It's the stuff movies are made of—A chance meeting opens doors for a new product leading to instant fame and glory! This fairy tale is becoming reality... well, sort of... for one of our newest products!

Just like in the movies, a connection made at the Winter Fancy Food Show earlier this year has led to an amazing opportunity for one of our newest products. Unlike what is portrayed in the movies, there's a lot more work that goes into making dreams like this a reality than one might think.

Mark Anderson, Regional Sales Manager, and Allen Hendricks, Director of Foodservice, met some reps from QVC while launching our new line of frozen breaded and battered curds at the Fancy Food Show. QVC was intrigued by our product and were curious about how their customers might like to have them available in their own freezers.

We knew once they tasted the product, they would be in love. However, before we could even get to that point, a seemingly never-ending round of meetings took place between QVC's online sales broker, the folks at QVC, and our team. They reviewed the specs, considered the applications of the product, their customers' tastes and preferences, the online and on-air appeal, etc. Pricing was also a consideration—there are a number of additional costs to consider for a unique opportunity like this, from brokers' fees to fulfillment cost. Agreeing on price required a lengthy negotiation to make the deal a win-win for all.

After many months of work, it was finally time to submit samples to QVC's quality team. They recognize the value of the product—and the taste! We hope to hear the good word soon and move the project even closer to becoming a reality.

Additional hurdles to overcome—How do we safely and efficiently get a frozen product from our facility to customers across the country? How does our shipping staff manage, package, and ship within hours hundreds of small orders that would likely be generated through QVC in a matter of minutes? We knew we didn’t have the capabilities. After some research Mark and Allen found Neesvig’s. Neesvig’s, Inc. specializes in frozen food order fulfillment. Orders would be accepted by QVC and forwarded to Neesvig’s for processing, packaging, and shipping from their frozen food warehouse. As a bonus, Neesvig’s has partnerships with other specialty online retailers. They can make our product available for sale by these online companies fulfilling their orders, too. This relationship will also allow us to make our frozen line of products available for purchase through our own online store, not only allowing us to reach the single order consumer but small restaurants who wish to offer our products but are unable to commit to the minimum quantity that is currently required.

So how does the story end? This project is looking very promising. While there's not a definite commitment, air dates are being discussed. If all goes as planned in a matter of weeks you'll see our full line of frozen breaded and battered curds offered on our online store with orders being fulfilled by Neesvig’s. This will allow us to test the order and fulfillment process.

QVC is currently considering a pre-Super Bowl promotion for our Frozen Beer Battered Cheese Curds. The product would be sold as two 2½ pound bags (5 pounds total). Last month a Michigan chocolate maker sold 6,700 cases of mini caramel bites in 6 minutes. Are deep fried cheese curds as appealing as fine chocolate? Can we expect that number of orders from our promotion? Stay tuned... It sure would be fun to find out!

We’ll be sure to keep you updated as this project progresses!
A Look on the Bright Side
By Paul Bauer, CEO, Manager paulb@ellsworthcreamery.net

This year has been tough on dairy farmers. However, instead of focusing on what is wrong with the markets, I’ve decided to end the year by focusing on what is going right for our cooperative. Listed in no particular order, here are some of our organization’s success stories from 2018...

- The WI Association of Dairy Plant Field Representatives’ Conference was held in River Falls. It was organized by Dean Hines and with the help of 9 other staff we were able to provide plant tours to 100 field service representatives and state officials from around the state.
- The footprint of our retail store was expanded with a deep fried cheese curd wagon in the parking lot. Generating over $22,000 in additional revenue, this exceeded our sales target and drove frozen curd sales building demand for this product.
- Our Purple and Gold Cheese Curd promotion in conjunction with the Minnesota Vikings’ trip to the Super Bowl was a hit with our Minnesota customers. We sold 21,000 lbs of the colored curds and discovered that it is very difficult to perceive purple food dye in large quantities.
- We tested the maximum capacity for our retail store customer count and sales volume under the current square footage and configuration during Cheese Curd Festival in 2018. With lines that extended out the doors and into the parking lot, we welcomed a record number of customers over the 1½ day event!
- We experienced increased sales as a result of our purchase of Wohlt Creamery. One customer increased their business with Ellsworth and we are now doing a branded process cheese at their request. One customer consolidated their business and is giving more sales to Wohlt. We are also quoting new business at Wohlt which is something they have not done for many years. In addition, we are able to capitalize on cheese prices and price by managing the cheese production at Ellsworth with Wohlt production.
- Our Dairy Month partnership with Kwik Trip in June resulted in the sale of 12 semi loads of retail curds with the promise of additional orders coming this fall.
- The Minnesota State Fair sold a record 132,000 lbs of curds this year. 100% of cheese curds at the Great Minnesota Get Together came from Ellsworth this year!
- A new bulk curd customer is gearing up for a fall promotion. In September and October they purchased 600,000 additional pounds of bulk curds. We’ll be on the lookout for a retail cheese curd promotion in the fourth quarter!
- Our Frozen Beer Battered Cheese Curls will be featured on a new menu being rolled out by national franchise.
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We Experience Audits & Inspections, Too...
Audits and inspections can be stressful, as you know if you’ve had an inspector at your farm. What you may not realize is that at our cooperative we experience a number of inspections each year, too. To give you an idea of the number of audits we experience, we’re sharing this list (to the right) of regular audits at our cooperative.

Bright Side (continued)...
truckload quantities to other distributors to sell. This allows our refrigerated and frozen product to reach a national reach with lower transportation costs.
- One of our private label cut cheese customers accepted a new packaging style, offering consumers an easy-open package which requires less labor and material on the production side. This new easy-open packaging will roll out to other cuts of cheese, as well.
- In addition to being great news for our cooperative, these wins also helped our patrons’ paychecks. Year to date through September, value added profits contributed $1.13 per cwt to your check! Put another way, had we not made the decision to transition to a greater share of value-added products 10 years ago, our patrons would have received $1.13 less per cwt for the entire year. This further supports that our continued investment and expansion into the value-added marketplace is critical to our profitability and viability into the future.

The National Milk Producers Federation (NMFPF) held its 2018 Annual Meeting last month in Phoenix, Arizona. A highlights of the event is the Championship Cheese Competition. Once again Ellsworth Cooperative Creamery brought home several 1st place wins, with two awards going to processed cheeses produced at our new Wohlt Cheese plant! Our Swiss American Processed Cheese took 1st place in the Processed American Plain Category and our Jalapeno Pepper American took 1st in the Flavored Category! And proving that there’s no better cheese snack anywhere, it was our Cajun Cheese Curds that took 1st in the Natural Cheese Snack Category. Take that cheese sticks!

From our cheese making staff, to our patron farmers; it’s your hard work and an ongoing dedication to quality that makes our products award winning and our brand one we are proud of.

Congratulations ECC Patron Farms!
We wish to extend a big thank you to every patron for your hard work and preparations in advance of the Federal Surveys! Thanks to your efforts, we passed in both Wisconsin and Minnesota. We would like to give special recognition to the patrons below for their exemplary survey ratings:

Wisconsin:
- Al Anderson Acres, LLC (Amada Anderson) = 100
- Michael & Bonnie Stafne = 98

Minnesota:
- Kevin Piere = 100
- Dean Kamps = 97
- Adam & Sarah Mellinger = 100
- Tony & Matt Berktold = 97
- Jon & Wendy Meyer = 97
- Jim & Debbie Wallerich = 97

Dairy proud for over 100 years.

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