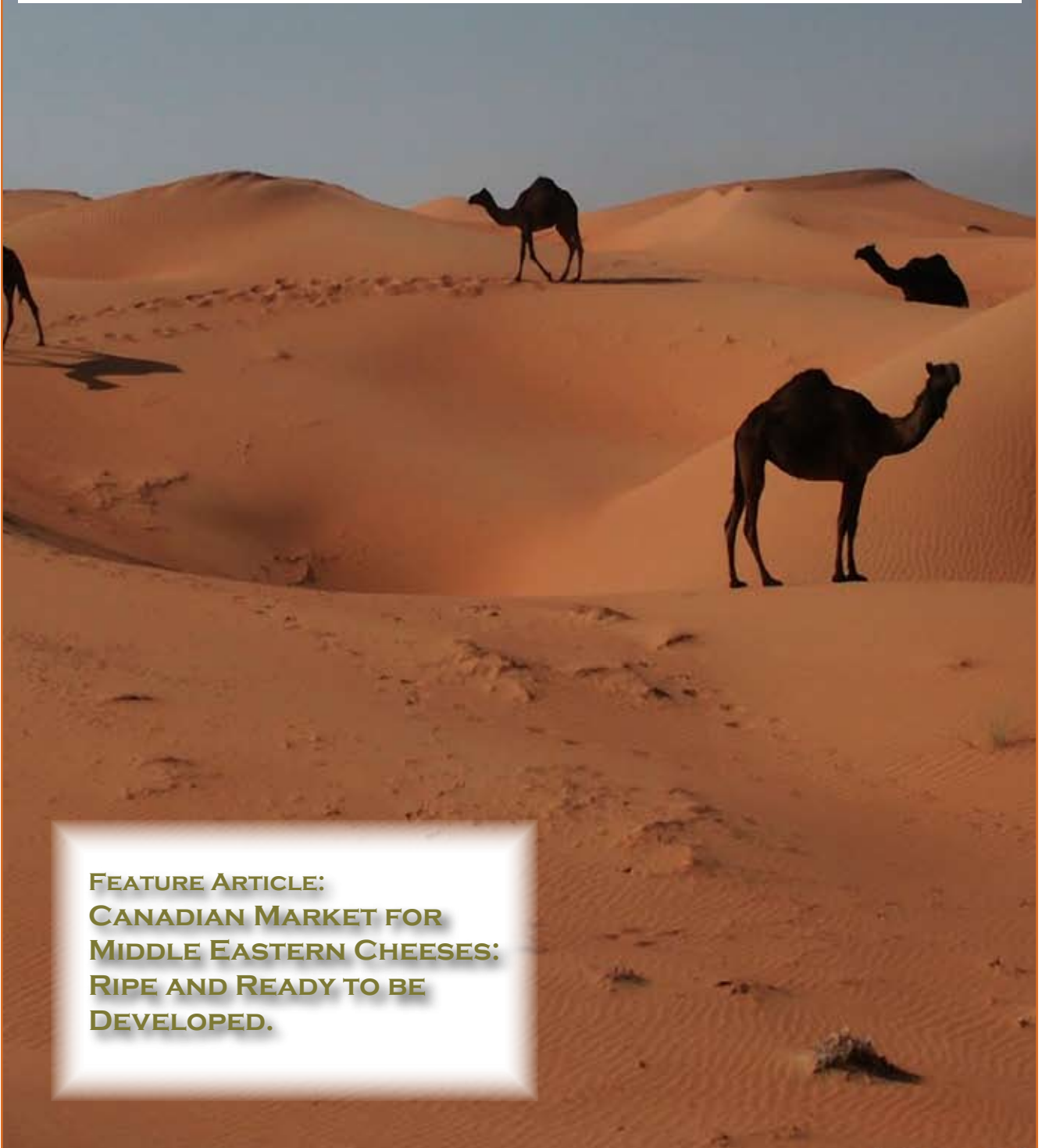


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# The Experts' FORUM



**FEATURE ARTICLE:  
CANADIAN MARKET FOR  
MIDDLE EASTERN CHEESES:  
RIPE AND READY TO BE  
DEVELOPED.**

## Canadian Market for Middle Eastern Cheeses: Ripe and Ready to be Developed

The Middle East region comprises of several countries extending from the eastern Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf. This region includes many unique and diverse cultural groups and a rich history rooted in economic trade, political and cultural affairs.

The Middle East is known for its flavorful foods, set apart by the rich texture and aroma of the cheeses used. In the past, the poor quality of the pastures available and the difficulty in sourcing adequate refrigerated storage led cheese makers to the popularization of simple, fresh cheeses and cream products. These products either had a very short shelf life (about 5 days) or were very salty. Today’s manufacturers are able to make the most popular of these products, such as Ackawi, Baladi, and Basket Cheese, using modern methods, achieving the authentic taste and texture that characterize them, while providing a longer shelf life for the product.



