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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 9, 2015

Christopher Eckerman Awarded \$2,500 Wisconsin Cheese Originals Scholarship

MADISON, Wis. – A University of Wisconsin-Madison student aiming to develop his own brand of sheep milk cheeses is the recipient of the 2015 Beginning Cheesemaker Scholarship from Wisconsin Cheese Originals.

A committee of industry leaders selected Christopher Eckerman, Antigo, for the \$2,500 annual award. Wisconsin is the only state to require cheesemakers to be licensed, an 18-month process that involves attendance at five university short courses, 240 hours of apprenticeship under a licensed cheesemaker, and passing a written exam at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture.

Eckerman is a full-time student at UW-Madison majoring in Food Science. He grew up on a sheep farm of 200 milking ewes in Antigo. He is a member of the Dairy Product Evaluation Team on campus, and hopes to apprentice this summer in the Babcock Dairy Plant under Master Cheesemaker Gary Grossen. His long-term goal is to continue the family farm and craft his own brand of seasonal sheep milk cheeses.

This marks the sixth year Wisconsin Cheese Originals has offered a \$2,500 scholarship to a beginning cheesemaker. Past recipients include:

- 2014: Sandra Acosta, dairy goat farmer in Port Washington, Wis. She is continuing to work toward obtaining her cheesemaker's license.
- 2013: Jennifer Digman, licensed cheesemaker and dairy farmer in Cuba City, Wis.
- 2012: Anna Landmark, licensed cheesemaker and owner of Landmark Creamery. She won a gold medal at the 2015 U.S. Championship Cheese Contest for Petit Nuage, a fresh sheep's milk cheese.
- 2011: Rose Boero, licensed cheesemaker and dairy goat farmer in Custer, Wis.
- 2010: Katie Furhmann, licensed cheesemaker at LaClare Farms in Pipe, Wis. At the 2011 U.S. Championship Cheese Contest, she took Best in Show for her goat's milk cheese, Evalon, and was named U.S. Champion.

Wisconsin Cheese Originals is a member-based organization dedicated to growing and promoting the state's artisan cheese community by hosting seminars, cheesemaker dinners, dairy tours and educational events, including CheeseTopia, an annual traveling one-day cheese festival. For more information, contact Jeanne Carpenter, 608-358-7837 or email Jeanne@wordartisanllc.com. To learn more, visit www.wisconsincheeseoriginals.com.
