

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Carlos Yescas and Lee Hennessy

JVN [00:00:00] Welcome to Getting Curious. I am Jonathan Van Ness, honey, and every week, you guessed it! I sit down for a gorgeous conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. Today's episode is a real gooey, ooey, cheesy celebration. On today's episode, we're joined by a returning guest, Lee Hennessy, who we love, and Carlos Yescas, where I ask them: What's the story of cheese cultures? Welcome back to Getting Curious. Honey, have we got an episode for you. I think you all noticed now that, like, every time we have a food expert on the show, whether it's Padma Lakshmi, Sohla [El-Waylly], whether it's Pati Jinich, honey – I'm always asking about cheese. And on an episode this summer with Lee Hennessy about farming, it hit me. We had finally found our cheese expert. So we invited Lee back to the show to talk about all things cheese. Lee Hennessey, as y'all know—unless you didn't listen to that episode, in which case after this episode, you should go back and listen to that one. Lee Hennessey is the owner, farmer and cheese maker at Moxie Ridge Farm, a small farm and creamery in rural upstate New York. And he invited cheese scholar and chronicler Carlos Yescas. He documents cheese traditions and stories and is currently researching raw milk use in cheesemaking around the world. And today, our guiding question is, can you say cheese? Welcome to the show, y'all. How are you doing?

LEE HENNESSY [00:01:23] Good. Thank you for having me back.

JVN [00:01:26] Ohmigod, it's literally our pleasure. Hi, Carlos.

CARLOS YESCAS [00:01:29] Hi. Yes, we're very happy to be here.

JVN [00:01:32] Okay. So, there obviously, like, are, many types of cheese and many types of cheese experts. So, Carlos, let's start with you. How do you work with cheese in your life?

CARLOS YESCAS [00:01:44] I'm trying to understand, "Why do we eat the cheese that we eat?" This is something that I call in my life cheese politics. So normally there is a political decision, a policy decision, an environmental decision that ends up translating into the types of food that we eat. I specifically look at cheese. And so that takes a different shape every time. So I'll either be talking to a producer or a distributor or a retailer. And I want to understand, for example, if it's a retailer, "Why are you buying this type of cheese and not that type of cheese?" Right. Or a distributor. "Why are you bringing this to the U.S. or why are you sending these from Spain to the U.S.?" You know, they're all political questions. They're all economic questions. And so I try to put that together to sort of understand what is happening in the world of cheese at any given moment. And then I turn around and tell that to the world because there's so much mysticism about it. And I think that that only creates barriers for people that want to enjoy cheese or that want to sell cheese. And so I'm trying to break those barriers by the work that I do.

JVN [00:03:02] Where do you do that work? You gotta, like, travel all over, honey? You're doing like you're going over to Spain to taste those cheeses and, like, ask people about it? Like, you're going all over the place?

CARLOS YESCAS [00:03:11] I wish I could go all over the place, but the reality is that most of the cheese culture is in Western Europe and the Americas. And because I'm a Latin American, I do a lot of work in Latin America. I am going in a couple of days to Wales and I'm going to be judging the World Cheese Awards. I was, two weeks ago, in Switzerland, judging the Swiss Cheese Awards, and I was in May in Brazil, I went to try to understand the cheeses of Brazil. So I do travel a lot, but not all over the world.

JVN [00:03:47] The cheeses of Brazil, bitch?!

CARLOS YESCAS [00:03:50] [LEE LAUGHS] Yes!

JVN [00:03:51] The fuck? What's the most popular Brazilian cheese?

CARLOS YESCAS [00:03:56] A cheese called queso coalho. And it is on the grill, on a stick, and you can eat it like a lollipop. And so it is the most popular cheese of the summertime of Brazil, and it is just an amazing cheese. And it's just one of, I don't know, hundreds of cheeses that the Brazilians have.

JVN [00:04:14] Okay. Obsessed with you! Lee!

LEE HENNESSY [00:04:18] Hello!

JVN [00:04:18] I have missed you! That fucking handsome face, honey. The people of Getting Curious miss you, we're so excited that you're back. Okay, so tell us: it's fall. So what's happening with our goats? What's happening with our cheese? Where's the milk? Are we, like, culturing or something right now? What are we doing over at Moxie Ridge?

LEE HENNESSY [00:04:33] So a lot of what's happening—we might be able to hear in the background of the podcast. So for that, just a quick heads up. But right now is breeding season at the farm and so when the days get shorter, that signals the goats' bodies because they are seasonal breeders and seasonal milkers. They're, like, "Okay, we want to get bred right now so that we can gestate and have babies once it starts to get warm in the spring." And so right now what we'll hear on the podcast are, like, some of my dairy goats just singing their siren song, which is irresistible.

JVN [00:05:13] What's it sound like?

LEE HENNESSY [00:05:15] Oh, it sounds kind of, like, a bit of, like, human scream.

JVN [00:05:19] Oh I love it. And that's goat for, like, "Fuck me!"

LEE HENNESSY [00:05:23] [LAUGHS] I mean, they're *very, very, very* clear about what they want. Depending on, like, the breed of the goat, like, sheriffs have been called on the sound.

JVN [00:05:34] Oh shit, because they thought that, like, there was someone who got hurt?

LEE HENNESSY [00:05:37] Yeah, yeah.

JVN [00:05:38] And you're, like, "No, it's just goat fucking." It's just goat lovemaking, rather. Cause we're, we're a classy podcast, that's why we say classy stuff. So does that mean that they're not getting milked because they're not having babies yet?

LEE HENNESSY [00:05:52] So technically, we could be milking all through this time period. We actually dried the girls off this year, like, slightly early. Drying off is when we very slowly, like, start milking them less and less. Until they get to a point where they're no longer milking anymore. So right now they have started their vacation, it'll be breeding season pretty much up until January-ish. And each of the girls will go into estrus, which is when they're able to be bred once every 21 to 28 days. The other thing that is happening on the farm right now is the males are also very excited about breeding season. And what they do is "smell good." And so when people are, like, "Oh, goats are really stinky," it's, like "Male goats in breeding season are very stinky." And frankly, it's because they pee on their faces.

JVN [00:06:49] Oh, to, like, give the pheromones. They're giving, like, masc for musk in, like, a whole new goat way.

LEE HENNESSY [00:06:56] Oh, my God. Yes, masc for musk. Absolutely.

JVN [00:07:00] How's my baby?

LEE HENNESSY [00:07:01] Oh, my gosh. Baby Jane is amazing. She's getting really big.

JVN [00:07:05] And she's just, like, really happy and stuff?

LEE HENNESSY [00:07:08] Yep, she is bouncy. She's very lovey with people. She loves a good nibble.

