

## NEWS / BUSINESS

## Hispanic Cheese Makers positions itself as leader in authentic cheese offerings, sustainability

By Alyssa Mitchell

**CHICAGO** — Hispanic Cheese Makers offers an array of private label Hispanic cheese while focusing on sustainable and holistic business practices.

Founded in 2009, the company originally was known by its former consumer brand, Nuestro Queso. As the business grew, the company began receiving more requests for private label Hispanic cheese offerings. Demand ramped up to the point that the company decided to spin off and sell its Nuestro Queso brand and focus solely on its private label and co-packing business under the name Hispanic Cheese Makers.

“Our customers were confused by the Nuestro Queso brand name when we were conducting business for private label offerings, so we wanted a new name to set us apart,” explains Arturo Nava, marketing director for Hispanic Cheese Makers.

“What we’ve found is that over the past several years, the real growth in our business has come from helping others by leveraging the experience we have from all the brand work we started back in 2009,” adds Mark Braun, CEO.

While the company continues to manufacture the Nuestro Queso brand, it no longer manages its sales, marketing or distribution.

Nava notes Hispanic Cheese Makers’ philosophy is about providing its customers with authentic, quality Mexican, Caribbean and Central American cheeses and creams crafted with care and a personal sense of ownership using locally-sourced milk free of rbST hormones.

With headquarters in Chicago, Hispanic Cheese Makers operates a manufacturing facility in Kent, Illinois. The plant is SQF Level 3 certified.

“It gives our customers peace of mind to know we offer expertise in Hispanic cheeses and manufacturing in a safe, state-of-the-art facility,” Nava says. “We’ve been doing this for almost 10 years now and have the experience managing the Nuestro Queso brand, which gives us insight into the marketplace to share that knowledge with our private label customers.”

Nava notes Hispanic cheese demand in North America is booming as restaurants have increased their authentic offerings, leading to increased demand from consumers at retail.

“We have world class capabilities to give customers what they need, from onsite shredding and grating, to providing packaging innovation capabilities,” he says.

Sustainability also is an important facet of the business, Braun notes.

“When you start to peel back the onion on the sales side, you ask yourself, what do customers value? Looking at the larger grocery chains — they want to know what your sustainability attributes are and how you stand on

that because they’re very forthright in their sustainability initiatives,” he says.

With this in mind, Hispanic Cheese Makers is taking a holistic approach across its operations to set goals and standards for the company that reflect its focus on quality across the entire manufacturing process, including sustainable systems and operations at the plant level.

The company is near completion on a multi-million dollar system designed to treat wastewater that can be re-used to irrigate adjacent crop land.

“Now we’ve got a system to irrigate crops from the water we treat. But importantly, we are working on systems to actually use less water,” Braun says.

“As part of this sustainability initiative, we’re installing new state-of-the-art systems that utilize reverse osmosis to purify water to extremely high-quality standards. Thus, we also are taking a look at our water and how we treat it both as it comes in and goes out. What can we do with the solids that we’re going to produce and collect in this new system? What benefits do they offer?”

The company also brought in an engineering firm to do an audit and see how the plant can conserve water by looking at leaks and equipment valves.

“We didn’t stop at water. We also brought the power company in for an audit and have been changing out

all the lighting in the plant to LED,” Braun says. “We’ve made this into a much larger project, and this is one of the things we’re going to be known for — a more holistic approach about who we are and what we do.”

Hispanic Cheese Makers will be sharing its offerings and capabilities at Private Label Manufacturers Association’s 2018 Private Label Trade Show, Nov. 11-13 in Rosemont, Illinois.

“We are offering a full line up of Hispanic cheeses and creams and showing customers who want to start their private label business what we can do to help them launch their own brands,” Nava says. **CMN**

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