



Making Cheese

We are dairy cow farmers, in Ireland and have been making cheese traditionally on our family farm for over 40 years. We live in an area which is at the heart of milk production in Ireland, on the edge of a region known as The Golden Vale. There is not a tradition of farmstead cheesemaking in our area, typically farmers will be members of a dairy co-operative selling their milk to a central processing location where it will be processed in large volumes into butter and cheese. This is very efficient for both the processor and the farmer allowing both to focus their attentions, but on the downside that precious sense of connection from field to fork is broken. The farmer on the one hand doesn't understand the long journey it takes to transform milk to an aged hard cheese, and likewise the cheesemaker is far removed from understanding how weather, feed, calving patterns impact on style of milk. Making cheese on the farmstead is an amazingly rewarding experience, if at times very frustrating. We challenge you to make cheese for a lactation season and trust gain a new sense of connection with your farm and respect for the final product... beautiful cheese.

Cheesemaking is a traditional and ancient craft, at its most basic, cheesemaking serves as a means of preserving milk. Indeed it is argued that cheese was originally discovered by accident, when milk was carried in containers made from ruminant stomachs, and the enzyme in the stomach resulted in the coagulation of the milk into curds and whey. There are several simple steps which will ensure you success in making cheese. 1. Milk Quality 2. Hygiene 3. Temperature Control. 4. Patience!!!! We started making cheese as a hobby, in our farmstead kitchen with a saucepan over our gas hob, muslin bags filled with curd were suspended from a clothes airer and the whey drained into buckets beneath. Our advise would be to start simple, this will not only give you confidence but also result in a cheese you can eat

almost immediately, we would suggest starting off making a fresh curd cheese such as Paneer for which you will simply need milk and white vinegar, the whole process is only an hour and 15 minutes, so very easy. An excellent reference book for making cheese at home is the very affordable publication "Home-made Cheese-Artisan Cheesemaking made simple" by Paul Thomas published by Lorenz books www.lorenzbooks.com it is full of recipes from the most simple to the very elaborate, there is also a lot of help available through the internet, The American Cheese Society is an admirable organisation preserving and developing the craft of farmstead cheesemaking. <http://www.cheesesociety.org>

Equipment you will need for basic cheese making includes: a large stainless steel pan, thermometer, a precise weighing scales, long handled stainless steel spoon, a heavy weight, chopping boards, a bowl, muslin squares, (cheese cloth) colanders and moulds into which you can place your curds as with all cooking, organisation is key. Make sure the kitchen is clear of clutter, all surfaces and equipment are washed down in advance. Poor hygiene in cheesemaking will result in a failed make, this could result from something as simple as not rinsing off properly the washing detergent from the saucepan, which will result in failed acidification and coagulation of the milk, known in cheesemaking terms as a "slow vat". In terms of ingredients to make more elaborate cheeses you will need to buy in rennet the enzyme which aids coagulation of milk, proteolysis (break down of fats and proteins) and ripening of cheese, we would also advise you to buy direct vat starter to aid the fermentation process. It is possible to make your own starter, but we would suggest you focus on having the freshest, cleanest sweetest milk and the cleanest cheesemaking equipment rather than spreading yourself too thin! We work with both fresh cow's and sheep's milk, did you know sheep's milk is known by the French as the "liquid gold" of milks due to it's amazing cheesemaking properties. Work with the freshest milk available, don't use milk from freshly calved cows wait around 14 days, feeding the initial milk back to the babies. Always taste your milk, if it tastes good to you, that's a great start, keep notes, temperature of your room, temperature when you add your vinegar, how long it takes to set, this will develop your sense of feeling and knowledge. While it is possible to make milk from shop bought pasteurised milk we would advise against this as it is less likely to be successful. It is a personal choice as to whether you wish to initially pasteurise or not, but assuming you have a recent Tuberculosis result on your milk there is no reason why not to make raw milk cheese, particularly if you are making a fresh or curd cheese not intended for ageing. I hope that these notes on cheesemaking, inspired by our own experience encourage you to give cheesemaking a go, it is a wonderful craft, and one where you never stop learning. My own particular passion is cheese maturation and natural rinds, I am quite happy tasting through batches of my Cashel Blue for hours on end. If you would enjoy to taste the fruits of my labours you can find my cheese at your local WholeFoods Cheese counter, under the name Kerrygold Cashel Blue.

Sarah Furno Maitre Fromager and Owner of Cashel Blue Irish Farmhouse Cheese