JVN [00:07:12] So basically, Carlos, that you're traveling all over the place. Lee, you're still in gorgeous upstate New York. That's where we're doing most of our work, just to set the scene. So now the real crux of the goddamn question, what the fuck is cheese? Okay? Is it fermented milk? Is it milk in, in bags? How are we making the goddamn cheese? What is it? What are the ingredients?

LEE HENNESSY [00:07:37] It's literally just fermented milk. So you were right on the first shot. It is fermented milk. There is milk. There is cultures, which you will probably hear us flipping back and forth on. Cultures are a polite way of saying bacteria and fungi.

JVN [00:07:56] So there is, like, a barn in your—, or, like a, like a cheese hall where you got stuff like, like, aging or whatever?

LEE HENNESSY [00:08:05] Yeah, and we get to call it a cave, which is so goth. We'll milk the goats. If we milk by hand, which we sometimes do, it'll be in a pail. Then what we do is we take that and we immediately filter it and we get it cold. So we do that, we have a tank that's pretty big and we'll filter all of the milk as we pour it into that tank. So the tank then keeps it cold, cold, cold so there's no, like, extra bacteria that can grow.

JVN [00:08:31] Question!

LEE HENNESSY [00:08:32] Yes?

JVN [00:08:33] When you say filter, is that, like, just filtering out, like, any hair or, like, a woodchip that flew in there or something just, like, filtering out anything that's not liquid?

LEE HENNESSY [00:08:41] Yeah. And if we can't make cheese with it right away, which is what we prefer to do, then it'll be in the tank where it ideally is this, like, perfect snapshot of the milk in a moment. And then from there we'll take it into the creamery. And so to make the types of cheeses that are in our cheese cave aging right now, those are raw cheeses.

JVN [00:09:01] It's goat cheese, right?

LEE HENNESSY [00:09:03] Uh-huh, it's all goat cheese right now. So then what we'll do is we will take that milk, we'll bring it into the creamery and then depending on the cheese that we make, then we'll process it. And I would say maybe the most important thing that I would love you and the listeners to walk away with from my side of this today is that, like, when we make cheese, it's not like baking. What we do is we are farming these cultures. We're farming these little bacteria. Depending on the bacteria that we use, the cultures that go into the cheese they all will thrive in different environments. So maybe some will be, like, thriving at 120 degrees Fahrenheit. Maybe some will be thriving at 75 degrees Fahrenheit.

JVN [00:09:54] I have a question again.

LEE HENNESSY [00:09:55] Yes, bring it.

JVN [00:09:56] So, like, you have the milk and then you're, like, "You know, it has, like, a great, like, nutty flavor. Like that would be great for, like, a goat blue cheese or, like, a goat feta or,

like, just, like, a goat goat." What's just, like, the goat goat cheese? Just like when you get, like, goat cheese from the store. What's that?

LEE HENNESSY [00:10:09] That is called chèvre. Which, like, honestly, your name for it, "goat goat," it's the French word for, for just goat cheese.

JVN [00:10:16] That shit is so fucking gorgeous. Okay, so there's chèvre. And then you did tell me last time isn't there, like, goat, like, feta?

LEE HENNESSY [00:10:25] Yes. [JVN SIGHS] That's the feta that you like. So we make a, a Bulgarian style feta with goat cheese. And as Carlos will tell us, there's so many different cheeses from around the world that have all of these different traditions that are based on what people and animals needed, like, at any given time. So, like, we have a lot to choose from now as modern cheesemakers because I can be, like, "Okay, our milk at Moxie Ridge is very delicate and it's almost sweet. It doesn't have a goat-y taste to it." So then, like, what I want to do is I want to increase the acidity. So, like, like, how can I really get like the acidity rocking and rolling? Well the acidity comes from having a lot of cultures really, really active for a long time, that means that I make a type of cheese that's based off of that activity, which is called a lactic style cheese.

JVN [00:11:11] How do we get the different cultures? If you want to make a Swiss cheese, if you want to go blue cheese, is it a different culture for everything?

CARLOS YESCAS [00:11:17] There is. This is such a good question, Jonathan because you got really fast to a place where the cheese industry at the moment is having its "come to science" moment of what we are trying to actually say. And so there are culture houses—this is what they called—they're big companies, conglomerates, all of them European. And they have, for the past 50 years, gone and acquired all of the cultures to make Swiss, to make goat, fresh cheeses, to make cheddar. They have acquired those libraries and they have privatized them. They used to exist in, in universities. And the universities, along with the cheesemakers, would develop these flavors and make sure that, you know, these producers, small farmers, will have it. But now these culture houses have created monopolies.

And so, yes, you can be anywhere in the world and now buy a culture for blue cheese that is also hard or for a very soft, gooey type of cheese. And the issue, the big issue that we are having at the moment is that because there are so many consumers and it has a very distinct flavor profile that people look for, a lot of cheeses are becoming the same type of cheese because everyone wants that same type of lactic culture. And so we're losing a lot of cheeses around the world because people are, like, "Well, I want to use something that tastes more nutty, that tastes more sharp, that tastes more whatever," which is what the market is asking. So that's a brief explanation to your very good question of, "Can I go and buy any culture?" Yes, you can go buy any culture anywhere.

JVN [00:13:10] And you just go online and people do that, but it's just, like, making them, like, more obscure and harder to find?

CARLOS YESCAS [00:13:16] I think of this as sort of the fast fashion moment of cheese. Let's say that, you know, a skirt that is a specific, pleated form is what people like. And so, you know, then you can go and ask for it and you can get in every single color. But, you know, another style, that's much more difficult to find. And so this is what's happening in cheese. And so if you are an American consumer and go to the supermarket today, you'll be surprised that so many of the cheeses, either being a gouda or being an Alpine style or being a cheddar, all kind of taste the same. And there's no reason for it because, you know, they're coming from all sorts of different places in the world. They're coming from all sorts of different types of milks and animals, but they taste the same because they're using the same cultures.

JVN [00:14:04] Mm. Okay, that makes sense.

LEE HENNESSY [00:14:06] And what this looks like from a cheesemaker's perspective is, like, it's very difficult for us to develop our own cultures and not have to buy from these huge global monopolies. Our food system is really created to sell to grocery stores. So it's all about being safe at an incredibly large scale. And so for me in New York—and New York has a lot of restrictions because New York regulates dairy basically for enormous, enormous places that, you know, increase tax space, give people jobs, all of the stuff. And, like, I have to apply, you know, the same rules to myself and my little teeny, tiny dairy surrounded by screaming goats. The requirements that I would need to have at my place to develop my own cultures, for cheese that I can sell, are astronomical. And so from an accessibility standpoint and a systemic side, like, we're starting to see all of our cheeses taste the same because everybody has to kind of use the same ingredients.

JVN [00:15:12] Got it. Okay. So that makes sense. I feel like I heard that the Swiss cheese is disappearing. Is that a culture fucking issue? Because, like, we don't have enough goddamn Swiss cheese cultures, and so it's getting less holey? I read an article that said that Swiss cheese is getting less holey. Is that true?

