

Cut the cheddar

Here are five representative cheeses that Maine cheese makers have to offer. They're all available at K. Horton's Specialty Foods. Ask for them by name, or better yet, just ask for some local cheese. You'll be sure to get an education.

LISA CRAIG



1. Fresh Chevre, by Sunset Acres, in Brooksville — This soft, creamy goat's milk cheese is one of the state's most well known. We tried the fresh stuff on its own, but you can get it marinated in olive oil or mixed with herbs.

Or try the Aged Chevre — Kris Horton, along with the usual fresh chevre, usually has a few aged hunks sitting in her case. Most are about two or three months old, and have shrunk considerably. Try this form of chevre as you get used to the flavor of the fresh stuff, because it is considerably concentrated in the drier form. It's wonderful grated on salads, or pasta, or chipped off on a cheese plate.



2. Mainechego, by 1797 Farm, in Auburn — A play on Spain's most popular cheese, this version is made from unpasteurized sheep's milk and aged for one year. It's slightly nutty and briny, dry, and very versatile. Eat it the way the Spaniards do: as tapas, by itself, or paired with some cured olives and a fruity Mediterranean red wine.



3. Ragged Island Romano, by Hahn's End Farm, in Phippsburg — Made with unpasteurized cow's milk and aged one year, this interpretation of the super-sharp sheep's milk cheese so famously produced in Italy is a milder cousin. It isn't as pungent or aromatic as the Italian stuff, but its subtler treatment of Romano's typical nutty and salty flavors makes this a very handsome and well-crafted cheese.

4. Bravura, by Smiling Hill Farm, in Westbrook — This we call a "bloomy rind" cheese, and it has about three times as much flavor as that prepackaged brie you find at the supermarket. It is made by the people that brought us wonderful milk in glass jars, and this creamy soft-ripened cheese should be enjoyed all by itself, save for a glass of Cabernet or another big red wine. Or just eat it off a paper plate.



5. Capriano, by York Hill Farm, in New Sharon — Kris Horton likens it to a goat's milk cheddar, Steve Jenkins (author of *The Cheese Primer* (Workman Publishing), cheese bible to many amateurs and professionals) says it's more like Parmesan. It's a hard cheese, with a dry and grateable texture, and a mild sharpness that is just enough for cheddar freaks and easily palatable for the rest of us.