The Cheesemaker's Vision

Sylvain Bergeron

CO-OWNER
OF FROMAGERIE BERGERON

Generations

It All Starts with Milk

The base of any cheese is milk. But what kind of milk? Depending on its origin and how it is processed, the milk used to make cheese can yield a wide variety of flavors and aromas. Overall, cheesemakers initially have 18 options to choose from: 3 types of milk (cow's milk, goat's milk, or ewe's milk) x 2 forms (whole or skimmed) x 3 processing options (raw, heated, or pasteurized).

Let's Start with the Type of Milk

Did you know that only three types of milk can be used to make cheese? These are cow's milk, goat's milk, and ewe's milk. We cannot use the milk from camels or mares because they do not contain one key protein, casein.

Raw, Heated, or Pasteurized Milk

Milk is what gives cheese its basic characteristics. Cow's milk is most often used. You will detect subtle nuances of flavor in farm cheeses, which are always made from milk from the same herd that is fed a special diet. Goat's milk, which has a unique flavor and more granular texture, contains fine fat globules that are easier to digest and are particularly suited to fresh cheeses. Ewe's milk is rare, but is so rich that it can produce two to three times as much cheese as the same amount of cow or goat milk.

Bergeron Taste

Raw, heated, and pasteurized milk can be used. Using raw milk allows us to work with the milk's natural bacterial flora. This yields greater nuances in flavor and softer, creamier textures. That's why raw milk is so popular with cheesemakers and cheese lovers alike.

Although raw milk is prized by gourmets, it has to be handled much more carefully in order to prevent the development of harmful bacteria, such as the bacteria that cause listeriosis. In order to ensure our cheeses are safe to eat, we heat our milk. Heated milk is heated to 60ºC, whereas pasteurized milk is heated to 72ºC. However, eliminating undesirable bacteria also destroys natural lactic bacteria. What's more, the higher the temperature, the greater the effect on milk's protein and fat particles that allow us to create different flavors and textures.

1

Select the type of milk: cow's milk, goat's milk, or ewe's milk

2

Choose the form of milk: whole or skimmed

3

Decide how it is processed: raw (i.e., unprocessed), heated, or pasteurized

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You may be wondering why most cheesemakers opt for pasteurization? It is important to know that regulations are the same for cheeses made with heated milk as they are for raw milk cheeses. Among other things, we have to fully sanitize the dairy to make pasteurized milk cheese after making heated milk cheese. In practice, raw milk and artisanal cheese production go hand in hand, while pasteurization is better suited to high-volume production.

Cheesemakers can also choose between whole and partially skimmed milk. It helps to think of milk fat as being like sugar in desserts—it's what gives us all the flavor and creamy textures.

Master Cheesemaker

But milk is just the start. In later issues, we'll also discuss the coagulation, draining, and ripening stages. And that's where the cheesemaker's know-how is transformed into fine art!

Patte Blanche

Spotlight on Bergeron

Patte Blanche is a rarity—a firm goat cheese. Its original taste was produced from our experience making Gouda. Its delicately goaty flavor makes it an ideal introduction to goat cheese, and kids in particular love its slightly sweet taste. It gives salads a wonderful flavor boost and goes very nicely with fish.

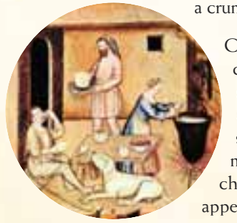
Spotlight on Cooking

Fish goes nicely with neutral or mild cheeses that won't steal the spotlight! That's why I prefer interior-ripened cheeses, such as a semi-soft Saint-Paulin or a firm Gouda. Fresh goat's milk cheeses are also a great choice.

Spotlight on History

The origins of cheese date back virtually to prehistoric times, from about 8000 B.C. (when sheep were first domesticated) to about 3000 B.C. The first cheese may have been made by people in the Middle East or by nomadic Turkish tribes in Central Asia. The practice had already spread to Europe prior to Ancient Rome and, according to Pliny the Elder, had become a sophisticated trade by the time the Roman Empire emerged.

The secret to making cheese was probably discovered by chance when milk was stored in containers made from animal stomachs, which naturally contain the rennet needed for coagulation. The earliest cheeses were likely to have been quite sour and salty, similar in texture to rustic cottage cheese or feta, a crumbly, flavorful Greek cheese.



Cheese produced in Europe, where climates are cooler, required less salt for preservation. With less salt and acidity, the cheese became a suitable environment for useful microbes and molds, giving aged cheeses their pronounced and appealing flavors.

Cheese production in the Middle Ages (fourteenth-century picture)

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