

# San Francisco District Office

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## SBA San Francisco Named Cypress Grove Chevre 2009 Small Business Person of the Year

### Small Business Person of the Year:

*Mary Keehn, owner, Cypress Grove Chevre, Arcata, California*

Started in 1983 in Humboldt County, Cypress Grove Chevre has put American cheese making on the national (and international) map. Mary Keehn simply wanted a healthy source of milk for her children when she started raising Alpine goats in the 1970s. She soon gained recognition as a premier breeder of Alpine dairy goats, and the owner of way too much goat milk. She headed to the kitchen and started to stir up recipes for cheese. Local chefs and restaurants bought her cheese and word spread fast about the taste and quality. Today, Cypress Grove Chevre employs 42 and has awards from the American Cheese Society, the U.S. Cheese Championship, the World Cheese Awards and the National Association for the Specialty Food Trade. Two years ago, the company won the *Outstanding Product Line* at the 2007 International Fancy Food and Confection show in New York.

The SBA award's criteria is not only for developing an outstanding business; a business must also help make a contribution to the community. Cypress Grove has earned its reputation as a purveyor of excellent cheese by putting quality first. "We realize that quality must be evident in more than the cheese," says Keehn. "We have to have excellent milk, and that means healthy goats and family farms. By contributing to our employees and community, we make it clear that we are all motivated by the same commitment to quality of life. This award affirms that our focus is appreciated and valued by the business community as well as by our customers."

Keehn has served in leadership roles in a number of industry associations and was also the first chairman of the Humboldt Harvest, an incubator group formed to help small food businesses become successful. She also serves on the President's Advisory Board of Humboldt University.

"We're delighted we can give the award to a woman who is such a great asset to the community," says Mark Quinn, SBA's San Francisco district director whose territory covers much of Northern California. "Mary Keehn's attention to her business, her employees and the Arcata community is what made her an easy selection for our Small Business Person of the Year."

Keehn will receive the award at the Arcata Economic Development Corporation's *Spotlight on Success* event May 20 at the Arcata Theater Lounge.