

## People & Places

# Takeover opportunity leads to creamery's revival

Rogue Creamery wins acclaim as it expands its offerings

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

CENTRAL POINT, Ore. — David Gremmels and Cary Bryant got more than they intended when trying to buy some cheese from Rogue Creamery.

In 2002, they were launching a wine-and-cheese bar and asked the creamery's owner, Ig Vella, to become a supplier.

Vella's response was surprising, remembers Gremmels: "Fellas, if you want my cheese you're going to have to make it yourselves."

Then in his early 70s, Vella was exhausted from splitting his time between Rogue Creamery in Central Point, Ore., and Vella Cheese in Sonoma, Calif. It was becoming apparent that he needed to focus on one business, so Vella decided to sell or close his operation in Oregon.

Though the proposal was a significant departure from their original plans, Gremmels and Bryant leapt at the opportunity and agreed to buy the company that same day.

They spent the next year learning the cheese-making craft from Vella and traveling to Europe to compare different techniques.

Meanwhile, the company was on shaky financial footing, so the wine-and-cheese bar was put on hold while they devoted capital and time to buttersing the creamery.

"We had to make a profit. I couldn't sell things at a loss," said Gremmels. "We worked hard and we worked day and night."

While new to cheese-making, they brought modern skills to the creamery, which was founded in 1933.

Gremmels had spent his career building the brands of clothing and home furnishing companies before he was recruited to a marketing position at the Harry & David fruit basket company, which brought him to Oregon's Rogue Valley.

Bryant, on the other hand, was able to put his training as a microbiologist to use.

"Cary brought the strict science with the recipes, the testing and the fine-tuning," said



David Gremmels, owner of the Rogue Creamery in Central Point, Ore., took over the company in 2002 with partner Cary Bryant. The company has since won international acclaim and has returned to profitability.

Photos by Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

### Western Innovator Rogue Creamery

**Owners:** David Gremmels and Cary Bryant

**Founded:** 1933

**Employees:** 43

**Location:** Central Point, Ore.

**Products:** 30 cheese varieties, shelf-stable blue cheese powder, upcoming ice cream line

**Vertical integration:** Company owns cheese-making plant, retail shop, cold storage and packaging facility, 70-acre dairy farm



Gremmels.

The change in ownership also brought some new flair to the company's products.

Rogue Creamery's blue cheeses are still made with the same strain of mold that Tom Vella, Ig's father, imported from France, where it's used to make Roquefort from sheep's milk.

Gremmels and Bryant adjusted the recipe for the Rogue River Blue by wrapping it in Syrah wine grape leaves and soaking it in artisanal brandy.

Their innovation brought outstanding results — the variety won the title of Best Blue Cheese at the World Cheese Awards in London in 2003.

The award put Rogue Creamery on the global map of fine cheese-makers, helping the company to achieve profitability and 20 percent annual sales growth since Gremmels and Bryant took over.

The company attained another milestone in 2007, when it crossed food safety hurdles to become the first U.S. creamery to export raw milk cheese to the European Union.

Whole Foods, a high-end grocery store chain, is now Rogue Creamery's largest customer, carrying its cheeses in more than 400 stores.

Over the past 13 years, the creamery has gone from "negligible sales" to a "multi-million-dollar company," said Gremmels.

It's also taken steps to become vertically integrated with the 2012 purchase of its own organic-certified 70-acre dairy farm, which currently supplies more than half the creamery's milk with 120 cows.

The goal is to double the herd's size over the next year and become completely self-sufficient.

By controlling its source of milk, the creamery gains

certainty about quality and production practices at a time when many dairy farmers in the region have retired from the industry, said Gremmels.

The dairy can also serve as a "sustainable model" for other operations with its organic practices and robotic milking system that reduces labor and cow stress, he said. "We hope to inspire other dairy people to come online and join us in producing milk in Southern Oregon."

Aside from securing Rogue Creamery's milk supply, the farm provides a new way to communicate with the public, said Francis Plowman, the company's "cheese narrator."

"We think that will be a very big tourist attraction," he said. The operation's agritourism appeal will coincide nicely with the company's upcoming



A cheese display at the Rogue Creamery's retail shop in Central Point, Ore.

line of ice cream, which will be made with honey and other "pure and simple ingredients," Plowman said.

Ice cream is part of the company's venture into fresh — rather than aged — dairy products, such as mozzarella, he said.

Because they don't have to sit in inventory for an extended time before sale, fresh products improve cash flow.

Rogue Creamery has also recently found a profitable use for blue cheese that doesn't meet the company's "top tier" quality requirements: it's turned into a shelf-stable powder.

The powder has proven popular as a stand-alone condiment as well as a bulk ingredient that's sold to food manufacturers, Plowman said. "It really has the taste profile of our blue cheeses."

