



Philip Tong

Flavored Cheeses? Yes we can!

Just a few years ago the mere mention of flavored cheese conjured up an image of some reddish purple streak running through a sea of orange cheese that you spread on your holiday cracker. However, thanks to many creative cheesemakers, new excitement is being created in the cheese category through the use of herbs, spices, vegetables, fruit, and other concoctions. Soft cheese are sweetened with honey, mixed with dried apricots or dusted with cocoa or chocolate. We can now all purchase Wild Morel and Leek Jack, Chipotle- Cranberry Cheddar, Habanero Jack, or Ginger, Honey, Almond Chevre. Recently I tasted a cheese that had a premium blend of coffee beans from Indonesia, South America, and Central America ground with lavender on the surface of the cheese. And for a little extra kick in cheese, Fiscalini Farms gives a two-hour soak to its Cheddar curds in some Scotch Ale to create Hopscotch Farmstead cheese. Such creative flavors can attract different consumers seeking something unconventional to tease their palates. For reduced or lowfat cheeses, adding complex flavors can compensate for the loss in flavor associated with fat reduction in the cheese itself.

Many of these flavored cheeses are artistic creations and communicate a high-end quality image to consumers also. These flavorings are mixed throughout the cheese, coated on cheese surfaces, and may also be put between two layers of cheese to create unique visual and taste effects. Utah State scientists have developed a high-pressure steam injection process to incorporate flavors and other compounds into cheese.

However care must be practiced with some condiments and/or flavorings added to cheese like herbs, spices and flower petals. If such materials are not properly handled and processed they can create microbial spoilage issues (enzymatic and microbiological). In other



Photo courtesy of Tillamook Cheese

cases such ingredients may lose or bleed color in the cheese environment. In the worse case, improperly handled and processed condiments and/or flavorings can carry pathogens or unacceptable levels of pesticide residues. Since they are not usually going to be reprocessed once incorporated into the cheese such materials must be pathogen free. Additional details on handling low acidity herbs and spices is described by Harris (1999).*

Who would have ever known that in this historic election year, you can now

say "Yes we can" to changing our traditional thinking of the cheese display by creatively incorporating fruits, vegetables, herbs, spices, honey and other flavoring systems. ■

* L. Harris. 1999. In "Perishable Handling Quarterly #98: <http://postharvest.ucdavis.edu/datastorefiles/234-209.pdf>.

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