

THE NORTHEAST GOLD MEDAL CHEESE COMPETITION

CHEESE COMPETITION ENTRY RULES

1. An entry form and entry fee of \$25 for each entry must be received by Eastern States Exposition no later than July 8, 2026, to be eligible for competition.
2. Cheeses made in New England by a New England licensed cheesemaker in a licensed dairy facility are eligible to compete.
3. Classes will be determined based upon entries. Remember: all cheeses are based on their individual merit and not based on the best in class. Competition Judges or Show Management reserve the right to move products that appear to be misclassified into the correct cheese class.
4. Cheeses with federal standard of identity must conform to those standards.
5. Send your cheese in its original form. Cheeses may not be plugged and/or resealed. Cheese must be entered as whole wheels, loaves, or blocks. Exceptions will be made for larger form cheeses, i.e. Emmental and Cheddar. These cheeses must be presented in the form in which they are available for wholesale distribution. (For example, 10-pound Print, 5-pound Brick, 20-pound Wedge, etc.) Any individual cheese under one pound weight will require a minimum of three pieces or samples. Any yogurt, fermented dairy drinks, or other fermented dairy products require a minimum of four 8-ounce samples or the equivalent.

Cheese Competition Judging Rules

1. Cheeses are judged by deducting points from a 100-point scale, based on defects for technical judges and desirable qualities for aesthetic judges. Judges' score sheets will be returned to participants. Gold, silver, and bronze medals will be awarded, based on the following:
 - a. Gold: 95 to 100 points
 - b. Silver: 90 to 94 points
 - c. Bronze: 80 to 89 points
 - d. All cheeses placing below 80 points will be awarded no medal.
2. All Gold Medal winning cheeses are eligible for Best in Show and Best in State.
 - a. Best in Show is determined by all judges as the overall best cheese of the day regardless of previous score.
 - b. Best in State will be the highest scoring cheese from each state selected as Best in State, regardless of previous score. States that do not enter at least three cheeses are not eligible for a Best in State award.
3. Each cheese will be evaluated by a panel of at least two judges: one aesthetic judge and one technical judge. A guest judge may join a panel. Aesthetic and technical judges' scores will be counted towards the overall score. Guest judges include invited chefs, local cheese writers, and cheese enthusiasts who work with the judges to learn more about New England cheeses. Guest judge scores do not count, but they do receive copies of their score sheets to utilize in future cheese opportunities.
4. Cheese entries become the property of Eastern States Exposition and are used for promotional purposes.

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CHEESE COMPETITION PROMOTION AND RESULTS RELEASE

All cheesemakers entered in the competition are invited to participate in the Farmers Market as part of The Big E, September 18 – October 4, 2026. Promotional material or placards are encouraged and used for display. Materials should not be reflected on actual entries for judging. The remaining cheese is used throughout the Fair at various tasting events. If additional samples of cheese are needed, the cheesemaker will be contacted. Additional opportunities for cheese promotions will be given as information becomes available.

HOW TO ENTER

Step 1: Enter Your Product

1. Entries can be submitted online at <https://thebigech.fairwire.com>.
2. Each contest entry must be accompanied by a \$25 entry fee. Checks should be made payable to Eastern States Exposition. MasterCard, Visa, and Discover are also accepted.
3. Entry forms and fees must be received by July 8, 2026.

Mail Fees to:

Eastern States Exposition
Agriculture & Education Department
1305 Memorial Avenue
West Springfield, MA 01089

Step 2: Submit Your Entries (Ship or Drop Off)

1. Package products in basic, discreet containers. If any label is visible from inside the lid, please cover it. Products should have no markings or labels other than the ESE-designated labels.
2. Upon entry, ESE will email labels to be printed and affixed to your product. Each label will display a three-digit number indicating Class # – Exhibitor ID – Entry #. Please ensure labels are securely attached.
3. Wrap or box your entries securely to prevent damage during shipping.

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SHIPPING INSTRUCTIONS

- Shipments will be accepted from Wednesday, July 8, 2026, through Wednesday, July 15, 2026.
- All entries must arrive by 4 p.m. on July 15, 2026. Deliveries will not be accepted on Saturdays or Sundays.

Ship entries to:

Eastern States Exposition
Agriculture & Education Department
Mallory Complex
1305 Memorial Avenue
West Springfield, MA 01089

DROP-OFF INSTRUCTIONS

- If you prefer to drop off your entry in person, you must schedule an appointment by calling 413-205-5011 or emailing aginfo@thebige.com.
- Drop-offs must follow the same packaging, labeling, and delivery timeframe as shipped entries.

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CLASS LISTING

CLASS 1 – CHEDDAR

1A – Cheddar (Aged up to 12 months)

No flavored cheese. All milks.

1B – Cheddar (Aged 13–24 months)

No flavored cheese. All milks.

1C – Cheddar (Aged over 24 months)

No flavored cheese. All milks.

1D – Cheddar (Bandaged or Linen Wrapped)

All milks.

1E – Flavored Cheddar

All ages. All milks.

CLASS 2 – EASTERN STATES ORIGINALS

2A – Eastern States Originals

Cheeses made with original recipes that display qualities beyond the definitions of listed classes.

All milks. All flavors.

Entries must describe what makes the cheese unique.

CLASS 3 – AMERICAN ORIGINALS

3A – American Originals

Includes: Colby, Monterey Jack, Colby Jack, Brick, Muenster, Dry Jack, Teleme.

All milks. Limited to cheeses listed.

