



*Cheese of the Week is a weekly feature on The Daily Meal, drawing on the expertise of internationally renowned cheese expert and consultant [Raymond Hook](#). What follows is based on an interview with Hook.*

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Manchego is one of the most popular cheeses in the market, and arguably the most widely eaten sheep's cheese outside of the pecorino family. It's available at just about every cheese shop and most supermarkets these days, and is easily recognized by its zigzag greenish-gray waxy rind. But the manchego we're talking about today is the highest-quality one that you'll find in the U.S., and it's called La Oveja Negra.

The difference between this cheese and what you'll find in the supermarket all comes down to the milk. Le Oveja Negra's milk is produced in La Mancha, Spain, from Manchego black sheep, the sheep that's historically been used for production of the finest manchego but was phased out in the 1970s. There are only about 10,000 of these sheep left in existence, and 1,300 of them live on this farm, which was founded by brothers Francisco, Javier, and Luis Parra in 1993 after they realized that it was nearly impossible to find high-quality, organic manchego made in the traditional style.



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Manchego is a semi-firm cheese, aged a minimum of three months. It's nutty and delicious with a hint of the barnyard and lanolin, as well as toasted grain. The texture is crumbly, but still creamy, moist, and buttery. It's great on its own on a little toasted bread, but also goes great with quince paste or honey. It melts well, and adds a rich umami kick to soups, and is fantastic grated over asparagus and morel mushrooms.

Hook likes to pair this manchego with Parra Jiménez Crianza, which is grown on the same land that the sheep graze on. "It's a little acidic, with rich ripe fruits," he said. "It's amazing how wine and cheese from the same terrior go together so well."

If you're not too familiar with manchego, Hook considers it to be a great "beginner" cheese, as even the ones you'll find in supermarkets can be tasty if treated properly. "A lot of sheep cheese is strong and powerful," he said. "This one is more nuanced."