CARLOS YESCAS [00:15:26] 100%. It's a huge response, but I would tell you two things very fast. One is that the icecaps of the Alps are not coming back every year like they should, you know, because of climate change. And so the water that goes down to the, to the mountains, to the, to the pastures, is less and less so there is less grass, there is less diverse microecology. And so that is impacting the type of cheese we have.

JVN [00:15:56] We're fucked! It's global warming. We're fucked! The Swiss cheese is fucking fucked! So they're going to be gone forever, queen, or is it going to come back? What's, what's up?

CARLOS YESCAS [00:16:06] I think it's going to be gone forever.

JVN [00:16:08] Fuck!

LEE HENNESSY [00:16:09] There's something really beautiful called the transhumance and I'm probably pronouncing it very upstate New York, but farmers in the Alpine Region, they will graze their, their cattle and their cows collectively. And so they'll all walk down, like, these huge streets when it's the springtime. And, like, all these farmers put all of their cows together and then they're out there and they're eating all together from all of these different farms. And then you've got, you know, people milking. And then there's one guy that's going as a collective, you know, that's making the cheese. And then they eat all of that grass and then the next level of the mountain is ready. And then they go up and eat that grass and they make cheese in another cheese house there. Top of the mountain and then they do it backwards in the fall. And I'm, like, where there aren't mountaintops, how do we recreate that?

JVN [00:16:52] So we're going to make Swiss cheese in New York.

LEE HENNESSY [00:16:54] We could pull together and, like, and be, like, "Hey, everybody, like, let's give us money so we can buy enough land to do, like, a transhumance and, you know, to save our version of Swiss cheese." But we can't do that because there's all these individual owners of the land and, like, it's, it's all systemic.

JVN [00:17:09] What's good with the Swiss cheese, you guys, enjoy it while you had it, because wow! So then, with all cheese, is it just, like, milk and a culture, or is there ever, like, other ingredients?

LEE HENNESSY [00:17:20] Milk, cultures, salts.

JVN [00:17:23] Salt!

LEE HENNESSY [00:17:24] You can have a coagulant, which is what rennet is. People have probably heard the word "rennet" or "vegetable rennet." It's a coagulating enzyme, some of it's animal based, some of it's vegetable based. The type of cheeses that really fits with my vibe are lactic cheeses, it's very much about, like, farming those cultures. You put it together, you let the cultures do the work, and for the most part, it's the cultures that actually, like, get the milk to basically an isoelectric state to coagulate the milk themselves. Like they'll just create such a low pH environment or a high acid environment that the milk itself will turn into curds and whey.

JVN [00:18:03] And is, like, curds and whey, like, big fat chunky cottage cheese, kind of?

LEE HENNESSY [00:18:08] Can be! Can be, the chunky cottage cheese type look. That's a curd.

JVN [00:18:14] Okay. So I was just in Wisconsin and in the hotel they gave me this, like, bag of cheese curds. It was just, like, a huge bag of, like, Wisconsin cheese curds. And there was, like, light yellow ones, more, like, of a creamy color. And then there was more, like, cheddar-y ones that were more, like, an orange color. So they took milk and salt and, like, maybe some rennet and they put it in a barrel or something?

LEE HENNESSY [00:18:41] They put it in a cheese vat and they would have heated it up. That would have been pasteurized because it's federally, literally, federally illegal to sell raw milk that's aged less than 60 days. And then they would have made curds and whey. They would have drained out the whey, packaged up the curds for Jonathan Van Ness.

JVN [00:19:00] And then to make that a block of cheese, would they have just drained the whey and then taken the curds and, like, smushed it together in, like, a square form to make it, like, you know, a wedge or whatever?

CARLOS YESCAS and LEE HENNESSY [00:19:12] Yeah.

JVN [00:19:13] So curds are just, like, unsmashed, unformed, like, they just go put it in, like, a form or something?

CARLOS YESCAS [00:19:19] Correct.

LEE HENNESSY [00:19:20] Curds are basically like unsalted pre-cheese.

JVN [00:19:24] Oh, they were so good. So they were salted then?

LEE HENNESSY [00:19:28] Those were salted. Yeah. Which is how you prepare them in Wisconsin, famous for its squeaky cheese curds.

JVN [00:19:35] It was really fucking good.

LEE HENNESSY [00:19:37] But what you talked about with, like, squishing them together, you can express moisture in a, in a lot of different ways. And one of those ways is pressing it. And then you can press it into all different kinds of shapes.

JVN [00:19:49] Oh! So sometimes we're super pressing them into, like, you know, those, like, big disks. And then what other shapes do we do?

CARLOS YESCAS [00:20:00] There's hard shapes, there's perfect squares. There are triangles.

JVN [00:20:07] I love a triangle. So then what's the difference between, like, hard and soft cheese? Is it, like, different cultures?

CARLOS YESCAS [00:20:14] Mm. The easiest way to explain it is that once you get to this curds and whey moment, depending on how much you cut your curd, you're spilling water out of that curd. And the more water that you spill, the harder the cheese will become. If the curd is very moist, it will end up with a very soft cheese as opposed to a very small grain of curd that doesn't have much water anymore. Then you put it together in the mold and that creates a very hard cheese that you can age for longer. So that's the difference between hard and soft.

JVN [00:20:57] And a softer cheese would be, like, a chèvre, right? And a harder cheese would be like, you know, like, a cheddar.

CARLOS YESCAS [00:21:05] Right. And so the best example of this is, you know, Parmigiano-Reggiano. They cut and cut and mill and mill the curds so much that they spill so much water that the inside of the curd is almost the size of a rice grain. And then they put it together in a, in a bowl, they put in the form, and then that develops that sort of hardness. And that's why they can age it for so long, because if you age a cheese that is very wet, it will ferment inside, it will become rotten. But if it doesn't have water anymore, you can age it for much longer.

JVN [00:21:39] I feel like I'm under fucking standing! Like, I feel like I'm fucking getting it. Oh, my God. And then obviously the milk is really important in cheese making because that's, like, the base ingredient. And so, Lee, even though we were talking about, like, all the cheeses kind of morphing because, like, the culture samples or culture libraries aren't as diverse. Doesn't that almost get a leg up in some ways to smaller farms? Because, like, you have a chance to be more unique because, like, if your milk is, like, totally different than, like, where these, like, mass farms are starting from...

