Packaging

There are many traditional packages for dairy products. Fluid milk, for example, can be in plastic, cardboard, or glass jugs. How do you decide what to package your product in?

**Fluid Products**

**Plastic**
You can generally purchase these from your local dairy processing plant. Hood, Deans Foods, and the like own their own plastic companies. If they do not, they will buy a tractor trailer load and you may be able to buy a sleeve to two from them rather than purchase your own tractor trailer load.

If you have not purchased the filler/capper, wait until you do so. You can retool the capper, but it is cheaper to just buy the right caps. You will have to think about the color of the cap. It is easier to consider what the customer is use to in your area. There is no law dictating the color of the cap, but it is hard to retrain consumers and you will come across more than one questioning your ability to process based on the color of your cap! Cap types are snap and screw top. Buy these when you purchase your bottles. Portola packaging has a monopoly on caps.

**Yogurt, sour cream and other cup-set cultured dairy products**
Fillers are horribly expensive for farmstead operations. It is a fluid product, so a piston pump is not appropriate. It becomes set in the cup. Some states allow you to hand fill and hand cap up to a certain volume. This can be for a specific period of time, or it can be forever. How clean you are and how well you present your product as safe to consumers may make the difference between being able to do this by hand and needing to spend $30,000 on a filler/capper.

If you ever plan to sell across state line, be upfront with inspectors at the BEGINNING. This is not cheese and will therefore fall under stricter laws. You will have to mechanically fill and cap. You may also need other things that are not as important if you sell within state lines.

**Plastic**
You see them in opaque containers so that the customer does not see the product separate in the container. They are not aware that this is normal. To determine what packaging to use, go to your local grocery store. Look at the packaging.

If you like a certain style, turn it upside down. Look at the name of the company that makes the package you like. They tend to have a web site. Ask for a free product demo and the name of a distributor. Understand that like the fluid products, it is often easier to collaborate with a larger processor when purchasing containers. Otherwise, there tend to be minimum orders that can seriously affect cash-flow.

**Glass**
With consumers becoming more aware of their impact on the environment, more and more are asking for something that is not in a plastic container. Glass bottles for milk and other dairy products is the newest trend. One-trip glass is when you package it once and it disappears forever, never to return for packaging again. The bottles are cheaper and thinner. These are handy because you do not have to deal with bottle returns, but they can be a challenge because the cost of packaging is higher and customers are not always willing to pay for it. Return bottles are nice if you have water to clean them, a glass
bottle washer, and are willing to deal with returns. You only have so many times that a bottle can be returned. You will clean out cigarette butts and other odd things. You will have some that do not return and have to reorder.

**Lactic Cheeses**
These are generally sold in either deli containers or in some kind of log roll, patty, or other hand-shaped object.

**Deli containers**
These are typically clear plastic. They can be 4oz, 6oz, 8oz, 16oz or larger. There are so many styles that you should go to a specialty section of the grocery store and look for a container you like. Turn it over and find the name of the company that makes it. Get free samples of the products and ask for the name of the distributor. The samples are for you to determine:

- Does 8oz of my product fit into the 8oz container before I order the labels to fit this container;
- How does the product look in this container?

You can purchase labels to attach to them or order the packaging with labels. With the later there will be a minimum order. Make sure this does not kill cash flow. Packaging like this is ideal for marketing grants. Make sure you understand where the product is on the shelf. Is a top label enough? Is a side label needed?

**Glass**
Glass is less common, but with consumers more concerned with plastic and their food, it is something to be concerned about. See above in the yogurt section to learn more about glass containers.

**Rolls and other shapes**
There are as many ways to do these as there are cheesemakers making lactic cheeses. Some use a sausage maker and plastic casings, others weigh the cheese out onto plastic or wax paper and form it into a shape. Some use special cheese paper, some plastic wrap.

**Butter**
Cultured or sweet, butter can be packaged the same way. Generally:

**Rolls**
Sometime pushed through a sausage former or hand rolled into logs. These are then either packaged in plastic and then a pretty paper or a foil of some kind. This is more commonly seen in cultured butter, but sweet butter can also be packaged this way and it is pleasing to customers as well as some restaurants and B&B-type operations looking to make butter patties.

**Plastic deli**
These are generally opaque, but any kind are possible. Look at packaging that appeals to you in the grocery store and find a distributor. This type of packaging is more common for direct farm sales as this is not as pretty for higher scale sales.

**Paper Ice Cream Tubs**
Generally the half-pint size. Makes a lovely presentation for cultured and sweet butter.

**Wax Paper or Foil**
More traditional block butter is sold in wax or foil. It may then be put into cardboard packaging to mimic more traditional butter packaging. Cultured butter from Europe is generally put into smaller foil
packaging by itself. Rather nice and familiar for higher scale markets.

Cheese

Cheese Paper
The more traditional packaging is cheese paper. This is more common if you sell by
the slice or as a whole wheel if natural rind. You can buy in many different sizes and
quantities. Nice presentation, but cheese will dry out if not handled correctly.

Plastic Wrap
Cheese should NEVER be in plastic wrap for long. Cheese takes on the flavor of the plastic and it does
not allow the cheese to breath.

Vacuum Wrap
Tidy packaging and cheese keeps for a long time. Some feel that it affects the flavor of the cheese. Not
always seen in higher end markets.

Wax
Cheeses and wedges can be individually waxed. This works well for some cheeses and may look farm
made. Not suitable for natural rind, crumbly or very soft cheeses. You may want to look at Beeswax,
but this is fragile and may crack, causing molding issues.

Ice Cream and other frozen desserts

Paper Tubs and Cardboard
Traditional packaging as seen in the grocery store. You can get them in half pint to gallons.

Plastic
Not as tidy a package and generally seen in sherbet or cheap ice cream.

Gelato Pans
More common for gelato and sorbet. Traditional packaging for those products.