CLASS 4 – SWISS & ALPINE STYLES

4A – Swiss Style

Includes: Emmental, Baby Swiss.

No flavored cheese. All milks.

4B – Alpine Style

Examples include: Raclette, Gruyère, Sbrinz, Appenzeller, Abondance, Beaufort.

All milks. No flavored cheese.

CLASS 5 – ITALIAN STYLES

5A – Italian Hard & Firm Style

Examples include: Provolone, Parmesan, Romano, Asiago, Montasio, Caciotta.

All milks. No flavored cheese.

5B – Italian Soft Style

Examples include: Fresh Mozzarella, Fiore di Latte, Burrata, Robiola.

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All milks. No flavored cheese.

CLASS 6 – HISPANIC STYLES

6A – Hispanic Style Cheese

Examples include: Cotija, Queso para Freír, Queso Blanco, Queso Fresco, Azorean styles, Chihuahua, Quesadilla.

All milks. No flavored cheese.

CLASS 7 – TRADITIONAL INTERNATIONAL STYLES

7A – Traditional International Cheese Styles

Examples include: Manchego, São Jorge, Edam, Gouda, Havarti, Caerphilly, Juustoleipä (Bread Cheese), Monastery styles, Danish Fontina.

All milks. No flavored cheese.

EXCLUDED – Blue cheeses, Italian styles, Cheddar, Hispanic styles, Swiss styles, Feta.

CLASS 8 – BLUE CHEESE

8A – Exterior-Rinded Blue Cheese

Includes: Soft ripened, white mold, leaf wrapped, washed rind, rubbed rind, alcohol-brined rind styles (e.g., Gorgonzola, Roquefort styles).

All milks. No flavored cheese.

8B – Interior Veined (Rindless) Blue Cheese

All milks. No flavored cheese.

8C – Flavored Blue Cheese

All milks.

CLASS 9 – GOAT CHEESE

9A – Fresh Goat Cheese

All shapes and sizes. No flavored cheese.

9B – Ripened Goat Cheese

Includes: Soft ripened, ash-covered, aged over 31 days.

All shapes and sizes. No flavored cheese.

9C – Flavored Goat Cheese

All shapes and sizes.

CLASS 10 – FLAVORED CHEESE (OPEN)

10A – Flavored Hard Cheese

Hard cheeses with less than 39% moisture. All milks.

10B – Flavored Fresh Cheese

Soft and semi-soft high moisture cheeses, including washed rind and international styles. All milks.

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EXCLUDED – Cheeses with an existing flavored class, all Cheddar, all goat cheeses, dips and spreads, cultured dairy products, unripened dairy products, Feta.

CLASS 11 – WASHED RIND CHEESE

11A – Washed/Smear Ripened Cheese

Includes cheeses washed or rubbed with natural agents (alcohol, brine, B. linens, grape must).

All milks. No flavored ingredients beyond listed treatments.

EXCLUDED – Gruyère, Raclette, Brick.

CLASS 12 – SOFT RIPENED WHITE MOLD

12A – Soft Ripened White Mold Cheese

Examples include: Brie, Camembert, Triple Crème.

All milks.

12B – Flavored Soft Ripened White Mold Cheese

All milks.

CLASS 13 – DIPS & SPREADS

13A – Dips and Spreads

Must contain at least 55% dairy cheese. All milks.

13B – Flavored Dips and Spreads

Must contain at least 55% dairy cheese. All milks.

CLASS 14 – SMOKED CHEESE

14A – Smoked Cheese

Open category. All milks, sizes.

14B – Flavored Smoked Cheese

All milks, sizes.

CLASS 15 – FETA

15A – Feta (Cow Milk)

All sizes.

15B – Flavored Feta

All milks, sizes.

15C – Feta (Goat, Sheep, or Mixed Milks)

All sizes.

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CLASS 16 – CULTURED DAIRY PRODUCTS

16A – Cultured Dairy Products

Includes: Kefir, Labneh, Buttermilk, Crème Fraîche, Sour Cream. All milks.

16B – Flavored Cultured Dairy Products

All milks.

EXCLUDED – Yogurt (see below).

16C – Yogurt

All milks.

16D – Flavored Yogurt

All milks.

CLASS 17 – UNRIPENED DAIRY PRODUCTS

17A – Unripened Dairy Products

Includes: Cottage Cheese, Fromage Blanc, Quark, Mascarpone, Ricotta, Crescenza, Stracchino.

All milks.

17B – Flavored Unripened Dairy Products

All milks.

17C – Cheese Curds

All milks. No flavored cheese.

17D – Flavored Cheese Curds

All milks.

CLASS 18 – BUTTER

18A – Salted Butter

All milks. No flavored butter.

18B – Flavored Butter

Includes salted and unsalted, cultured styles. All milks.

18C – Ghee

Clarified butter with no remaining milk solids.

18D – Unsalted Butter

All milks. No flavored butter.

18E – Cultured Butter

Made from fermented cream. All milks. No flavored butter.

CLASS 19 – SHEEPMILK CHEESE

19A – Fresh Sheepmilk Cheese (Under 61 Days)

Examples include: Brin d'Amour, Pérail de Brebis, Brousse.

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19B – Aged Sheepmilk Cheese (Over 61 Days)

Examples include: Pecorino, Manchego, Caciotta, Petit Basque.

CLASS 20 – MIXED MILK CHEESE

20A – Mixed Milk Cheese

Cheese made from two or more dairy animal milks (cow, goat, sheep, buffalo, camel, yak).

EXCLUDED – Plant-based or non-dairy milks.