LEE HENNESSY [00:22:10] Yeah, absolutely. And, like, I mean, you absolutely nailed it with the importance of milk right now, especially in, in U.S. cheesemaking. But the French literally have a name for that in, in food and drink, and that's called *terroir*. And that's that sense of place. And when you think of *terroir*, you can think of a postcard from a moment in time. The things that can, can create *terroir* for cheese are the milk, are the cultures, if they're, native, if they're local. It's the cultures that are around for aging, if there is any aging and you know what the people are capable of. If the people are capable of milling curd for a very, very long time and lifting, you know, a 120-pound wheel of curd, like, then they can make a Parmigiano-Reggiano. If you don't have access to that, then you can make the little cheeses that we make here. So all of that it, like, goes into that concept of *terroir*. The thing that's really important about milks and the point that you made about smaller farms versus larger farms, is that just like with big, big cheese companies, even the best cheese companies, they don't have their own farms or they have farms that they're contracted with, but they're, they're contracted with hundreds and sometimes thousands of different farms. You get no postcard from it. You get, like, a Xerox from someone else's trip.

JVN [00:23:40] No postcard from Sargento bitch. That's a goddamn Xerox copy.

LEE HENNESSY [00:23:47] You have, like, the spookiest AI painting of a cheese. It doesn't mean it's bad, it's accessible for a lot of people.

JVN [00:23:53] It's just different. Yeah.

LEE HENNESSY [00:23:54] Yeah. And so when we talk about small farms, if you've got single source milk, you can create a postcard in that milk itself, right? What we do here, because I'm a gigantic nerd and very stubborn, is the food that my goats get is grown within ten miles of the farm. So what they eat is what is around them. You know, they either eat the stuff that's here on the farm with their, their grass and their brows and stuff, or they'll get hay from down the road or they'll get grain from the next town over. And so we can create our own postcard within that milk. And there's nobody else's milk in the world that would taste like our milk. Just like if somebody else in a farm an hour away, nobody else's milk would taste like their milk if they kind of did the same thing. But it's similar without getting too much into farming. Like it's kind of the same thing when you're, like, "Oh, well, I need a lot of goats to produce, you know, a lot of milk and I need like the highest production ratio for it because I'm, you know, selling to a cheesemaker that's making stuff for the grocery store. I'm making stuff for a grocery store." You just want the most amount for the least amount of money. So now you're going to be feeding your goat, you know, grain that's, like, created by a large corporation that's, like, bought off the commodity market that's going to have grain from everywhere in the hemisphere. You're going to have, you know, different types of supplements in there and all that stuff. And so even the milk can be a Xerox.

CARLOS YESCAS [00:25:19] So to add to what Lee was saying all the culture houses are European and they are the ones that are pushing this Xerox copy idea of cheeses that are exactly the same. The biggest conglomerates of cheese are French companies and they are creating awful, awful cheese, but also because they have that "Frenchness," they can go around the world and sell cheeses that are not expressive of a place. They're, they're expressive of a lab. For the past ten years, I have noticed that in places like Mexico, which is my home, or places like Brazil or maybe places like India, a lot of the cheese culture is starting to disappear because the local producers want that aspirational aspect. And so they are buying these cultures or buying this, this idea of "Frenchness" or "Spanishness" or "Italianness" to create their cheeses. And so they're leaving behind the molecular cultures of what they used to make cheeses. And so it is actually quite bad what is happening. And so that's why so much of the work now that many of us are doing is trying to document the cheeses of Georgia, the country, and Albania and Armenia and, and people doing the same type of work in India, the same type of work in Latin America. And we're trying to save these cultures to make cheese so that we can develop and maintain our culture before, you know, this sort of big capitalism comes to, to cheese and destroys everything. And then we are all eating the same, terrible Sargento shit.

JVN [00:27:02] Oh, my God. It's, like, the stakes are, like, literally high. They're literally high. There's just a really rich world to get into with cheese that, like, it's past just like what you

shove in your face because you had a bad day. And it can be that, too. But there's also, like, a lot of, like, really interesting science and culture and history and even, like, economics and, like, trade laws and shit. Like, there's just so much that you can learn about! It is, like, so fucking interesting. So we got to do this fierce episode on mycology, fungus—don't need to tell you guys that because I already know y'all already know about that—with Patty Kaishian. And she was teaching us all about, like, how there's more bacterial and fungal cells in our bodies than human cells. So when we say, like, "cultures," what's the importance of fungi and bacteria to cheese? Like, is cultures really, like, fungal cultures?

CARLOS YESCAS [00:27:56] Yes, the U.S. Microbiological Association defines cheese as the microbes, because very much like humans, cheese is mostly, you know, microbes that are interacting either inside of a cheese or outside of the cheese, in the rind, have been around transforming the milk, the pace and all that. There are hundreds, hundreds and hundreds of bacteria and fungi and yeast that are growing on the cheese and are developing flavor, aroma and also texture. And so this is also what is so interesting about cheese that you can literally take the same culture and put it in different milk and it will interact in different ways that you end up with a different cheese. And then some people are trying to figure out how to bring all their fungi that maybe were not traditional to cheese making, but they want to incorporate it to create a different flavor profiles.

There's a microbiologist at Tufts University called Ben Wolfe, who is doing research specifically on microbes of cheese, not necessarily because he wants to know everything about cheese, but because he wants to understand how the ecology of microbial communities happens. Because once we understand that, then we can look at our microbiome and understand what is happening inside us. But of course it's easier to do it on the rind of a cheese because, you know, you have it out there. And so they have gorgeous graphics of things that they are tracking of the types of molds and types of bacteria that they have found in cheeses. And some of the things are very unique or things that a microbe or a fungi that they hadn't seen other than algae from the ocean and all of a sudden they appear in a cheese made in Vermont. And so they're trying to figure out, "How did that happen?" or "What is the interaction?" It's a huge world and go and study microbiology of cheese because it's not only fun, but it's also delicious.

JVN [00:29:58] I was just in New Zealand and ate this, like, blue cheese that was, like, the blue cheesiest of fucking blue cheese I've ever had. Like it had, like, the biggest chunks of, like, blue in it. And then I was, like, "Oh my God, am I really going to do this?" And I did it. And it was, like, really good. So, like, what makes, like, some cheese mold safe to eat because, like, aren't I just eating, like, mold as fuck. And, like, why is that safe?

CARLOS YESCAS [00:30:20] Of the hundreds and thousands of bacteria and fungi that exist, a very limited amount is actually pathogenic to humans. And I think this is a good question that you bring up, Jonathan, about blue cheese, because most people have heard that blue cheese is a type of Penicillium, it's Penicillium roqueforti. And so it is of that big genus of Penicillium.

But this is so different from the penicillin that we use to cure infection from the one that grows in cheese. And I think it's an interesting thing about humans, and this is a creation of connoisseurship as a skill, that as you develop your food taste and your gastronomic culture, you start seeing some foods as interesting and delicious. And, and they don't actually, you don't have to stop yourself anymore at that point of "It just looks kind of scary. I'm not going to eat it." In other cultures different molds are being eaten in different things. You know, kimchi is a good example of a food that is fermented and sometimes people develop a sort of mucus top and kombucha is also the same.

