

# Retired journalist turns to Basque roots, sheep farming and cheese making

By Ella Lawrence, KQED

On a steep hill above Marshall, a gorgeous rolling sheep ranch sits on 800 acres of land. Its owner Marcia Barinaga, a third-generation American Basque, bought it with her husband when she decided to “take a break” from her career as a science journalist and retire on the land they had grown to love since purchasing a shore house in Marshall in 1993.

While Barinaga’s original intention was to retire, she is not a woman who sits still easily. The compact, well-spoken cheesemaker with a doctorate in molecular biology was not sure what she wanted to do with the land. But her Basque roots run deep and slowly the idea of making sheep’s milk cheese took hold of her. “When we bought the ranch I had never even touched a sheep and there were no buildings here,” she laughs. But Barinaga is a quick learner and within a few years she had traveled to Basque country to learn shepherding and cheesemaking from her distant relatives; built a milking parlor and a small creamery; and by 2008 began producing two types of distinctly Basque cheeses.

On a recent tour of Barinaga Ranch and creamery, Marcia was asked by a visitor, “What kind of cheese did they have in your father’s Idaho sheep camp?”

She laughed and responded, “Big blocks of orange American cheese. They never thought to make cheese with their sheep’s milk!”