MIDDLE EAST (Source: www.maptown.com)

### Middle East population in Canada

A growing number of Middle Easterners are now calling Canada home. In 2001, the Middle East population in Canada was 522,535<sup>1</sup>, spread out across the country, with the bulk of the population residing in the East in Montreal (22%), Ottawa-Gatineau (8%), and Toronto (39%), and in the West in Vancouver (10%).

With the Canadian Middle Eastern population growing significantly, so has the demand for traditional Middle Eastern foods, in particular, cheese. But this demand has gone unsatisfied, since many Middle Eastern-type cheeses are not readily available in Canada.



The Middle Eastern population is concentrated mainly in the East in Ottawa-Gatineau, Montreal and Toronto, and in the West in Vancouver. (Source: www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/canada.html)

<sup>1</sup>Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census.

<sup>2</sup>Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census, Immigrant population by place of birth, by census metropolitan areas.

## Opportunities

Middle Eastern cheese varieties such as Ackawi, Naboulis, Basket Cheese, and Haloumi are in demand but in scarce supply. Although some of these varieties are available in Canada, the small amounts that are being imported make it difficult to find. The growing Middle Eastern community and its demand for traditional cheeses serve to create some very real opportunities for Canadian cheese makers.

The Canadian market for Middle Eastern cheeses is ripe and ready to be developed. Cheese makers willing to learn new skills and new recipes could become part of some exciting developments in a growing market.

## Challenges

It's one thing to want to make Middle Eastern cheese, but how do you ensure that they have the traditional taste, texture, and appeal that made them so popular? Finding the right formulation and the right process can be difficult, time consuming and costly. The Canadian Dairy Commission (CDC) can offer valuable assistance in this regard:

## Supporting innovation

The CDC is committed to supporting an environment which fosters innovation and growth in the manufacture and use of Canadian dairy products and components. Two industry supports Funds have been created in support of innovation and technology transfer placing particular emphasis on small and medium sized companies who lack the resources, time and expertise to resolve dairy product innovation and/or product reformulation issues.

The *Direct Access Fund* (DAF) provides up to 7.5 hours (or the equivalent of \$1,500) of free consultation with recognized food science and technology institutions. The *Innovation Support Fund* (ISF) provides financial support and expertise in the areas of product innovation and analysis, pilot scale trials, packaging techniques, technology transfer and product reformulation. Eligible projects could receive up to 75 percent of the cost of the project, to a maximum of \$25,000.

Another important program to mention is the *Domestic Dairy Product Innovation Program* (DDPIP). It was designed to grant flexibility to the National Milk Marketing Plan by providing a mechanism whereby those who wish to produce

### Middle Eastern Cheeses

**Ackawi:** soft, white cow's milk cheese primarily used as a table cheese

**Baladi:** This Middle-Eastern, soft-white, smooth, creamy cheese has a mild flavor. The cheese tastes delicious spread on fresh bread or crackers. It is eaten for breakfast or snacks.

**Basket Cheese:** white, soft cheese that is formed in a basket. It has a circular shape, weighs about 12-18 oz, and has salty taste.

**Jibneh Arabieh** is a simple cheese with an open texture and a mild taste. It is widely used in cooking and snacking.

**Kashta (Kishta)** is a heavy cream that is very popular in the Middle East. Traditionally, it is made by skimming the thickest part of the cream from whey cream and has no more than a five day life. The product is used both as an ingredient in cooking and is mixed with honey to be eaten as an incredibly rich dessert.

**Kenafa** is an unsalted, very fresh, soft cheese that melts easily and freely. It is used to make the popular "cheesecake"-like dessert that is sometimes called Kenafa by people in the Middle East. It can also be used as a base for other sweet cheese desserts.

**Naboulis:** salty, fresh, brined cheese that is popular in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.

new and innovative dairy products (as defined in the CDC Act) can access the milk they need outside of existing provincial plant supply allocations. By encouraging such new development, the overall demand for milk is expected to increase.

**For more information on how the CDC can help you bring Middle Eastern cheese to the Canadian market:**

- visit our Web site at [www.milkingredients.ca](http://www.milkingredients.ca) and click on the *Innovation Support Funds* icon on the right hand side of the screen; or
- Contact **Shana Allen**, Marketing Officer  
**Tel:** (613) 792-2035, **Fax:** (613) 792-2009  
**Email:** [shanaallen@agr.gc.ca](mailto:shanaallen@agr.gc.ca)