



Legacy & Leadership

Jim Sartori is the third-generation owner and CEO of Sartori Cheese, a family-owned company specializing in artisan, award-winning Wisconsin cheese. Since 1939, Sartori Cheese has crafted cheese that honors its Italian traditions while embracing the ingenuity of its team members.

For more than three decades, Jim Sartori has led Sartori Cheese through an era of growth and opportunity. Investments and expansions have allowed Sartori Cheese to develop into a premium, retail brand that is now available in more than 50 countries around the world.

In 2017, Sartori Cheese won the title of Grand Champion at the U.S. Championship Cheese Contest for its Black Pepper BellaVitano — an original cheese created by the company. The accolade was not a first for Jim Sartori and the Sartori team, who won Grand Champion in 2009 for SarVecchio Parmesan. Over the past five years, Sartori Cheese has won more awards on the national and international level than any other domestic cheese company — a tradition of excellence the fourth generation of the Sartori family intends to carry on.

Jim Sartori and his wife, Jan, live in Crystal Lake, Wisconsin, and are the proud parents of three adult married children and nine grandchildren ... all nine age 5 and under!

Q How is managing a multi-generational family business a unique endeavor?

A Owning and managing a multi-generational family business is a challenge and a blessing. I believe family businesses are the lifeblood of our country. Family businesses represent a large percentage of business in the United States and create millions of good high paying jobs. At Sartori Cheese, we believe all our team members are part of the Sartori family. We also include our family farms, customers and suppliers as a part of the “Sartori family.”

Q What are some of the benefits and possible challenges that come with running a family business?

A There are many benefits that come from running a family business. One of those benefits is that we feel blessed and a sense of pride that our family expands each year as we invite more people to become team members in our growing business. We are then able share and celebrate success together and be a source of strength during challenging times that we all experience.

As in all businesses, there are challenges. President Harry Truman famously said, “The buck stops here.” Ultimately, final responsibility for the

business resides with the family and that is a responsibility we take very seriously given the amount of families that depend on Sartori Cheese for their livelihood.

Q What advice would you give someone going into a leadership position for the first time?

A You need to lead by example. People watch and follow what you do, not what you say. There is an opportunity every day to use your leadership position to inspire your team and the people around you. You can’t command people to follow you, their respect must be earned and there is no better way than through consistent actions of integrity.

Q What is one characteristic that you believe every leader should possess?

A Integrity. Integrity is one of our key company values. A wise person once told me integrity is doing the right thing, even when no one else is watching. We try to live and work by this standard every day.

Acting with integrity can be difficult when others take short cuts and certainly there are times where acting with integrity in the short term may not produce the results you desire. However, in the long run, I believe acting with integrity will always win.

Q What is the biggest challenge facing the dairy industry today?

A There are a variety of challenges facing the industry today ranging from trade to competitive products. However, as an industry, we need to better educate the public on the health value of dairy. We are all in the business of health. People want to make good decisions for their own health and for their families.

Unfortunately, today there are many people and companies who are promoting a message of reducing dairy in our diets. This will negatively impact all players in this great industry. As an industry we need to strongly promote the incredible value of our products as part of a healthy daily diet.

Q What are the most important decisions you made/have made as a leader of your company?

A Hire smart people and allow them to lead. It doesn’t make sense to make significant investments in people to only handcuff them as it relates to making decisions and helping lead the business. We’ve been blessed to be able to attract very talented men and women into our company, and I work hard to ensure they have the space and autonomy to make decisions. It helps our business, and it helps them continue to grow and develop. It’s a win-win.

Q How do you communicate your company’s “core values” and encourage others to do the same?

A Our core values are communicated every day. Some days it is through formal training, other days it is through messaging within our buildings. Whenever I speak with our team members, I am sure to speak about our values. They are so critical to the fabric of everything we do at Sartori Cheese. We can never speak about them enough!

Our values are family, integrity, commitment, ingenuity, humility and authenticity. These values provide a road map for all our team members on how we aspire to behave. We do our

very best each day to “walk the talk.” These are living values that guide our behavior, not just some words on a wall.

Q Please discuss the benefits of collaboration among industry leaders versus the need to “protect your brand.”

A There are many things in the industry that benefit all whom compete. Consistently elevating the standards of our food safety and animal husbandry is critical. We can’t afford to lose the trust of our consumers. We are all hurt when there are failures in these areas. I strongly believe that a rising tide will raise all ships, and we collectively benefit when there is greater consumer trust in dairy.

Q What, in your opinion, does the dairy industry need to do to attract the next generation of leaders?

A It is critical that the dairy industry continue to attract bright minds to help usher in the next stage of growth. We need to make sure we are providing compelling opportunities of product innovation, creation of new markets, adopting of the latest technology and providing competitive wages to make sure we can compete against other industries that are attracting new workers today. The only constant is change, and we need to be leading that change rather than fighting against it.

Q What has been your favorite thing about working in the cheese and dairy industry?

A At the end of the day, it is always about people. I’ve been blessed over the past couple decades to share a sense of striving for common goals that has provided a camaraderie that is unique and special. I’ve enjoyed being able to work with such talented and dedicated people. Although all companies in the cheese industry compete, we share a common respect for one another that has made this a great industry to dedicate my career. **CMN**