

## **Branched Oak Farm**

Doug and Krista Dittman and their sons, Nelson and Andreas, have been crafting award-winning cheese at Branched Oak Farm in Raymond, Neb., since 2006 and marketing it using the Queen of Quality® label since March 2010.



The Dittmans create four varieties of organic farmstead cheese—quark, camembert, gouda, and mozzarella—along with several seasonal cheeses and cheese curds. Branched Oak Farm Quark placed second in its class at the American Cheese Society in 2007 and Krista’s Little Camembert earned a silver award in its class at the North American Jersey Cheese Awards in 2009.

Cheese is marketed at farmer’s markets, grocery stores and restaurants in the Lincoln and Omaha areas and specialty stores in Chicago, Denver and Seattle.

The first livestock to reside at Branched Oak Farm weren’t Jerseys. They were low-line Angus that were raised for grass-fed beef and free-range chickens. Customers began asking for fresh, organic dairy products as well and the Dittmans soon discovered their “true niche in agriculture.” Jerseys came to the farm in the spring of 2003. The beef cattle and chickens were eventually phased out and today the farm raises only Jersey cows for milk and Jersey steers for beef.

The 230-acre farm is located about 15 miles north of Lincoln in an area known as the Bohemian Alps. Grass is at the heart of the operation and imparts a unique flavor to Branched Oak Farm cheeses. The 20-cow Jersey herd is rotationally grazed and seasonally calved. Lineage descends from New Zealand lines.

Depending on the variety of cheese to be produced, milk is either used raw or pasteurized in a 100-gallon vat on the farm. Cheeses are aged in a cave on the farm. This allows the Dittmans to control temperature and humidity, so cheese can be ripened to perfection.

“We began using the Queen of Quality® logo because we wanted our customers to know we milk Jerseys,” said Doug Dittman. “It sets our cheese apart from conventionally-produced cheese.”

Goat-milk cheese is also produced at the plant by Charuth and Kevin Loth using the label ShadowBrook Farm.

The two families operate Farmstead First, a production and marketing cooperative that mentors others in the craft of cheese making. Seasoned cheese makers and up-and-coming cheese makers share production space and work together to merchandise their products at farmer’s markets and other venues.



*Cheese aging at Branched Oak Farm*