

# LE GRUYÈRE®

SWITZERLAND



*A cheese of tradition*

[www.gruyere.com](http://www.gruyere.com)  
[www.switzerland-cheese.com](http://www.switzerland-cheese.com)





## *Constant quality*

Gruyère AOC mild, semi-salty, salty or premium quality: whatever you want! But how is this, the most famous of Swiss specialities made? And what gives it its unique taste?

To find out the answers, let's visit one of the cheese dairies that produce the famous wheels of Gruyère AOC, whose ancient recipe has been handed down to us over the centuries.

It is 8.20 in the morning. Ten to twelve wheels of Gruyère AOC are starting out life in two vats in the form of several thousand litres of milk – twelve liters are needed to make a kilo of cheese – from that morning's milking or that has been left to settle all night at a temperature between 15° and 18° from the evening before. The producers bring this milk to the dairy, and each delivery is strictly checked and analysed. The milk is not heat-treated

in any way before being transformed into cheese, which ensures that the flora that gives the Gruyère AOC its typical taste is preserved.

## *History*

Produced since at least 1115 AD in and around the small town of Gruyères, today it is still manufactured to the traditional, ancestral recipe in village cheese dairies in French-speaking Switzerland.

Its place of origin, recognised by the Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée, consists of the cantons of Fribourg, Vaud, Neuchâtel, Jura and some municipalities in the canton of Berne – a region where ancient traditions and customs have been carried on to the present day.

The cheese was given the name of Gruyère for the first time in 1602. And in 2001, it was awarded Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée status, an indicator of quality and origin.



- *Special care is taken in the milking process so that the milk retains its impeccable quality.*
- *The cows that provide the milk used in the production of Gruyère AOC are fed with natural fodder. In summer, the fodder supply essentially comes from pastures; in winter, it is based on the first and second cuts of hay. Both chemical additives and silage are forbidden, as they would prevent the cheese from maturing and cause it to deteriorate.*
- *Twice each day, the producers take the milk to the cheese dairy. After weighing, the milk is poured into the copper vat.*



## *The eye of the cheese-maker*

The cheese-maker adds the starter cultures that will mature the milk. These are whey-based lactic leavens cultivated in the cheese dairy itself. Once maturity is reached, the cheese-maker pours in the rennet. This is a totally natural ingredient, taken from the stomach of calves fed with milk. It contains the enzymes that curdle the milk, a process which becomes visible after around 35 to 40 minutes. At this moment, the contents of the vat totally change in appearance in the space of three to four minutes. A warm aroma starts to fill the cheese dairy.

The cheese-maker's expert eye is essential for starting the process at the right moment. The combination of milk and lactic cultures is a living matter, so one minute more or less can determine the quality of Gruyère AOC at the moment it is sold.

As soon as the milk mass takes on a gelatinous appearance, the cheese-maker starts to turn three large curd rakes, which gently separate the curds in the vat into grains (about the size of a grain of wheat).

This cutting operation without heating, known as «curd-cutting» or «de-curding», lasts around seven minutes. The cheese-maker's eye is all-important and a creative silence reigns.

The curds and whey are gradually heated to approximately 56° to 57°. After 40 to 45 minutes of heating, a final check of the texture and the outflow of the cheese can start.



- *The cheese-maker adds starter cultures and natural rennet. He keeps a constant eye on the quality of the milk.*



- *After stirring, the cheese-maker checks the density of the curds.*



- *The cheese-maker's eye determines exactly when to cut the curd, an important stage in the production process.*



APPELLATION D'ORIGINE CONTRÔLÉE

*A guarantee of origin*



*Branding irons used to mark the wheel.*

## *The pace picks up*

Bright shining pipes bring the curds to the stainless steel moulds topped out with plastic covers. The silence of earlier is now broken by the sound of the curd pump. Near the window, ten moulds are lined up in two rows. Below them, a large tub collects the whey that drains off from the moulds, giving off steam. This will later be used as pig feed.

The pace of the operation picks up, while the curd is packed down into the moulds. Having unscrewed the pipes, the cheese-maker now removes the now useless plastic covers, 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 appears on the mould: there it is, you can already recognise the form and texture of the exterior of the Gruyère AOC wheel.

The cheese-maker quickly takes up each

wheel and places them on the press before positioning further moulds to receive the contents of the second vat, where the final stages of curdling are under way.

After a few minutes and other activities around the moulds, the ten or twelve daily wheels of Gruyère AOC are in the cheese press. It is 9.30. From now until noon, they will be pressed at a pressure gradually increased from 300 to 900 kg.

Each wheel is systematically identified by a casein mark showing the number of the mould and the cheese-dairy. The day and month of production are also indicated. These black marks are made with a cheese protein known as casein. Once again, no artificial additives are permitted.

From this point on, the name Gruyère AOC is stamped on the heel of each Gruyère wheel as a means of preventing illegal copies and guaranteeing authenticity. This technique uses marked branding irons, which makes it possible to stamp the wheel. This marking gives it its identity and indicates its origin.



