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Cheese brings smiles to Easter table



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Ricotta and basket cheese combine with eggs and prosciutto, all baked in a pie, to make Pizza Rustica.

It's fresh, it's local and it's essential for those glorious pies, pastries and pasta.

BY GAIL CIAMPA
JOURNAL FOOD EDITOR

With Easter around the corner, this is the busiest time of year at Supreme Dairy Farms Brand of Warwick. This cheese maker and purveyor makes the fresh basket cheese, ricotta and mozzarella that will go into holiday pies such as pastiera and rusticata as well as lasagna or manicotti dishes.

Supreme has been making cheese for more than 75 years, most of that time under the founding Bruzzese family, but for the past few years under new owner Paul Areson and his business partner Bill Toll, a 30-year Supreme employee. They've added new products, including part-skim ricotta and part-skim mozzarella for more health conscious cooks, as well as cheese blends for the pizza trade. All Supreme cheeses are sold in local supermarkets (Dave's Marketplace, Shore's, Belmont Market, Brigido's Marketplace, Ruggieri's, Stop & Shop, Shaw's, Whole Foods Market and Eastside Marketplace), and specialty stores (Venda Ravitoli). But they are also used in the kitchens of pizzerias (including Cassera, Ronzio, Tommy's Pizza), restaurants (including Marchetti's) and at bakeries (including LaSalle and Buono's). "We're behind the scenes and on the shelves," said Areson.



Supreme Dairy Farm makes all the cheeses that are used in Easter cooking. The 75-year-old company is owned by Paul Areson, right. At left is business partner Bill Toll.

Dave's, for example, buys thousands of pounds of cheese a month for their large prepared food department. Bakeries, too, use lots of cheeses as they supply many more customers with rice and ricotta pies, as fewer people make their own but still crave these traditional Easter treats.

The flavor and freshness that comes with a locally produced product make Supreme's a popular choice. Areson said it is the best selling ricotta in Southern New England.

Toll said that in general Supreme sells to the higher end customers as their niche. These restaurants and bakeries will pay a little more for the fresh cheese made down the road in Warwick. Recent food price hikes challenge the company to remain competitive but Areson said that like many in the food business, they will ride this out. Most of the stores they sell to are also holding their prices down, especially during the Easter season, so home cooks shouldn't expect to see the sticker shock at the grocery store that they are seeing with other products like bread.

Supreme has also expanded beyond cheese to sell deli meats, in demand by some of their restaurant customers,

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and ancillary items such as paper goods, including pizza boxes. Supreme was founded by Thomas Bruzzese in 1932. He learned cheese making in his native Calabria, Italy, before moving to the United States and saving enough money to start his own Italian cheese-making business in Providence. Today his sons, Jimmy (Vincent) and Sal Bruzzese, may be retired but Areson said they still drop by Supreme. They were recently in to test the seasonal fresh basket cheese, one of the recipes brought to Rhode Island from Calabria.

The fact that Toll wanted to see the company continue, after so many years working there, convinced Areson the company was a good investment, he said. Toll first worked for Supreme when he was in college at URI during the busy Easter season some 34 years ago. The company needed help making all that basket cheese that would find its way onto an antipasto or as a key ingredient for pizza rusticata.

"Formagino Fresco" as it is called, has a short 30-day shelf life and shoppers look for it as a sign of springtime. From its

"Formagino Fresco" has a short 30-day shelf life and shoppers look for it as a sign of springtime. From its early days in Italy, it was made at Easter by local farmers as an offering to the clergy and others.

early days in Italy, it was made at Easter by local farmers as an offering to the clergy and others. It has a mild, silky and creamy taste and is packaged in a plastic basket. Toll said it is made with the same starter as mozzarella and is often put on the table in the basket but just as often sliced up and served in pieces almost like cranberry sauce at Thanksgiving.

Over the years, the Bruzzese family shared recipes through booklets and even held cooking contests to find more. Now many of them are online at the company's Web site at www.supremedairyfarms.com.

We've included two Easter favorites here, one for Easter Pastiera and another for Pizza Rustica.