JVN [00:31:34] Yes.

CARLOS YESCAS [00:31:35] And you know, like, ten years ago if someone came is, like, "Oh, here, grab this drink that has mucus inside." You'd be, like, "I don't know that I want to drink that." But then you kind of come acculturated to, to this.

JVN [00:31:45] Basically the bottom line is it's safe, it's meant to be there. It's a good deal. So what the fuck is this rind, what do we do with them? We eat them, right? Cause I feel like I eat it in that gooey brie, like, when it has, like, that outside thing, like I eat that like waxy outer thing and I'm supposed to, right?

LEE HENNESSY [00:32:00] Yeah. So essentially, unless it's literally wax, which some cheeses are aged in literal wax, Edams and goudas.

JVN [00:32:10] I think I have had some wax before, and I was, like "What is this is, like, honeycomb-ass, like, plastic in my teeth?" Yeah, I think I've done that, too. But usually it, like, disintegrates because it's, like, cheesy.

LEE HENNESSY [00:32:19] Yeah. And ultimately, the rind cultures, like, the taste of the rind, like, it's all going to affect how the cheese tastes. So maybe if I am having a big old, you know, chunk of rind, I'll have it with, like, a pairing. But I also, I don't have to eat the rind. I'm a cheese maker. And sometimes I'm, like, "You know what? The rind is a bit too much for me today." I'm just here for the paste. The paste is the inside of the cheese and the rind is the outside of the cheese. So it's entirely up to you. I mean, I think some of the most gorgeous cheeses on the planet are cheeses that develop a natural rind. And that's some of the, the ones that we do here, mainly, again, because I'm very stubborn and a natural rind is just, like, kind of what you were talking about before, Carlos, about like there's so many different flora around that can grow on this stuff. So you kind of, like, let what's in your cave grow naturally on the outside, you brush it down, but you encourage that growth. And so by the end of it, once you've brushed everything down and you've gotten it ready to, to eat or to send, it looks like a gorgeous river stone, like, it looks like granite, almost. Like it's really incredible. And that's just, you know, I would imagine thousands of different types of flora all together, certainly at least hundreds.

JVN [00:33:38] So is the rind sometimes something that you make and then put the cheese in?

LEE HENNESSY [00:33:43] Nope. So the rind is something that naturally develops.

JVN [00:33:46] On all cheeses that have rinds, they all just naturally, like, develop that from their aging process.

LEE HENNESSY [00:33:50] Yep, yep. So, like, what wouldn't have a rind would be a very fresh cheese that just has not had the opportunity to develop a rind. I have a little visual aid.

JVN [00:34:01] Show us!

LEE HENNESSY [00:34:02] This is a lactic style cheese. So the cheese that you love, the chèvre, that is fresh cheese. If it's aged, then you can turn it into something like this. This cheese that we're talking about here, it has a bloomy rind, the rind has been allowed to bloom. So me, as the cheesemaker, my job is to shepherd it through. And remember, it's a farmer in the cheese room. So, like, my job is to make sure that, like, all the little creatures that are going to be forming this rind are in their most comfortable environment. They have the perfect amount of moisture and they have the perfect temperature and they have the perfect everything. And then for a bloomy rind, the rind will then bloom. And that's, like, a bloomy rind you can think of, like, camembert, brie, that white, that's a penicillium rind. So that's a rind that blooms. Other rinds are, are brushed, other rinds are washed. But rind is just the thing that naturally happens as the cheese is, like, allowed to age.

JVN [00:35:07] So the first time I ever had blue cheese and didn't throw up and, like, want to die, was this, like, melted blue cheese that came, like, atop these fries. And I was, like, "This shit's next level." And then I couldn't believe that it was blue cheese. So how does the temperature change its flavor profile? And, like, why is that? Is that just because, like, the animals get fed like whatever, like, hay and nuts and whatever else the fuck they eat. And then when you heat it up, like, you can taste that stuff more or something, like, why?

LEE HENNESSY [00:35:35] The hotter the cheese gets, like, literally the more scent compounds can come off of it or inversely, like, the colder a cheese gets, the less scent compounds are coming off of it. Those scent compounds are shaped similarly to other scent compounds. So, "That's the ripe raspberry shape. I'm getting scents of ripe raspberry." In order to get the most amount of those scent compounds off, you want it at the right temperature. The same thing when you're, like, "I don't want to drink, you know, refrigerated red wine or, like, let my white wine get up to 55 degrees." It's because you're going to experience the taste a little bit more. Now for your Midwestern melty time. Some of them will be, like, that melted blue cheese that you had where you're, like, "Holy cow," maybe you can only experience, like, the, you know, the sharpest bits of it or whatever. But heat will do different things to the scent compounds as well. So usually it can, like, it works almost like a little bit like cold in that it flattens them out a little bit and it makes it, like, a bit more

palatable. Whereas, like, perhaps if that cheese was at, like, a room temperature, it would have, like, knocked your face off.

JVN [00:36:48] Right, like have been like "Ooh, like too much fungal," but, like, the heat, like, killed a little bit of it. So I was like, "Oh, this is delish." But then I grew up more and now I'm kind of, like, just into blue cheese anyway. So we talked, like, a little bit about raw milk cheese. We talked about, like, regulations in the U.S. and it's, like, a literal, like, federal offense to like, do certain, like, raw cheeses and stuff. They're, like, very regulated. But for you, like you've traveled to Brazil, you're, like, going all over the place, you're judging like world cheese competitions and things. So, like, what's the raw milk? Like, what's raw milk cheese? Like, how is it made? What's it taste like? Is this, like, an older version of cheese making then the cheese making that we've been talking about now? Like, I need the breakdown on raw milk cheese.

CARLOS YESCAS [00:37:33] This is my favorite topic. I'm a guest host in a radio show and I just did two shows on some raw milk. So I feel like I'm ready to answer this question. Until about 80 years, all of the cheeses were raw. It's only with the creation of pasteurization, and then the implementation of pasteurization to the dairy industry, that then we start having the possibility of making cheeses with pasteurized milk. Just to understand why we're doing this: at some point, animal husbandry practices were very basic in cities. And so what that created was that animals were eating whatever they could eat, and they were being milked, and the process of milking the animals and using their milk was not sanitary. So that created outbreaks of listeria and people will get sick and die. And so the regulators said, you know, "This is terrible. People shouldn't be dying from what they're eating. So we are going to ask that the milk is pasteurized." And that is bringing the milk to a certain temperature for a certain amount of time. And I'm not giving you specifics here because there's two different types of pasteurization and different people use different types.

