

## **CABOT CREAMERY COOPERATIVE**

Cabot Creamery Cooperative is one of Vermont's great success stories.

From humble beginnings, it has grown to become one of the largest dairy cooperatives in New England. Cabot Creamery makes a variety of dairy products that include butter, yogurt, dips, spreads, creams, flavored cheeses, light cheeses, and of course, its famous cheddar, for which it won the "World's Best Cheddar" award at the World Championship Cheese Contest in 1998. It has received dozens of other awards over the years in virtually every contest and category.

There are two opportunities to experience free samples of many Cabot Creamery products. One is at the Cabot Annex, in Waterbury Center on Route 100 North, off I-89's Exit 10. It is open daily 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

If you like what you find here, we strongly recommend you make the trip to Cabot Creamery's primary production facility for a tour of the plant to see the cheese being made and hear about its history. To get there, take Exit 8 off I-89 to Montpelier, follow Route 2 East, and at Marshfield, take Route 215 five miles to Cabot village, where you will find the factory, on the right. It is open daily June through October, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Monday through Saturday, November through May, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.; and Monday through Saturday in January, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tour admission is \$1 for adults, with children 12 and under free.

The history of Cabot Creamery Cooperative began in 1919 when 94 farmers in the Cabot area banded together to purchase the original creamery plant, then owned by F. A. Messer. The price of admission for farmers was \$5 per cow towards the \$3,700 purchase cost, plus a cord of wood for the boiler.

The creamery got its start making butter, then the only commercially viable dairy product, which it sold in stores in Boston. In the 1920s and 30s, when large numbers of people flocked to urban areas, the commercial demand for dairy products grew rapidly.

Advances in technology, manufacturing, refrigeration and distribution helped the creamery to expand into supplying fluid milk to bottlers in southern New England, and in 1930, the creamery hired its first cheese maker to make cheddar, and later, cottage cheese.

Over the next 60 years, Cabot grew to a \$70 million-a-year business, handling an average of 330 million pounds of milk a year from 400 member farms.

In 1992, Agri-Mark, Inc., another Northeastern dairy cooperative, dating back to 1917, merged with Cabot Creamery, dramatically increasing Cabot's marketing and distribution network.

In 2003, Cabot Creamery also acquired McCadam Cheese in Chateaugay (pronounced Chateau-Gay) in upstate New York, a \$50 million-a-year company.

Agri-Mark/Cabot also own large cheese-making facilities in Middlebury, Vermont, and West Springfield, Massachusetts, and has executive offices and two large storage facilities in Montpelier, Vermont.

Today, Agri-Mark/Cabot represents more than 2,200 farmers in New England, and handles about 2.5 billion pounds of milk annually. Cabot Creamery alone has about 1,500 farmer members, and sales of over \$200 million a year.

A visit to the Cabot Creamery provides an intimate experience to learn firsthand about the cheese-making process today.

As you approach the plant on Route 215 through Cabot, you'll see large silos that can store up to a million gallons of raw milk. The plant uses up to 500,000 lbs of milk per production day cycle.

Inside the visitors' center, there is a wide array of Cabot products on display and for sale, and many of them are offered to sample before making your purchase choices.

Tours are held every 30 minutes, and begin with a short video presentation that reviews the history of the creamery with interviews with some of Cabot's farmer members and longtime employees. There is also video footage of the various cheese-making processes that you will view through large picture windows during a tour of the creamery.

Cheese-making at the creamery begins with the most important ingredient, fresh whole milk, mostly from Jersey and Holstein cows, much of it from Vermont farmers, and regarded as some of the best in the nation. It goes through a battery of tests to check for bacteria and butterfat content before it enters the creamery.

Then the milk is pasteurized to kill any bacteria, homogenized, and the cream is skimmed off. A “reverse osmosis” process is used to separate out the whey. It used to be discarded in the cheese-making process, or used as farm feed, but is now captured, processed at Cabot’s Middlebury plant into a powder, and used widely in the food industry as a protein additive.

The milk is then processed in long open vats to skim off the curds that are the principal ingredient in cheese by heating the milk, adding cultures and non-animal rennet to coagulate it. Salt is also added to reduce the acidity of milk and promote the aging process, and if the creamery is working on a flavored cheese, herbs, spices and other ingredients are added.

To ensure the highest quality, the creamery does not add any preservatives or chemical enhancers

Because there are no added preservatives, you’ll learn on the tour that the best way to keep large blocks of cheese fresh is to remove it from its original wrapping after opening and wrap it tightly in plastic wrapping before refrigerating. It should also be re-wrapped with fresh plastic wrapping each time it is re-opened.

It takes about 10 lbs of milk to make 1 lb. of cheese, and the total time from vat to the aging rooms is about 3 hours.

The video room is filled with many of Cabot’s numerous awards, and examples of its products and those of other major manufacturers that use whey from the creamery in their products. Tour guide hosts are very knowledgeable about the cheese-making process, and very happy to answer questions.

After the video, there is a tour of the plant, down corridors lined with a bewildering array of pipes that move milk and its products to various preparation chambers and rooms. Large picture windows allow you to watch employees at work on a number of products.

It takes just two hours, from start to finish, to process very perishable cultured products like cream cheese, yogurt and sour cream that are then shipped to retailers the same day.

Cheeses that require aging spend anywhere from two months to three years in cold storage facilities, and are constantly monitored to ensure quality.

In addition to its most popular cheddar cheeses, Cabot Creamery products include a wide variety of flavored cheeses – such as Monterey Jack, Five Peppercorn, Horseradish and Sundried Tomato Basil – and its top-of-the-line Private Stock and Vintage Choice cheeses that are hand-waxed and noted for their rich flavor and sharpness.

The creamery is also noted for being the first in the country to offer “light” cheeses with 50 and 75 percent less fat than conventional cheese.

Back in the visitors’ center, the creamery offers a good selection of recipe ideas for Cabot Creamery products, and eclectic pairings of cheeses with wines and beers.

As part of a coordinated campaign to promote agriculture in Vermont, Cabot Creamery also promotes the sale of many specialty food products in Vermont at its creamery and the Cabot Annex in Waterbury Center. At both, you will find a wide range of preservatives, candies, maple syrup, seasonings, oils, vinegars, salsas, mustards, coffees and chocolates.

The company is also noted for its extensive health and nutrition campaigns in schools and communities to promote the benefits of calcium, and is also involved in promoting the arts in schools.

Cabot Creamery cheese products come in a wide range of shapes and sizes, including 8-ounce and 2 lb dairy bars, single-slice and shredded cheese packs, and classic waxed bars and wheels.

Cabot Creamery products are available throughout much of New England, New York, the Mid-Atlantic states and parts of Florida and California... and through a major retailing deal, can be found in Wal-Mart stores nationwide. The company also has an extensive mail order business.

For more information at Cabot Creamery Cooperative, call 800-837-4261, or visit its Web site at: [www.cabotcheese.com](http://www.cabotcheese.com)