

# Delaware has a swiss cheese maker

By DEBBIE CLAYTON  
Asst. Agricultural  
Editor  
University of  
Delaware

NEWARK, Del. — Most people smile when they "say cheese," but Buddy Shaw smiles when he makes it.

A soft-spoken man who obviously enjoys his profession, Shaw has been making swiss cheese for a living for the past five years. Chrome Dairy in Kenton where he and his helpers make several batches of cheese every week year-round is one of the few Delaware operations still in existence which specializes in any type of dairy product besides fluid milk.

While the original swiss cheese recipe crossed the Atlantic more than a century ago with the original Swiss

immigrants, it's not something that's available in your everyday cookbook. The recipe itself hasn't been hoarded through the generations, but the process of making it involves a fine art which, according to Shaw, cannot be mastered by just anyone.

"My father learned how to make cheese from his uncle during the Depression," says Shaw. "At that time they thought it had to be made in copper kettles or it wouldn't come out right. Now we know that using stainless steel vats is much more efficient and the cheese still tastes just as good."

Though Shaw's family has been in the dairy business all his life, he learned how to make swiss cheese the way he presently makes it by

serving an apprenticeship under a cheesemaker in Ohio. By replacing the old-fashioned copper kettles with stainless steel vats, he has cut production time by at least a half.

From each "run" of approximately 14,000 pounds of milk, Shaw processes 1200 pounds of cheese. He makes three or four runs a week in the summertime when there's plenty of milk available but cuts back to two runs per week during the winter. Since milk used in the cheesemaking process doesn't have to pass the strict inspections applied to fluid milk, Shaw pays less for his milk, most of which he buys as leftovers from bottling plants.

Shaw generally begins the cheesemaking process long before most people even

think about getting up in the morning. He first pumps the fresh milk from the holding tank into a vat where a minimal amount of hydrogen peroxide is added. The peroxide kills a certain undesirable bacteria but is transformed into water by the end of the process.

The milk then travels through an elaborate heating-cooling system which is designed so that the hot milk flowing through one side heats the cold milk flowing through the other side and vice versa. After going through a separator which removes all of the cream, the milk is pumped into a huge vat where it will be made into cheese.

"We add some butterfat back into the milk before it reaches the vat, since we do want some fat in our cheese but not as much as natural milk contains," says Shaw.

The cheesemaking process is actually quite similar to making-sourdough bread or yogurt. A "mother culture" of bacteria is saved from each batch to be used as a starter for the next one. When this culture is added to the milk, it rapidly multiplies until it spreads throughout the entire vat, giving it the distinctive swiss cheese flavor. A substance called rennet—which serves to coagulate the mixture—is also added at this time.

After undergoing several more steps, including "cooking" and cutting with giant cheese slicers, the mixture is pumped out of the vat and poured through—you guessed it—a cheesecloth. A weight is placed on top of the semi-coagulated mixture to press it into a solid slab and it is left in this second vat overnight.

Next, the cheese is cut into 12 100-pound hunks and placed in a brine tank. The brine serves to seal the hunks of cheese which are then stacked in the curing room for 30 days.

Ever wonder who puts all those holes in the swiss cheese? Well, believe it or not, there's a logical explanation for them.

"If all goes well, a bacteria forms in the cheese when it's in the curing room," Shaw explains. "As this bacteria grows, it forms a gas which sifts through the

cheese and creates bubbles. The cheese stretches to accommodate the bubbles and eventually the holes are formed. However, if the level of acidity is too high, the cheese won't stretch properly and the holes won't be right."

You can tell a lot about the quality of swiss cheese by looking at its holes, according to Shaw. If the holes are smooth, uniformly round and not too big, the cheese will probably be good. But the outcome of a batch of cheese depends largely on the original quality of the milk.

"Most cheeses are made in a similar way," says Shaw, "but the bacteria are different for each type. Swiss cheese is paler than other cheese because no artificial coloring is added. However, summer cheese will be much yellower than winter cheese because the cows are eating

more grass than and the milk contains more carotene."

Shaw tests the cheese in the curing room periodically during the approximately 30 days it remains there. Once the holes are a certain size, he moves the hunks to the cool room, where they must stay for another 30 days before being sold. He has a few customers in and around the Kenton area but sells most of his cheese through a wholesaler in Philadelphia.

It's apparent from the looks—and taste—of his finished product that Buddy Shaw has mastered the fine art of swiss cheesemaking. Though he's transcribed the Old World ways into the more efficient methods of the modern age, Shaw still makes a product that he maintains is "just as good as any national company can make it."

## Horse health seminar topic

LANSDALE — "Horse Health Programs" will be the topic of a horse science meeting scheduled for February 22, 7:30 p.m. at the Montgomery Co. 4-H Center near Lansdale.

Dr. Dwight Schwartz, D.V.M., Penn State University Extension veterinarian will speak on health programs for horses, particularly covering internal parasites, inoculation programs, and poisonous plants affecting horses. Handouts on these subjects will be given out at the meeting.

Sponsored by the Mon-

gomery Co. Cooperative Extension Service, the meeting is open to all interested persons. Prospective and new horse owners are particularly encouraged to attend. The meeting is free of charge.

The 4-H Center is located on Snyder Road off Route 363 between Sumneytown Pike and Allentown Road (near North Penn High School). If more information concerning the meeting is needed, contact Nancy Kadwill, county agent at the Cooperative Extension Service in Norristown, 215-277-0574.

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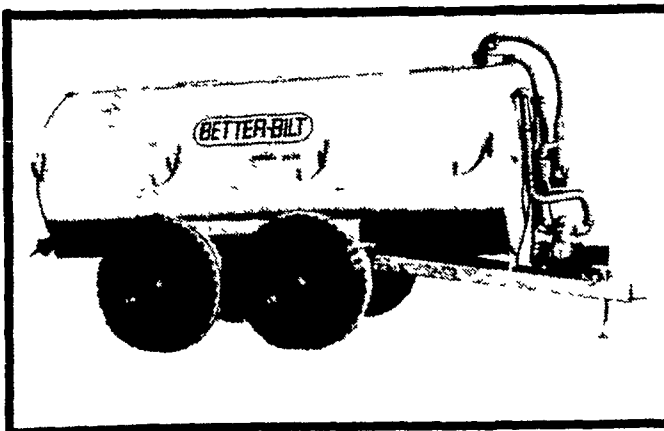
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