

Versatility of Hispanic cheeses could boost market

By Sarah Hills, 08-Dec-2008

Hispanic cheeses are offering new market opportunities for processors and food manufacturers in the US due to their wide variety of functions and flavours, according to Dairy Management Inc (DMI).

Hispanic cheeses originate in Latin America, including Mexico, the Caribbean, Central American, or South America and the most popular, based on sales, are Queso Fresco, Queso Blanco, Cotija, Queso Quesadilla, Pamela.

And their functional and textural attributes are said to make them a versatile option for processed foods with potential applications including entrees, snacks, sauces, appetizers, side dishes and salads, experts claim.

The various qualities of more than 60 types of cheeses are in The Hispanic Cheese Reference Guide from DMI, which represents US dairy farmers. This includes information on flavour, mouth feel, melting points and detailed production tips.

It comes as Hispanic foods are growing in popularity in the US, in part due to a rising population but also a general interest in ethnic foods.

Dean Sommer, cheese and food technologist for the Wisconsin Center for Dairy Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison told FoodNavigator-USA.com: *"I think there is a lot of potential for these cheeses to be used in processed foods."*

"Unlike any other cheese group, you have such a wide variety of functionalities, from the many fresh, crumbling, non-melting, frying cheeses, to the very nice melting cheeses like Queso Quesadilla to the hard grating cheese like Cotija."

"What Hispanic cheeses bring to the table for food processors is an amazing array of functional and textural characteristics to choose from to use in advantageous ways in food formulations."

Top five Hispanic cheeses

Sommer said: *"Queso Fresco, Queso Blanco and Pamela are all fresh cheeses that are typically high pH cheeses. Because of this they have the unique functional benefit of being non-melting. They will soften but not melt and flow when heat is applied."*

"These cheeses can be used in baked dishes and even used in frying and they maintain their shape and identity, which is a unique and advantageous property in many applications."

They are made without using [starter culture](#) and are the taste is described as *"very mild, somewhat bland, with pleasant sweet, milky and salty flavours"*.

Sommer added: *"The Queso Quesadilla is a melting cheese and works wonderfully well in applications such as Quesadillas, or grilled cheese sandwiches."*

This uses a starter culture and the cheese has a slight hint of acid, with mild flavours.

Sommer said: *"The Cotija is a hard, dry, grating cheese. It normally has a mealy texture which makes it work well in situations where you want to crumble cheese over the top of dishes, whether on foods like burritos or directly on beans or corn."*

This tends to be dry and salty, with hints of piquant flavours.

The Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board said that in the supermarket retail arena alone, the total value sales for Hispanic cheeses in 2007 was \$171m, which is estimated to rise to \$278m by 2012.