Dairy farmers to American public:
Smile and say cheese, please
By Luke O'Neil, The Guardian, adapted by Newsela staff
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America's dairy farmers would like for you to say cheese. No, seriously, they want people to say cheese at the grocery store.

Americans eat an awful lot of cheese. Americans eat almost 37 pounds per person, per year. Apparently, that's still not enough. Demand for American-made cheese is seriously falling behind supply. Recent data from the Department of Agriculture shows we're experiencing a 1.4 billion-pound cheese surplus.

Lucas Fuess is director of dairy market intelligence at HighGround Dairy, a consulting business. He said that cheese is sitting in cold storage facilities waiting for some aspiring pizza-maker to give it a home.

"It's normal to have some cheese in warehouses, to make sure there's enough in the pipeline," Fuess said. "The amount that's in there currently is, if not a record, very close to a record high."

Sales Growth Of Plant-Based Products
In part, this can be linked to less dairy being eaten and the growing popularity of veganism. A vegan diet does not allow animal products. This includes milk and eggs. Plant-based products such as almond milk have experienced quick sales growth.

Since 2008, milk production has grown by 13 percent, but demand for milk in the United States has dropped sharply. As demand decreases, the price of milk drops, and farmers receive less per gallon produced. This appears to have pushed farmers to produce even more milk. As they work to make up the shortfalls in their income, the problem gets worse.

Producing American cheese helps farmers to use up milk they can't sell. The milk would otherwise spoil. At the end of November, U.S. cheese production had grown yet again for the 67th straight month.

New Favorite Foods
The problem is that Americans are eating less cheese, too, because of new favorite foods.

American diets are moving away from processed cheeses like Velveeta and Kraft. Many of the nation's leading fast and casual restaurants are trying new things. Panera, like others, has replaced American
cheese in their sandwiches. Panera uses a four-cheese combo made up of fontina, cheddar, monteau and smoked gouda.

Euromonitor International says sales of processed cheese are projected to drop 1.6 percent this year. It would be the fourth year in a row for a drop.

**Processed Cheese Is Gross**

In part, that's because many Americans now think processed cheese is gross. However, it's also because they've gotten familiar with quality cheese from around the world. It's hard to go back to an indestructible bright orange mess once you've tried brie de meaux.

"We're seeing increased sales of more exotic, specialty, European-style cheeses. Some of those are made in the U.S. A lot of them aren't," Andrew Novakovic told NPR in early January. He is a professor of agricultural economics at Cornell University in New York. Since imported cheese costs more, a few blocks of the good stuff might not leave much money in the cheese budget for anything else.

The cheese mountain is crushing farmers. "We've seen record numbers of dairy farms close because milk prices are so low that dairy farms aren't profitable anymore," Fuess said. "This cheese that is hanging over the market is preventing prices from rising higher." He added that it's reaching "a critical level."

**Trade Practices Play Role In Cheesepocalypse**

President Donald Trump's trade practices have also played a role in the "cheesepocalypse." Trump has put tariffs into place. A tariff is a tax on imports or exports between countries. Three top importers of U.S. milk and cheese products, Mexico, Canada and China, have started tariffs as a response. Those will have a significant effect on American dairy farmers, says a study from Texas A&M University.

"As long as the tariffs are still on in Mexico, it remains a challenge to move cheese out of the country," Fuess said. It will be difficult to reduce cheese supplies, he said.

It's not the end of the line. Experts have noted large buyers of cheese increasing offerings or finding new ways to use it. McDonald's recently launched a breakfast sandwich with two slices of American cheese. "Fast-food companies are taking this opportunity with low cheese prices to increase cheese on their dishes," said Fuess.

For now, though, American dairy farmers are going to continue to look for ways to offload their cheese supplies. "I was just reading stories of cheese tea in China that have kind of gone viral," Fuess said. "Maybe we need to look into that."

Directions: Use the information found in the article to identify the best response for each item.

R1: Cite text evidence to support an analysis of what the text says explicitly

1. How is the demand for milk related to the production of cheese?
   A. As the demand for milk decreases, its price drops, causing farmers to produce more milk in hopes of making up the money they lost. However, consumers are not buying as much milk, leading to a surplus of the product. Farmers then use the extra milk to produce cheese.
   B. As the demand for milk decreases, its price increases, as farmers must charge more for each gallon they are able to sell to be able to support themselves. Because the price of milk is more expensive, cheese production costs more. This makes cheese products very costly.
   C. As the demand for milk increases, farmers struggle to produce enough to meet consumer demands. They are forced to expand their dairy farms and focus their resources on milk production. Because of this, they are unable to produce as much cheese as they normally would.
   D. As the demand for milk increases, the price of the product is raised because consumers will pay it. With the profit achieved from milk sales, farmers are able to produce more expensive and fancy types of cheeses. As a result, Americans are buying cheeses like gouda, cheddar, monteau and fontina.

R1: Cite text evidence to support an analysis of what the text says implicitly

2. Which of the following companies mentioned in the article would be MOST LIKELY to agree with the idea that the American cheese surplus has some advantages?
   A. Velveeta
   B. Kraft
   C. McDonald's
   D. Panera

R4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases

3. Read this paragraph from the introduction (paragraphs 1-4).

"It's normal to have some cheese in warehouses, to make sure there's enough in the pipeline," Fuess said. "The amount that's in there currently is, if not a record, very close to a record high."

What is the meaning of the word pipeline as it is used in this paragraph?
   A. the machine that produces cheese
   B. the pipes that bring water to buildings, including homes
   C. the cheese that is stored and awaiting distribution
   D. a long pipe, typically underground, for moving oil, gas, etc. over long distances

R2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text

4. According to the article, the continued surplus of cheese products could have devastating effects on dairy farmers in the United States.

Which paragraph from the article BEST supports the idea outlined above?
   A. Lucas Fuess is director of dairy market intelligence at HighGround Dairy, a consulting business. He said that cheese is sitting in cold storage facilities waiting for some aspiring pizza-maker to give it a home
   B. American diets are moving away from processed cheeses like Velveeta and Kraft. Many of the nation's leading fast and casual restaurants are trying new things. Panera, like others, has replaced American cheese in their sandwiches. Panera uses a four-cheese combo made up of fontina, cheddar, monteau and smoked gouda.
   C. The cheese mountain is crushing farmers. "We've seen record numbers of dairy farms close because milk prices are so low that dairy farms aren't profitable anymore," Fuess said. "This cheese that is hanging over the market is preventing prices from rising higher." He added that it's reaching "a critical level."
   D. It's not the end of the line. Experts have noted large buyers of cheese increasing offerings or finding new ways to use it. McDonald's recently launched a breakfast sandwich with two slices of American cheese. "Fast-food companies are taking this opportunity with low cheese prices to increase cheese on their dishes," said Fuess.