## Bangladesh-based group founder wins World Food Prize

By DAVID PITT  
Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — A man who created a nonprofit organization credited with helping more than 150 million people out of poverty was named the winner of the 2015 World Food Prize on Wednesday.

Fazle Hasan Abed, of Bangladesh, created BRAC, the organization originally known as Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, as a temporary relief organization to help the country recover from the 1970 typhoon that killed about 500,000 people and the subsequent war fought in 1971 to win independence from Pakistan. Bangladesh was once listed as the second poorest country in the world.

BRAC has grown into one of the world's largest nongovernmental organizations focused on alleviating poverty — estimated to have helped more than 150 million people out of poverty in Africa and Asia and is expanding efforts to 10 additional countries.

"Poverty is a multidimensional thing. It's not just lack of income or lack of

employment, it's also lack of opportunity, lack of education, lack of opportunity for health care and so on," Abed, 79, told The Associated Press in a telephone interview from Bangladesh.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the prize on Wednesday at the State Department in Washington.

The World Food Prize was created by Nobel laureate Norman Borlaug in 1986 to recognize scientists and others who have improved the quality and availability of food. The foundation that awards the \$250,000 prize is based in Des Moines, Iowa.

World Food Prize President Kenneth Quinn said the ability of Abed, who was knighted in London in February 2010, to successfully transition BRAC it into a global relief organization was the key to his win.

"What distinguishes him is the incredibly difficult environment in which he has built now the largest, and some would say, the most effective and far reaching nonprofit organization anywhere in the world with more than 100,000 employees," Quinn said. "It's his emphasis on reaching to the very poor those who have



Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee via AP

This 2012 photo provided by the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee shows Sir Fazle Hasan Abed during a visit to the BRAC School in the Karail slum in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Abed, who created BRAC, a nonprofit organization credited with helping more than 150 million people out of poverty, was chosen July 1 as this year's recipient of the World Food Prize.

great food insecurity and who face the most difficult path out of poverty."

The initial focus of BRAC, Abed told the AP, was on alleviating high child and infant mortality rates by providing social services including health care. He also saw the need to empower women and get them to see they could also contribute to the national economy, so he helped teach them to farm efficiently and grow surplus crops to sell.

"Sir Fazle's and his organization's recognition that

engaging women in STEAM fields — science, technology, engineering, agriculture, and math — benefits our local and global communities is a vision that we share at USDA," Vilsack said.

BRAC estimates more than a billion people live at a poverty level of less than \$1.25 a day but hundreds of millions of others live on less than half that amount and are considered in extreme poverty.

The organization also has created a pilot program that helps those in extreme pover-

ty work their way out; it'll be used in eight other countries to see if results can be replicated. Participants receive a weekly stipend so they have enough money to eliminate the need to beg or work at menial labor to survive. A savings account and financial literacy training helps teach them to manage money, and a one-time grant provides a productive asset — such as a cow, goats or chickens — as a means to work toward self-sufficiency.

"In many countries, poor people are not seen as a solution to the problem but the problem. Poor people can be organized and become the solution to the poverty themselves," he said. "All we need to do is provide them opportunities and conditions and give them the tools."

"The hard work is done by the poor themselves to defeat poverty."

The United Nations Development Program reports Bangladesh has reduced poverty from 56.7 percent in 1991-1992 to 31.5 percent in 2010, the latest year data is available.

Abed will be awarded the World Food Prize at a ceremony in October in Des Moines.

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#### Index

California ..... 8  
Dairy ..... 13  
Idaho ..... 9  
Livestock ..... 13  
Markets ..... 15  
Opinion ..... 6  
Oregon ..... 10  
Washington ..... 11

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We want to publish corrections to set the record straight.

### Calendar

#### Saturday, July 11

94th Annual Idaho Ram & Ewe Sale, 8 a.m., Twin Falls County Fairgrounds, Filer, Idaho.

#### Friday, July 17

Forestry Shortcourse, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. West Bonner Library, Priest River, Idaho, 208-446-

1680. This 6-session program will help forest owners understand ecology, silviculture, wildlife and other topics.

#### Saturday, July 18

Washington State Sheep Producers Ram & Ewe Sale, 11:30 a.m.-6 p.m. Grant County Fairgrounds, Moses Lake, Wash.

#### Tuesday, Aug. 4

Spotted Wing Drosophila Workshop, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Eugene Unitarian Universalist Church, Eugene, Ore., 208-850-6504. Topics include understanding SWD biology, behavior and seasonal needs; SWD management tools and practices; monitoring and identification; and fruit sampling demonstrations.

#### Saturday, Sunday, Aug. 15-16

Harvest Fest, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Yamhill Valley Heritage Center Museum, McMinnville, Ore., 503-434-0490. Tractor parade, threshing, binding and baling oats using antique farming equipment and horses. Pioneer kids area, agricultural displays, music, food and fun.