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Food Section

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FARMERS MARKETS / TAKE-AWAYS

Cheese monger on wheels

Brie, cheddar, blue?

From his roving truck, Laurent Bonjour takes his fromage show on the road.



By Corie Brown, Times Staff Writer

He's got peppered Cabecou from France, wrapped in chestnut leaves and soaked in plum brandy. Ivory-colored English Farmhouse cheddar with plenty of bite. And gooey-under-the-skin and crumbly-at-the-center Bermuda Triangle goat cheese from Northern California.

But the real treat for those who poke around Cheese Corner, a little white refrigerated truck parked at farmers markets in the Los Angeles area, is the cheese peddler himself, Laurent Bonjour. Equal parts bon vivant and cheese

evangelist, Bonjour is charming Angelenos with his mantra: Eating good cheese daily is the key to a healthy, happy life.

Bonjour — yes, that's his real name — is an impassioned cheese salesman who wants his customers first to know his product is packed with calcium, potassium and protein. For those willing to suffer the health food lecture, the reward is Bonjour's charming way of detailing cheese's gastronomic side.

A sliver of Maytag Blue shouldn't stand alone when it's more luscious drizzled with a little wild honey, says Bonjour. And don't just eat a chunk of cheddar. Put a slice onto a hunk of fresh baguette spread with fresh unsalted butter. "The butter brings up the flavor and creaminess in the cheese," he says. Pour a glass of stout, or perhaps Irish whiskey, and the day will be complete, he says.

Washed rind or rindless, cow's milk or sheep's, Bonjour's 45 cheeses all come with tasting tips or lore. "I try to bring people a good time," he says.

A native of the Alpine village of Annecy in the Savoie region of France, where pungent raclette is a regional favorite, Bonjour was the fromager at Monsieur Marcel in the Original Farmers' Market at 3rd Street and Fairfax Avenue until last year, when he decided to take cheese to the streets, as is the custom at farmers markets in France. He parks his Cheese Corner truck at the Sunday market on Larchmont Boulevard in Hancock Park, as well as the Monday market in West Hollywood, Tuesday's market in Culver City, Wednesday's market in downtown Los Angeles, Friday's Hermosa Beach market and the Saturday farmers market in La Cañada Flintridge.

His favorite cheese? As with any connoisseur, it depends on the occasion. But he loves Tomme de Savoie from his native province. And the Fleur du Maquis from Corsica, covered with savory, rosemary, juniper berries and mold. When customers turn their noses up at the mold, he's a hand-holder championing its earthy flavor.

But unlike most French people, who believe cheese is best eaten after dinner, Bonjour believes in cutting to the chase: "Don't cook dinner," he says. "Just serve some cheese with a bit of bread and fruit. It's all you need."