



Tim Stone, shown here with his wife, Tina, and two sons

Tim Stone

*Great Hill Blue
Marion*

The turn-of-the-century barn in rural Marion looks like a manor house in the British Isles, gabled in white and crosshatched in dark green, straw visible through second-story windows. The interior is cavernous, cool, and dim, with just the faintest whiff of blue cheese lingering in the air. Swallows swoop high in the rafters.

Tim Stone, businesslike in a short-sleeved shirt and khakis, shows off the iron milking stalls, installed in his great-grandfather's day but idle since Stone sold the Guernsey herd last year. "We really miss the cows," he says. He gave up dairy farming to concentrate on making blue cheese, because his surveys of local restaurants and shops showed that New England lacked a great blue.

Great Hill Blue, firm and boldly veined, has the strong, deep flavor a good blue cheese should have. Boston's cheese guru Ihsan Gurdal, owner of the Cambridge cheese and specialty store Formaggio Kitchens, says Great Hill Blue rivals the fine Roqueforts of France — high praise for a brand-new company that put its first cheeses on the market in March.

Great Hill Blue, which Formaggio distributes to many Boston restaurants, is made from nonhomogenized milk. This lengthens the aging process, slowing production but giving the cheese a "truer blue flavor," Stone says. In the aging room, the big wheels, about 6 pounds each, are stacked a half-dozen high on shelves to age, at 43 degrees, for eight to 10 months. "It's not quite as glamorous as the Roquefort caves," Stone says, "but we do what we can within the health inspector's rules."