

Making of Gruyère



Special care is taken in the milking process so the milk conserves its irreproachable quality.



The cheese maker constantly controls the quality of the milk.



The cows giving milk destined to the production of Gruyère AOC feed on natural fodder. In summer the fodder supply comes essentially from pastures; in winter, it is based on the first and second cuts of hay.

Constant Quality

Mild, semi-salty, salty or prime quality: as much as you could desire! But how is the most famous of the Swiss specialties made and what gives it its inimitable taste? To find out, let's visit one of the cheese dairies that produces the famous wheels of Gruyère AOC, the recipe of which has been handed down to us over the centuries.

It is 8:20 in the morning. In two vats, nineteen future cheese wheels are in the making in the form of thousands of liters of milk (twelve liters per kilo of cheese), from the previous evening's milking (which has been left to settle all night at a temperature between 15° and 18° Celsius) and the morning's milking of the same day.

The milk is brought to the dairy by the producers, and every delivery is strictly controlled and analyzed. The milk will undergo no thermic treatment until its transformation into cheese. This guarantees the preservation of the flora that gives Gruyère AOC its typical taste.



The cheese maker adds the lacto-fermentation cultures and the rennet.



The cheese maker's hand determines the precise moment of the outflow.

The Expert Eye of the Cheese Maker

The cheese maker adds the cultures that will mature the milk. These consist of whey based lacto-fermentation cultivated at the cheese dairy itself. Once maturation is achieved, the cheese maker adds the rennet. This is a natural ingredient that comes from the stomachs of milk-fed calves. It contains enzymes that curdle the milk, the process of which becomes visible after 35 to 40 minutes. In the space of 3 or 4 minutes, the contents of the vat totally changes in appearance. A warm odor fills the dairy. The cheese maker's expert eye is essential in starting the process at the right moment.

The combination of milk and lactic cultures is living matter; one minute more or less can be determining for the quality of the cheese at the moment it is sold. As soon as the milk mass takes on a gelatinous appearance, three large curd rakes gently stir the curd so that the thick matter is separated into grains (about the size of a grain of wheat). This operation, without heating -called the cutting of the curds- lasts 10 minutes. The artistic touch of the cheese maker is primordial and a creative silence reigns. Progressively, the curds and whey are heated to about 55°. After 40 to 45 minutes of heating, a last control of the texture and the out flow of the cheese can begin.



The rhythm accelerates

Brightly shining pipes bring the curd to the stainless steel moulds topped by plastic covers. The silence of before is now broken by the sound of the curd-pump. Near the window ten moulds are lined up in two rows. Above them, a large recipient receives the whey that drains off from the moulds, giving off steam: it will serve as pig feed. The rhythm of the operation accelerates while the curd, now separated from the whey, is packed down into the moulds.



Der käser versieht den Käse mit der Kaseinmarke.

The cheese maker has unscrewed the pipes. He has removed the now useless plastic covers and takes up the identification marks and places them on the surface of the white mass where the curd grains are still visible. A few seconds of pressure and the imprint on the mould appears: there it is, you can already recognize the form and texture of the exterior of the Gruyère AOC cheese wheel. The cheese maker quickly takes up each wheel and places them on the press before installing other moulds for the arrival of the contents of the second vat, where the final stages of curdling are being achieved. After a few minutes and other comings and goings around the moulds, the nineteen daily Gruyère AOC cheese wheels are in the cheese press.



Die Masse aus Körner und Molke wird in die Formen gepumpt

It is 9:20. From now until noon, progressively and manually, they will be pressed at increasing pressure from 300 to 900 kilograms. Systematically, each wheel is identified by the number of the mould and the cheese dairy as well as the date of fabrication. These black marks are made with casein, a cheese protine. Once again, no artificial additives.



The Maturation Process

After twenty hours in the press, the cheeses are immersed in a salt water bath (20% salt) where they will absorb half of the final salt content. The cheese maker's job continues up to the last day of storage in a cellar climatized at 13° -14° where there is a slightly ammoniac odor typical to the maturation of Gruyère AOC. The rind protects the interior of the cheese and is the origin of this specific atmosphere. During the first ten days, the cheeses are turned and rubbed with a salt water solution daily. Then, twice a week for three months and again once a week, until they are sold, they are turned and rubbed with lightly salted water only.



The washing maintains a nice healthy rind and guarantees a healthy cheese as well. The slow maturation process in the cellars breaks down the casein lipides into easily digestible amino-acids. In terms more gastronomic, if not poetic: of the maturation process is born a smooth and creamy cheese. After about three months, the Gruyère cheese wheels are transported to a «finishing house» to complete their maturation (several more months are necessary for them to acquire their full flavor). Once mature, the cheese wheels are controlled and taxed by a Gruyère Interprofessional Specialist and another active cheese maker. Core samples are taken to control the quality and flavor of the cheese and the rind is tested for its form and conservation.



The last stages of the maturation process will continue in the cellars and will last five to twelve months. Five months for mild Gruyère; eight months for semi-salty (the most in demand and the most sold); about ten months for the salty variety and at least twelve months for prime-quality Gruyère. Their qualities are equal, but depend on the consumer's taste.