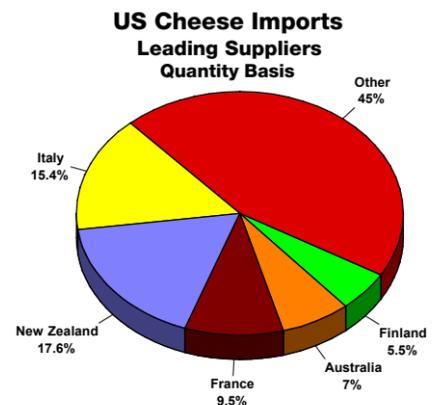




# CHEESE REPORTER

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## Popularity Of Greek Yogurt, Probiotics, Piques Consumer Interest In Yogurt Cheese

### More Shoppers Becoming Familiar With Health Benefits Of Probiotics

Madison—Growing consumer interest in yogurt products like Greek yogurt, frozen yogurt and kefir is slowly turning shoppers' attention to probiotic-friendly yogurt cheese.

The *Toronto Star* reported recently that some Canadian grocers have been unable to keep up with the demand for Greek yogurt, and they are experiencing temporary shortages. Greek yogurt demand is also surging in the US.

Customers perceive yogurt cheese as a healthier, lactose-free option in the cheese category because of health benefits associated with probiotics, said Sara Elkins, co-owner and sales manager of World Import Distributors, Montclair, NJ.

About 12 years ago, World Import Distributors, owners of Cultured Way Yogurt Cheese, entered a partnership with Maple Leaf Cheese Cooperative of Monroe, WI, to make yogurt cheese under the Cultured Way brand.

**“With products like Activia, Greek yogurts, yogurt drinks and kefir, consumers are becoming more educated about the benefits of probiotics. Purchases of cultured dairy products are increasing and will continue to increase.”**

—Sara Elkins,

World Import Distributors

Wisconsin Master Cheesemakers Jeff Wideman and Paul Reigle of Maple Leaf met with members of the Wisconsin Center for Dairy Research (CDR) to help formulate cultures for the production of Cultured Way Yogurt Cheese.

“I created the recipe for Cultured Way Yogurt Cheese in 1999,” Wideman said. “I wanted the challenge of making a unique cheese that involved my 36 years of expertise.”

Once the Classic Original flavor was formulated, other flavors were

introduced including South of the Border Jalapeno, Fiesta Chipotle, and Mediterranean Tomato Basil.

“Our Yogurt Cheese sales are growing annually as consumers become more aware of what they are eating, where their food comes from and the associated health benefits,” Elkins said.

Specifically, the recent yogurt craze has helped consumers become more aware of the value-added health boost of yogurt cultures and probiotics, Elkins said.

“With products like Activia, Greek yogurts, yogurt drinks and kefir, consumers are becoming more educated about the benefits of probiotics,” she continued.

“Purchases of cultured dairy products are increasing and will continue to increase,” Elkins predicted.

Yogurt cheese is made much like other cheeses – it starts with quality milk, Elkins said.

Milk that is rBST-free from small, family-owned dairies arrives at Maple Leaf Cheese daily, where Paul Reigle, the only certified Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker in Yogurt cheese, makes Cultured Way products.

“Yogurt is not added to the cheese, Elkins said. “Instead, the same active cultures found in yogurt are added to our cheese during the make process. Our Yogurt cheese is made with probiotics and live active cultures – acidophilus and bifidus.”

Our product is unique because it's low in sodium, lactose-free, rBST-free and made with vegetable rennet – perfect for vegetarians, Elkins said. It's also ideal for those seeking probiotics and lower-sodium diets.

“We also recommend our cheese to people who are lactose intolerant and have trouble digesting dairy products,” Elkins continued.

The cheese is likewise highly versatile and has excellent meltability, making it a perfect ingredient for recipes, she continued.

### ‘Heini’s Fountain Of Youth Cheese’

One of the country's first operations to manufacture and sell yogurt cheese is settled in Ohio's Amish Country.