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Cheese gives extra reason to smile at Easter

SUPREME PASTIERA EASTER PIE

Pasta Frolla crust (see recipe)

Filling:
4 cups ricotta cheese
2 cups sugar
3 egg yolks
3 egg whites
1 cup boiled milk
1/2 cup citron, chopped (optional)
1/2 cup orange peel, chopped
1 teaspoon vanilla

Rice, wheat or barley (use only one):

1 cup dry rice (cooked 10 minutes)
1 cup drained wheat (soaked 72 hours and cooked 10 minutes)
1 cup drained barley (soaked 24 hours and cooked 10 minutes)

Drain ricotta. Add sugar, egg yolks and blend together. Add the prepared wheat, barley or rice and cooled boiled milk, citron, orange peel and vanilla. Blend ingredients together thoroughly with mixer. Fold in stiffly beaten egg whites.

Pour mixture into crust-lined pie plate or spring form pan. Crisscross top with strips made from remaining pie crust dough. Bake in 350 degree oven for 1 1/2 hours or until firm in center.

Note: Chef A-Roni, 2832 South County Trail, East Greenwich, is one source for citron.

PASTA FROLLA

1 cup flour
2 egg yolks
4 tablespoons milk

1/2 cup confectioners' sugar
1/2 teaspoon vanilla
1/4 pound butter

Sift flour on pastry board. Form pocket in center of flour. Drop in egg yolks and butter cut into small pieces and with fork, blend in butter, egg yolks and flour.

Add sugar, vanilla and just enough milk to hold mixture together. Roll out on lightly floured board, keeping dough in circular shape. Roll from center toward the edges until dough is 1/4 inch thick. Fit dough into 10-inch pie plate or spring form pan. Save leftover dough for strips to criss-cross top of pie.

SUPREME PIZZA RUSTICA

1 pound prosciutto, cubed
2 cups whole milk ricotta
1/2 pound fresh basket cheese
1/2 pound mozzarella (cubed)

6 eggs
1 teaspoon black pepper
2 10-inch pie crusts (see editor's note)

Line extra deep baking dish with one pie crust. Beat eggs in large bowl. Add cheeses, prosciutto and pepper. Thoroughly blend all ingredients.

Pour mixture in lined baking dish. Cover with remaining pie crust.

Cut slits in upper crust to allow steam to escape. Bake in 375 degree oven for 45 minutes or until firm in center.

Editor's note: Supreme suggests using your favorite pie crust or try Mother's Crust (recipe here).

MOTHER'S CRUST

4 eggs, divided
1/2 to 1/3 cup Crisco, melted

1 teaspoon baking powder
2 cups flour

With a stand mixer, beat three eggs. Add flour, baking powder and mix with 1/2 cup of Crisco and mix into dough. If it doesn't blend, add more Crisco. As soon as the dough comes together, stop the mixer. Do not overmix.

Divide in half. Using wax paper dusted with flour, roll out dough to 3/8- to 1/2-inch thickness to line a deep spring form pan. Pour in Pizza Rustica mixture (see recipe). Top pie with second piece of rolled out dough. Cut vents.

Whisk the remaining egg and a bit of water in a wash. Brush it over all the crust.

Full-flavored cheeses, Supreme Easter dish

BY GAIL CIAMPA
JOURNAL FOOD EDITOR

You can't sit and write a story about cheese without trying it. So, armed with a full complement of Supreme Dairy Farms Brand's cheeses, I hit the kitchen last weekend and emerged impressed.

These Bruzzese family recipes are mighty fine. The superior texture of the cheeses paired with the full flavor make for a great start to any dish. I started with the whole milk mozzarella for Friday night pizza. My husband and I began nibbling it while the sauce simmered and I rolled the dough. The full flavor and density was great cold from the fridge and or on the pizza. We resolved to make it our pizza cheese of choice. For a second pizza, I used the part skim, which is not my usual choice, as I find other brands lose flavor and don't cook up as nicely. But it was almost impossible to tell

Supreme's from the whole milk either by taste or texture.

On Saturday, we enjoyed the full-bodied Pecorino Romano as a topping for a fresh batch of Italian Wedding soup.

Finally, I took the Supreme Pizza Rustica recipe and went to work with the whole milk ricotta, basket cheese and mozzarella. I baked it in my mother's pizzagaina crust recipe in a springform pan. It called for a pound of cubed prosciutto but I chose the Black Forest ham in my fridge. (After all, this is supposed to be a dish that is perfect for using up leftovers).

It cooked for closer to an hour and 15 minutes rather than the 45 minutes called for, but cooks should always be watching anything they make. The test should always be a clean, dry knife coming out of the middle.

I brought it to the office for a photo and to share, and it was the perfect Easter treat.