- *The curds and whey are pumped into the moulds.*



- *The cheese-maker affixes the identification mark with casein. Each wheel is identified like this.*



- *The new wheels, freshly turned out, are plunged into salt-water baths.*



APPELLATION D'ORIGINE CONTRÔLÉE

*A guarantee of origin*



## *The maturing process*

After twenty hours in the pressing, the cheeses are immersed for twenty-four hours in a salt-water bath with 22% salt, where they absorb half of the final salt content. The work of the cheese-maker continues through to the last day of storage, in a climate-controlled cellar at 13°-15° where there is a slightly ammoniac smell typical for maturing Gruyère AOC.

The rind, which protects the interior of the cheese, is the origin of the specific character of Gruyère AOC. During the first ten days, the cheeses are turned and rubbed every day with a salt-water solution. Then they are turned and rubbed with slightly salted water twice a week for three months and again once a week until they are sold.

The washing maintains a nice, healthy rind, which guarantees a healthy cheese as well.

The slow maturing process in the cellars breaks down the casein lipids into easily digestible amino-acids. This process is what gives birth to a smooth and creamy cheese. After about three months, the pieces of Gruyère AOC are moved to a special store where they continue to mature. (It will take several more months for them to acquire their full flavour.) Once they have matured, the cheeses are checked and taxed by a Gruyère interprofessional specialist and another active cheese-maker. The characteristics they check and tax are the presence or absence of openings (Gruyère AOC does not have any holes), the quality of the texture, the flavour of the cheese and its external appearance (form and consistency of the rind). A cheese that has to be downgraded is not allowed to bear the Gruyère name.



The final stages of maturing continue in cellars, lasting a minimum of five months and a maximum of eighteen months.

It takes five months to form Gruyère AOC mild (also called «Classic»); around eight months for semi-salty (the most popular variety); some ten months for the salty (also called «Réserve») and at least twelve months for the premium quality. They all have the same characteristics – the choice is left to the consumer.

You will also find Gruyère AOC under the Bio or Gruyère d'Alpage names. This latter speciality is the fruit of mountain pastures, produced solely during the summer.

- *The cheeses gradually take on their golden colour: the rind appears.*



- *After four and half months, the wheels are tested for quality.*
- *The maturing process, in french «affinage», is the care given to the cheese. This one is kept in a maturing cellar for several months, before being ready to be marketed.*

*During this slow maturing process, the cheeses are regularly turned and rubbed down with salted water. The humidity will help the rind to form, which in turn assists the maturing process.*



## *Unique quality and recipe*

This is a 100% natural product, produced from raw milk in accordance with the AOC requirements as recorded by the Swiss Federal Office for Agriculture.

Thus the quality of Gruyère AOC can be attributed to its unique recipe, the quality of the raw milk and the expertise of the milk producers, the cheese-maker and the maturer.

The raw milk comes exclusively from cows fed with non-silage fodder and reared naturally. It must be fresh that morning or kept fresh from the previous evening (the two may be mixed). It has not been stored, even at weekends. The work of the cheese-maker can start no later than 18 hours after treatment.

The only additives used in cheese-making are rennet (enzyme secreted by the stomach of unweaned calves), specific cultures and salt.



*A wheel of Gruyère AOC ready to go  
on display*

**LE GRUYÈRE<sup>®</sup>**  
**SWITZERLAND** 



## *Technical data*

- *Round wheel, with a yellowy-brown rind and a hard texture, ivory-yellow in colour.*
- *Flavour: fruity, sustained by a variable salty flavour, may vary depending on the exact origin.*
- *Matured:  
For 5-12 months or more*
- *Weight: 25 - 40kg  
Average weight: 35kg  
Gruyère d'alpage:  
20 - 35kg*
- *Height:  
9,5 - 12 centimeters*
- *Diameter:  
55 - 65 centimeters*
- *Fat in dry matter:  
min. 49 %*
- *Water content:  
max. 36,9 %*
- *Salt:  
1,4 % average.*



APPELLATION D'ORIGINE CONTRÔLÉE

*A guarantee of origin*

# LE GRUYÈRE®

SWITZERLAND



*Gruyère AOC  
production area*



The Gruyère AOC designation is an official mark of quality that is only awarded to certain regional products. It has its roots in a region that gives it its specific character and unique taste. The AOC label guarantees the authenticity of the products that are made using only traditional methods and know-how.

Interprofession  
du **GRUYÈRE**

P.O. Box 12 • CH-1663 Gruyères  
Tel. +41 26 921 84 10  
Fax +41 26 921 84 11  
[www.gruyere.com](http://www.gruyere.com)  
[interprofession@gruyere.com](mailto:interprofession@gruyere.com)

ART COM & PARTENAIRES, CH-1077 SERVION / PHOTOS: S. GALIFIER



APPELLATION D'ORIGINE CONTRÔLÉE

*A guarantee of origin*