So the idea there is that you have brought the milk to this level of temperature and this time and you have killed off all of these cultures that we were talking about before. And so you can start anew. And that's why the, you know, these cultures houses started growing because then you needed to put back the stuff that you had killed to make cheese. And so what would happen is that there is growth in the pasteurized cheese production. Then, you know, because the US is the way that it is, the FDA creates the regulation, which is a very strange regulation that is called the 60-day aging rule, which basically says that if you're going to make cheese with raw milk, you have to age it for 60 days before you can sell it. It is based on faulty science. A bunch of milk was injected specifically with E. coli and then cheese was made with it, a cheddar cheese was made with it. And then they started testing at how many days that E. coli had disappeared, enough of it was around 60 days that E. coli disappeared. And that's how the 60-day rule came to be. The problem with it is that, that the amount of E coli that was introduced to that milk is not something that you will naturally find.

And then the other thing is that not all cheeses are cheddar. And, like we talked before, you know, a lot, a lot has to do with moistures. Cheddar is a very specific type of cheese. And so it

becomes sharper, it becomes acidic as it drops. And so that creates the environment so that these pathogens grow. And so that is the legislation that was created. Then the United States, because FDA is big and because the United States has a lot of money, other countries have decided to apply the 60-day rules. So the 60-day rule is part of the regulation that is applied to NAFTA, the countries. So it applies in Canada and Mexico. It also applies in New Zealand and Australia. And because the United States is such a big market for cheese, it also now applies for all of Europe and Latin America. So we have faulty law, faulty regulation, dictating what the cheese of the world should be.

Going back to what raw milk cheese is. There is actually a couple of definitions and there is not one set. Some people would say that the raw milk cheese comes from milk that has not had any temperature treatment. That means both that it has not been heated up to pasteurize. But it also means that you have not cooled down to control these microbial activity. Because there is also bacteria that can develop during the refrigeration that is, is potentially pathogenic as well. But I just want to make sure here, because this seems like a very complicated conversation, that milk is not contaminated when it's inside of the animal. It is only when we take the milk out of the animal that contamination can happen. And that's why if you have a barn or you have a milking parlor where there are sanitary conditions, you can have clean raw milk that then you can make cheese. The problem with pasteurization is that if you have already pasteurized, there is other points in the process that there can be post-pasteurization contamination. It could be in the milk, it could be in the agent, it could be in the packaging, it could be in the transportation. But because those cheeses have no other bacteria, no other microbes, there is nothing to fight off any type of contamination. So it is a cheese that is more prone to actually have contamination. And in the United States, the last three outbreaks related to cheese have actually been from pasteurized milk.

JVN [00:43:22] So basically you're saying it's, like, a false safety, like, you can still have, like, food contamination in pasteurized cheese. And basically all of the cheese previous to 80 years ago was, like, all raw milk cheese. And so basically there's just like a lot of like traditional cheesemaking, like, culture that's just been like, kind of vanquished. And, like, that's why it's, like, sad and shitty?

CARLOS YESCAS [00:43:42] Correct. And, and this is a big thing because a lot of cheeses have disappeared, completely disappeared, because they had to be made with raw milk. Now it has to be with pasteurized milk. So you have changed the structure of the milk. That cheese doesn't taste like it used to taste. Then it goes out of fashion. This is a good example, of a cheese called *coulommiers*, which is the sister cheese of Brie and Camembert. But because the cheese was forced to pasteurize, all of the terroir from the coulommiers disappeared and the cheese disappeared.

LEE HENNESSY [00:44:15] To build off of what Carlos had said, like, from a cheese maker perspective and from a safety perspective, these raw milk cheeses, they have their own biome. it's their immune system. And so, like, there are experiments that have been done where

somebody will take, you know, some milk that's, you know, straight out of a clean environment from an animal and take milk that's been pasteurized, you know, put it on the windowsill for five days. And the one that was pasteurized, that has essentially no immune system to fight off any of the bad stuff, that's the one that's, like, bright orange and rotten and, like, terrifying looking. Whereas, like, the the raw milk has had kind of its own immune system to kind of fight all of this stuff. And so by doing what we're supposed to be doing, we're actually, you know, potentially you can create an even worse environment for, for these things all, all for the sake of, like, you know, trying to, like, kill all of the bacteria and only introduce the good stuff. And, and it's only been in the last, I would say, 15 years, when people are really starting to respect, like, the biome of raw milk and just how safe it actually is in comparison.

JVN [00:45:23] So what I hear you saying is that prior to 80 years ago, pasteurization wasn't a thing. Then pasteurization becomes a thing. And while pasteurization is, like, kind of, gaining a foothold, like, some people are dying of, like, listeria, like, there's, like, certain raw cheese / milk contaminations where some people become sick. But who knows what cheese that was, where it was, the conditions in which like those happened. And so then as, like, a blanket thing, like, we just kind of, like, prescribed pasteurization as like a one size fits all thing. But maybe that wasn't even, like, a perfect fix to some of those food contamination, like, listeria issues. And so now you fast forward 80 years and because of colonialism and the way that, like, America and, like, capitalism works, we now have, like, Australia, New Zealand, the whole of Europe, North America, all having to do this, like, 60-day rule, which is based off of older science. It's one specific type of cheese that, like, you know, now being, like, prescribed for like all the cheeses and it's having like all of these other consequences on, like, cheese generally.

And then again, it's, like, you think like, "Oh, who's that really affecting?" But it's like all of the local people that could be making cheese. And, like, Brazil could have, like the reputation of, like, a French cheese, like India, like all these places could be doing like their local cheese economies that, like, aren't really allowed to, like, flourish because of a lot of these regulations. So I think that's what I hear you saying and that sucks. And I think it's really important, Carlos, the work that you're doing. Really the work the both of you are doing, like, putting kind of, like, what farmers and what cheesemakers, like what this industry is kind of, like, up against.

LEE HENNESSY [00:46:54] It's also important while we're putting it in context like that to, like, add an additional layer to it: before the 1920s, this was the Industrial Revolution. And so all of these kind of unsafe practices started happening because this was all new. Making cheese in a factory was new. You know, getting milk bottled to thousands and thousands of people was new. And people had no idea what they were doing and they, you know, didn't have the right safety protocols and things like that. But essentially, with that turn, people are, you know, making cheese for a grocery store. When we're talking about what's required to be in a grocery store, you have to have your nutrition information on the label. And so what happens, you know, when you're a small cheesemaker and you're making cheese off of milk with animals

eating what's, you know, available seasonally, you're gonna have the fats really high in one area. You're going to have fats low in, you know, in another time of the year, your nutritional information is going to be changed. You have to have all these third party auditors in order to be on the shelves, you have to go through a distributor in order to be on the shelves because it costs money to be on the shelves in a grocery store.