Bunker Hill Cheese Company of Holmes County, OH, has been producing Heini's Cultured Yogurt Cheese since 1971, when owner Peter Dauwalder first developed the

product, called “Heini's Fountain of Youth Yogurt Cheese.”

Today, Bunker Hill purchases canned milk from over 220 local Amish farms to create its lactose-free yogurt cheese line for retail and food-service sales.

Heini's Yogurt Cheese is available in 10 varieties, including Raw Milk, Goat Milk, Classic Original, Garden Vegetable, Jalapeno Pepper, Garlic & Herb, Sun Dried Tomato & Garlic, Hickory Smoked, Sun Dried Tomato & Basil, and Peppercorn & Chive.

“In 1971, Heini's idea of adding yogurt cultures was considered novel, but not particularly exciting,” said Bob Walker, marketing manager for Bunker Hill Cheese.

“After all, yogurt displays in supermarkets at that time consisted of one brand, — Dannon — and maybe an inexpensive store brand.

Today, the yogurt section of the dairy case has literally exploded in popularity as customers become more familiar with the benefits of supplementing diets with probiotics. This interest has resulted in Heini's expanding our variety of Yogurt Cultured Cheeses from the Original flavor to seven different flavors,” Walker continued.

Additionally, Heini's now offers both a raw milk version and a goat milk yogurt cheese, Walker said.

The company's packaging styles include 40-pound blocks, 7-pound slicing loaves, 8-ounce half moons, 13-pound deli horns, 3-pound wheels, and 8-ounce cracker cuts.

### Healthy Alternative To Cream Cheese

Benoit de Korsak, owner of Sonoma County's Saint Benoit Creamery in California, started making yogurt cheese roughly two or three years ago.

“It's a very small business for us – maybe 2,000 pounds of cheese per year,” he said.

It can be eaten cold straight out of the crock, as a spread or dip, used in baking or sauces, and is a healthy alternative to cream cheese or crème fraîche, de Korsak said.

“We do not add yogurt to cheese. It is solely yogurt strained in a cheese cloth for two days,” de Korsak continued.

The company uses pasture-fed organic Jersey cows' milk, live active

cultures, and just a hint of sea salt.

Because there is no added cooking time, the probiotics remain live, according to de Korsak.

The cheese also has a very low lactose content and few carbohydrates.

Like Elkins, de Korsak agrees that more customers are becoming aware of probiotic health benefits.

Customers either like the taste or want something with less fat and fewer calories than cream cheese, he said.

“When people know about the benefits and taste it, they love it. But the taste has to be special,” he continued. “I think we won a Good Food Award for yogurt cheese this year because of its taste.”

Still, most people don't know what yogurt cheese is, and so it's very hard to market, de Korsak said. There needs to be lots of consumer education in the future for more people to recognize yogurt cheese and identify its health benefits.

Bunker Hill's Bob Walker agrees about the need for further consumer education.

“Certainly, the positive media concerning acidophilus and bifidus has helped educate consumers on the benefits of supplemental probiotics,” Walker said.

### Karoun Launches ‘Labne’ Cheese

Karoun Dairies, Inc. of Turlock, CA, recently launched a spreadable kefir cheese called Labne, a staple of traditional Mediterranean diets, for the US food market.

Supermarket Guru's Phil Lempert called Karoun Dairies' Labne “one of the best products I've tasted in a very long time” and that it “could easily be one of the biggest hits of 2012.”

Labne is a thick and creamy spreadable kefir cheese that contains an ample amount of probiotic bacteria.

The regular and Lite Labne will be available in Ralph's grocery locations throughout the western US.

For more information on St. Benoit Creamery Yogurt Cheese, visit [www.stbenoit.com](http://www.stbenoit.com).

More details about Cultured Way Yogurt Cheese, including purchasing information, is available online at [www.yogurtcheese.com](http://www.yogurtcheese.com).

Information about Heini's Yogurt Cultured Cheese can be found online at [www.heinis.com](http://www.heinis.com).

And for more information about Karoun Dairies, visit [www.karouncheese.com](http://www.karouncheese.com).