place honors at the American Cheese Society competition and a coveted sofi™ for “Specialty Outstanding Food Innovation Award” from the National Association of Specialty Food Retailers (NASFT)

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