And so that means that, you know, let's all be cheesemakers for a second. I'm making cheese for the grocery store. So I need it to be, you know, be able to nutritionally test the same all the time. So I need to feed my animals the same thing all the time. Now I need to actually get it there. And that means I have to go through a distributor. So I need to be making as much cheese as I can so that when I can pay myself and my workers that I have enough money, right, left over. So that means that, like, it also needs to be at a price point at the grocery store. So now I'm doing a volume business. I'm making as much cheese as possible for the least amount of cost, right? So that, like, you can just sell a ton of it at a, at a small profit to the distributor. And that distributor will then go and mark it up and, and put it on the shelves. Your other option is to get so big that you don't need a distributor and you can pay for it yourself to be on the shelves, which means that you need to be making enough cheese to make it worth it to have all of that cold chain transportation, you know, keeping everything safe, like, grocery stores are meant for convenience and, you know, a post-industrial system that's meant for what's convenient for people. It's meant for, you know, what is popular among the tastes of people at any given time. Carlos can speak to this masterfully, but essentially what happens is that, like, people can't play. You know, you're not seeing small producers in these grocery stores because of these systemic blocks.

JVN [00:49:36] So it's, like, if you do want to support a smaller farm or you do want that, like, closer to home type of cheese, you're going to need to, like, find your local farmer's market. And there's not—, like, that's not something that, like, every place has, like, a lot of places don't have, like, fucking farmer's markets.

CARLOS YESCAS [00:49:53] Right. And I think this is a good sense of why artisan food is important to be part of your mix of food. I know that not everyone can have artisan food all the time. And here I'm not saying organic, you know, buy it at Whole Foods, but, like, this mix is kind of important. And sometimes, I will even say it's, it's also good that you go and make your own, your bread or your own cheese or even your own tofu at home because that sort of diversity will be very good for, you know, your microbiome, also the way of sourcing things will incentivate different parts of the economy, different politics. I think the biggest thing that we learned during the pandemic is that if you're relying on one supply chain for everything, that just breaks down. And so if by buying from different places at different scales, you are incentivizing different types of producers as well. And I think that's super important for not only the diversity of, in the marketplace, but also to maintain our food system that hopefully is more just for, for everyone.

JVN [00:51:03] So Carlos, like, you're minding your own business one day, and you woke up and you were just, like, "I'm obsessed with cheese." Like, how did you become a cheese expert?

CARLOS YESCAS [00:51:14] I have always worked in issues about human rights and farmers' rights. And through many things in life, I ended up in Ireland doing a Master's degree in law and, you know, like a, like a good student, I needed somewhere to work to pay the bills. And so I went around looking for jobs and I, and I applied to many places and the only place that actually called me back and that, you know, ended up hire me was a cheese store. And they were, like, "Well, you can do the dishes." And so I started doing dishes at the cheese store. And then after a couple of months of doing that, one of the cheesemongers left for a different job. And they were, like, "Do you want to be a cheesemonger?" And I was, like, "Of course I want to be actually a cheesemonger." And so I just started learning with an amazing mentor, Sarah Bates, who is now a cheesemaker. And she taught me a lot about European cheeses, a lot about Irish cheeses, and I just kind of, like, got so interested in cheese. But I had my "serious life," quote unquote, "serious life." And so I was doing all sorts of other things. And so my husband, who wasn't my husband at that time, he was a boyfriend, said, "I'm moving to New York because I'm going to start my PhD. You want to come to New York?" And I was, like, "Sure, I'd come to New York."

And so, you know, we went from Ireland to New York and I started working at the UN in something— nothing to do with cheese in something that is actually very, very important but very difficult work because I used to working and the child in armed conflict and I was part of a team that had to deal with the girl soldier. And, you know, these are girls that are brought into war to be soldiers. And so that was really hard work at the UN in the fancy building, you know, suit and tie. And then in my day off on Friday and in the weekend, I will go to Murray's Cheese in New York City and work in the caves. And, you know, putting cheese and watching cheese. And I had this crazy life of two things. And so I started learning and learning. And one day I was, like, " Why are we not talking about, you know, cheese as a sort of social justice issue? That, you know, it helps farmers, it helps the environment, it helps the world. And, you know, we're not talking about it."

And so I became obsessed with this. And, you know, many things led to many things. And I started a business with my mom and my sister in Mexico. And then we created this small company in Mexico that buys from mainly women cheesemakers, making traditional cheeses in Mexico, and we bring them to market and sell them. And so that got me into, like, now learning all about Mexican cheeses, which is actually kind of interesting because most people would say, "Oh, you know, Carlos is a Mexican cheese expert," but I'm actually, I know more about Irish cheese than I know about Mexican cheese just because of how I learned about it. I'm a geek at heart, you know, I have read every single possible book and I love these conversations. And so every time I, you know, I sit with people like Lee, I learn so much.

JVN [00:54:33] I mean, that's a really interesting path and such, like, a wide spectrum of, like, lives that you've lived. So from all of that, like, what has studying cheese taught you about the way that the world works at large?

CARLOS YESCAS [00:54:47] We need to understand where our food comes from, but not just in the sense of, like, "This farmer is making it," or "It's coming from this animal." But what are the politics involved? Because as you have seen now, Jonathan, today, we have touched on monopolies, trade, law, regulation, colonization, every single aspect. And we were talking about cheese. I'm sure that if we had someone here that was doing beer or bread or charcuterie or whatever you want, we will have these conversations and they are all political conversations that we need to have because if we don't have these conversations at the sort of, like, level that we are having them and we are just allowing someone else to have them, they will define the food that that is more profitable for big corporations that sells in supermarkets and that affects the environment, the world and everyone. So I think that the one thing that I have learned is that there are politics in food. And the politics of food are everyday politics that we all need to be very, very involved.

JVN [00:55:53] And then Lee, we got some of that for you but since we've last spoken and just kind of starting to gather this into, like, a gorgeous bow, what do you feel studying cheese and being a cheesemaker has taught you about the way the world works?

LEE HENNESSY [00:56:06] I never feel more in touch with the world around me than when I'm making cheese. Because as a farmstead creamery, I mean, we're starting with the land that grows the food that the goats eat, and then the goats and then, you know, taking care of all of the cultures and, you know, farming those, and then taking care of the rind cultures and the affinage. And then you're going and you're, you know, you're selling it at market or you're shipping it to somebody. I mean, it goes from literally microscopic and quite frankly, prehistoric when we're talking about the land that we're on, through the political. I'm sitting here on Mohican Land and they're sitting in Wisconsin. So we're traveling through the politics and we haven't even gotten to the milk yet, you know? So to have an understanding of this process, I think, is to see the things really, really zoomed out, you know, working from, again, microscopic creatures and to have my livelihood based on how well these microscopic creatures do under my care, it makes me just appreciate kind of the scope of everything and feel a little bit more connected with with everyone in the process.

JVN [00:57:28] So basically, I think I learned a shitload today. Like, I feel like I got my, like, my whistle wetted in the way that I needed to, like as far as, like, understanding. So we're going into our rapid fire. You guys ready?

CARLOS YESCAS and LEE HENNESSY [00:57:39] Yes.

