

SAY CHEESE!

A Note from Your President

September 2026



Dear CIAA Members,

Happy Fall Y'All! Tomorrow is the first day of October, Mimolette's favorite month of the year! Before pumpkin spice takes over every menu, I wanted to highlight what an incredible month September has been!

Importer of Record Webinar: 60 Strong!

We kicked off the month on September 8 with a Husch Blackwell webinar on Executive Order 14411 and the importer of record changes. We moved it up two days, and 60 of you joined us! Thank you to Kyle Gilster and Robert Stang for breaking down a complicated topic and helping our members stay ahead of it, you gentlemen, did a great job!

Our First Ever-Board Meeting in Washington, D.C.

On September 22, for the first time in CIAA history, we held our board meeting in person in Washington, D.C. Thank you Husch Blackwell for hosting! We were honored to have past presidents Andrea Berti and Ralph Hoffman join us live, along with Emil Rufolo of Atalanta, Sumeet Mathur of Friesland, our Executive Committee, and our newest board member, James Biro of Ornua. Welcome, James!

That afternoon, immediately after our meeting, we met with Becky Rasdall Vargas of IDFA. Becky agrees that while the CIAA and IDFA may not be 100% aligned on all topics, we can definitely work together on others for all of our benefit. Thank you Kyle for setting that up.

We then headed to USDA to meet with Elizabeth Riley...due to taking multiple Ubers, some of us might have gotten lost, but the detour was worth seeing a more beautiful side of USDA offices.

😊 Our meeting with Elizabeth went very well, and she wanted us to remind all the members to surrender by the deadline (tomorrow!) if needed. We learned that Dylan Daniels, her old boss, moved to take a position at USTR and Elizabeth will be operating in the office alone.

We then headed to USTR, where we met with Dylan, whose new title is Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for Agricultural Affairs and Commodity Policy. Dylan had started in his new role just the day before, and sitting down with him in his first days on the job was a wonderful opportunity. Joining him were Leo Roytman, Sarah Fasano, and David Jankowski of USTR's agricultural affairs team. It was a very good meeting, and Dylan commented that he believes the Federal Register changes will be out by the end of this year.

I'd love to make this board meeting in DC an annual tradition, so I'd truly welcome your feedback. What worked, what would you change, and would you join us next fall?

Wine and Cheese in the Capital

That evening, we hosted our Wine & Cheese reception at Frontier House, and the response was incredible! Our guest list included staff from House and Senate offices across Capitol Hill, as well as from the Senate Agriculture, Appropriations, and Finance Committees. We also welcomed trade and agriculture representatives from eight embassies, plus plenty of last-minute guests. We had especially great conversations with Rep. Gottheimer's office, and it was wonderful to share a table with our friend from the Consorzio del Formaggio Parmigiano Reggiano.

The evening came together thanks to Sheila & Annette and our own EC second vice prez Jennifer Drezga, who organized every detail regarding the cheese. She brought in Matt Kevill—and his stunning cheese displays were the talk of the event. Thank you everyone! Nothing opens a door quite like a great cheese board, and we certainly had that!

Taking Our Message to the Hill

On September 23, we split into two groups and covered a lot of ground. We met with the offices of Senators Patty Murray, Maria Cantwell, Chuck Schumer, and Cory Booker, and with the Senate Agriculture Committee. On the House side, we met with the offices of Representatives Josh Gottheimer, Kim Schrier, Mark Pocan, Byron Donalds, Rob Menendez, Analilia Mejia, Dan Goldman, and Mike Lawler. A huge thank you to Kyle and Beth at Husch Blackwell for putting together such an incredible schedule. Securing these meetings is no small feat! Every one of these conversations builds on the last, and the relationships we're forming are paying off. We have had follow up with everyone, and we have letters regarding sheep's milk cheese being reviewed by three offices to send on to USTR.

Looking Ahead to SIAL Paris

We're busy tying up the last details for SIAL and our retailer pre-trip. We're grateful to be joined by PCC Community Markets, Balducci's and Kings Food Markets, Uncle Giuseppe's, Northeast Shared Services (Tops, Price Chopper, and Market 32), Sprouts Farmers Market, DeCicco & Sons, Lowes Foods, Haggen, Nugget Markets, Fresh Thyme Market, Weaver Street Market Co-op, H-E-B, Roche Bros. Supermarkets, Foodland Super Market, and Publix Super Markets. Thank you to each of them for making the time to learn what we do and why we love imported cheese so much! I'm also so excited that so many of you signed up that we sold out of our trip!! I'll get to see so many of my cheese friends at breakfast and on the bus! Yay!

Our Unsung Heroes

I can't close without a heartfelt thank you to Sheila and Annette of The GA Team. This month they really went above & beyond. One day I believe I sent over ten emails in five minutes to Sheila while calling her at the same time! They scouted out the Frontier House in person, not to mention that they are handling every detail of SIAL. They're always available, always calm, and somehow always able to herd the cats! Honestly, I don't know what we would do without them. Sheila and Annette, you are amazing, and we are so lucky to have you.

To my executive committee—thank you for your support, your engagement, and your passion for this industry. I'm grateful to serve alongside you. Kevin and Jen, you especially have been a great sounding boards & I am thankful to have you in line behind me as my vice presidents!!!

Members, see you all in Paris or at the November meeting, whichever comes first! Please remember that I love hearing your ideas & insight so please say hello!

Blessings,

Laura Lyden McGregor

President, Cheese Importers Association of America



www.theciaa.org | 202-547-0899



CONTACT US



Cheese Importers Association | 515 2nd Street, NE | Washington, DC 20002 US

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