



Legacy & Leadership

Tim Omer, president and managing director of Emmi Roth, Monroe, Wisconsin, began his career 30 years ago working in sales and marketing in the U.S. dairy industry. Formerly, as CEO and owner of DCI Cheese Co., he was the driving force behind boosting the company from five employees to 450 and transforming it into a leader in the U.S. specialty cheese industry.

Omer is an authority on domestic and imported specialty cheeses and brought his expertise along when he joined Emmi Roth in September 2014.

He graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communications. He earned his Masters in Business Administration degree from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Omer enjoys spending time with his family, the outdoors and traveling.

Q How is the dairy industry uniquely positioned as an essential industry to feed the nation and world during the COVID-19 crisis?

A The U.S. dairy industry has demonstrated the ability to increase production and deliver product at an astonishing level. Whether demand changes, grows, declines, this industry is extremely agile in my opinion.

Q How is the coronavirus pandemic affecting marketing messaging and positioning for dairy products?

A Consumers have obviously changed their behaviors. We had invested a lot of effort and resources prior to COVID-19 into our digital and e-commerce presence. This continues to increase as we all navigate this new landscape. In regards to positioning, we have focused heavily on delivering usable portions for at-home consumption of cheese.

Q How have your company's acquisitions and innovations over the past several years helped to meet growing and changing consumer demand?

A Our acquisitions and innovations have allowed us flexibility and capacity in driving growth in areas that we have identified as must-wins.

Q How does being part of a leading global dairy company help your U.S. business better serve its customers?

A Being part of a company with people, operations and consumers all around the world helps us provide insights on how to be better in all of our disciplines. The world is becoming more transparent, and working with global partners makes us much more agile.

Q What is one characteristic that you believe every leader should possess?

A Integrity. Doing what you say you are going to do, and doing the right thing when no one is looking.

Q What is the biggest challenge facing the dairy industry today?

A Two things come to mind — demand and sustainability. Where is consumer demand going to go in the next decade? How is the industry going to evolve so that we are in a position to positively impact the planet? Interestingly, I believe that demand and sustainability are interwoven.

Q What has been your favorite thing about working in the cheese and dairy industry?

A There are two things that stick out: One is that we get to produce such an exciting product — cheese. When I first entered the cheese industry it was struggling with an enormous amount of consolidation and did not have much going on in regards to innovation. Through this consolidation process the industry either focused on scale or differentiation. It was through necessity that I focused

on differentiation. As I became more immersed in the industry, I discovered the amazing variety of cheese that was found around the world. It was so exciting being on the ground floor of a resurgence of specialty cheesemaking throughout the '80s to today's reality. Two are the people in the dairy industry. My work has always been so enjoyable and rewarding because of all the people I've interacted with in my career.

Q What advice do you have for adapting in an ever-evolving marketplace?

A Be curious, read and study as much as possible. Listen to all different opinions and points of view. Be open to change — look for it and accept it.

Q Please discuss the benefits of collaboration among industry leaders versus the need to "protect your brand."

A The cheese industry has been successful due to our collaborative nature. The key to continued success and growth is to increase partnerships and take it to another transformative level.

An example of how we collaborate is our joint venture with Meister Cheese on the Kindred Creamery line of cheese. Emmi Roth does not make American-style cheeses, and Meister manufactures amazingly great cheese. They also manufacture their cheeses with humane certified practices. They pay their farmers a significant premium to follow the guidelines of the humane protocol. Meister Cheese had launched the program in foodservice with great success but had not been able to penetrate the retail market. We partnered with them to assist to bring Kindred Creamery certified animal humane cheeses into the market, and it has been an excellent partnership.

Q What, in your opinion, does the dairy industry need to do to attract the next generation of leaders?

A We have to do a better job of enhancing the image of the dairy industry to our youth. We need to expose them early on to the many, diverse opportunities within

the dairy industry.

Our industry has to do a better job of promoting younger leadership and giving them more opportunity for taking risk. In my career, nothing truly transformative occurred unless I took risk and changed the way we did business. The greatest learnings come from the greatest risk. Win or lose, the only way to truly be great is to have the courage and support to change your business and industry for the better.

Q Have you fostered certain habits throughout your career that have encouraged/promoted your company's success?

A I have made sure in my career to spend a large part of my time researching and focusing on the demands of customers and consumers. Listening to your customer and helping to solve their problems has been a successful habit.

Q How did you feel to win the World Championship Cheese Contest in 2016, the first U.S. winner in nearly 30 years?

A Winning the World Championship was surreal. I had only been with Emmi Roth a short time. The reason I had decided to go to work for them was I felt we had some of the best cheesemakers in the world. There are so many great cheeses that are entered into the contest. To win, you have to have something that is truly outstanding and special. Our make recipe and curing process is one that is extremely intricate and quite lengthy. This provides for a cheese that develops many layers of complexity, depth and character. The cheese from the U.S. that had won the contest back in the '80s was a String cheese. I love String cheese, but it doesn't have a chance in today's contest because you need a flavor explosion and gorgeous personality. As I said in our acceptance speech, I believe that the win was for the U.S., Wisconsin, Green County and Monroe cheese industry. The win was for all of us who truly believe our industry makes great cheese, and this contest announced that to the world. CMN