JVN [00:57:40] Stinkiest cheese you've ever had?

LEE HENNESSY [00:57:42] Pentewan!

CARLOS YESCAS [00:57:43] Stinky bishop.

JVN [00:57:45] Okay. Most underrated cheese?

LEE HENNESSY [00:57:48] Chèvre. Fresh chèvre, for sure.

CARLOS YESCAS [00:57:50] Queso panela.

JVN [00:57:50] Ah! Unexpected use for cheese outside of consumption?

CARLOS YESCAS [00:57:56] Cheese sculptures.

LEE HENNESSY [00:57:57] Ooh.

JVN [00:58:00] Oh! Lee?

LEE HENNESSY [00:58:03] Ooh, you can do, like, soap, out of cheese proteins, I love that.

JVN [00:58:09] Oh! Okay, that's a really good one. Best name for a cheese? That Stinky Bishop was pretty good.

LEE HENNESSY [00:58:18] Yeah.

JVN [00:58:19] Furthest you've gone, distance, time, and effort, to try a particular type of cheese?

LEE HENNESSY [00:58:25] I mean, I like Carlos got me beat but I mean, I one of the reasons I started the farm was that I could just, like, mainline, like, cheese that's illegal to buy so... [LAUGHTER] What about you, Carlos?

CARLOS YESCAS [00:58:40] I have gone to India, and not that India is a strange place or far, it's just that for me, from Mexico, it is very far. And, and I went to a water buffalo milk farm and helped them with their cheese making. And that was an amazing experience.

JVN [00:59:01] Water buffalo cheese! Yeah. Like buffalo cheese, bitch! There's buffalo cheese. What other animals make milk?

LEE HENNESSY [00:59:09] Yaks.

CARLOS YESCAS [00:59:11] Camels.

JVN [00:59:12] Is there? Have you guys had camel cheese?

LEE HENNESSY [00:59:13] I have not.

CARLOS YESCAS [00:59:13] Yeah. It's terrible. [LEE LAUGHS]

JVN [00:59:15] Oh, it is? What else is there? What? What's like? What other ones? Camel cheese.

CARLOS YESCAS [00:59:21] There's mule. There's yak.

JVN [00:59:23] Okay. Well, I love that. So Lee, we're going to go with you first. What is your hopes for cheesemaking and mongering around the world?

LEE HENNESSY [00:59:32] Really my hope is that it can somehow become smaller and not to say, like, less important. But I hope that those of us that are working in it right now, like Carlos and I and so many other people that, you know, as our legacy we can maybe take away some of the barriers that have been put in place in the last hundred years in order for more people to get into cheese making, more people to work at small creameries, more people to have access to to these cheeses without having to pay an arm and a leg. And create some type of legacy where we make it easier for people to make more interesting cheeses rather than what's been going on for the past hundred years, making it harder to make less interesting.

JVN [01:00:26] Carlos, same question.

CARLOS YESCAS [01:00:29] I would totally agree with Lee on this one. I think he has said one of the most important things, which is that we hope that the cheese that we care for so much becomes the cheese that everyone eats as opposed to what is being eaten right now.

JVN [01:00:45] And this question is for both of you. How can listeners learn to appreciate cheese even more?

LEE HENNESSY [01:00:50] Eat it. Honestly, eat it.

JVN [01:00:52] Like more local, artisanal sourced cheeses.

LEE HENNESSY [01:00:55] I mean, start where you can for sure. But, like, my, my favorite, favorite, favorite way of doing this is like, okay, fine. Start in the grocery store. That's fine. But pay attention to when you're eating it, try it with different things, try different pairings. You can look them up on the Internet. You don't have to look them up on the Internet. Eat it when it's, you know, room temperature and really pay attention and try and do what the wine folks do and be, like, "Oh, this is, like, kind of nutty." Or "This is like, oh, this reminds me of X taste." "This is like a little mushroom-y."

JVN [01:01:26] And Lee, really major question. When do you ship? When does Moxie Ridge Creamery ship nationwide? Because you said that there was a shipping time tower.

LEE HENNESSY [01:01:35] We ship around the December holidays.

JVN [01:01:38] Bitches, listen up! December! Moxie Ridge! And on your Instagram handle is...?

LEE HENNESSY [01:01:43] @moxieridgefarm.

JVN [01:01:45] Moxie Ridge Farm. Honey, you got to get on that for this holiday season. That cheese is so fucking gorgeous, like, you guys don't even know the depths of with which your body will yearn. It is so delicious and you really can taste the love.

LEE HENNESSY [01:02:03] We're also, I'm teaching a cheese making class through Small Farm School. And so we're going to teach how to make the lactic cheeses, which are the slow cheeses that I mentioned. So yeah, people can check that out at smallfarmschool.com

JVN [01:02:17] Lee! That's so fucking cool. Congratulations. I love that for you!

LEE HENNESSY [01:02:21] Thank you.

JVN [01:02:22] Carlos tell me, for you, how can listeners learn to appreciate cheese even more from where you sit?

CARLOS YESCAS [01:02:27] Right now, the content that is being created both on Instagram and TikTok around cheese is amazing. When I started this job, like, 15 years ago, there wasn't content like what it is and it is in every single language. There is just, like, so much content out in the world. And I'm just delighted to, to know all these Latin Americans and all these people in India that are documenting their cheeses and just learn, just go and watch TikTok. Stop doom scrolling, just learn about cheese.

JVN [01:03:00] I love that. No more doom scrolling, only learning about cheese. There's, like, a rich, beautiful world of cheese that is waiting for you to join it. Lee, thank you so much for your time.

LEE HENNESSY [01:003:07] My pleasure.

JVN [01:03:08] Carlos, thank you so much for your time. I'm feeling cheesy. I'm feeling gorgeous, and I'm just so grateful for you guys coming on Getting Curious. Thank you so, so, so, so much.

LEE HENNESSY [01:03:15] Thank you!

CARLOS YESCAS [01:03:16] Thank you! Thank you for having us.

JVN [01:03:20] You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. Our guests this week were Lee Hennessy and Carlos Yescas. You'll find links to their work in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on. And did you even fucking realize—excuse my French in this episode—that cheese was so fucking interesting?! I mean! Share it with your friends, tell everybody, growing this podcast, honey, through amazing episodes if I do say so myself. You can find links to Carlos and Lee's work in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on, honey. Our theme music is "Freak" by Quiñ, thank you so much to her for letting us use it. If you enjoyed our show, introduce a friend honey and show them how to subscribe. And if you're still listening to this, we love to see what our listeners are vibing with, what you guys are learning about, what you think is amazing from the latest or the greatest episodes of Getting Curious. So let us know, tag us @CuriousWithJVN, we love to hear from you. Our editor is Andrew Carson. Getting Curious is produced by me, Erica Getto, and Zahra Crim.