

A Provolone Primer

If buying and eating different cheeses has become a new interest for you, as it has for so many other Americans, then walking through a well-stocked cheese shop is certain to be an experience that excites the senses. Just breathe the air and the aromas are almost overwhelming: sharp, pungent, savory, robust, mellow, even sweet. And the view: a panorama of cheeses of every shape and size imaginable.

Provolone is easily recognizable: waxed or oiled and sold in pear, ball, melon or salami shapes, it is often displayed and sold with the strings from which it hung during curing. While the shiny outside surface ranges in color from light golden-yellow to rich golden-brown, the interior is a creamy yellow-white. The texture is solid and compact, so it doesn't crumble when cut, making it an attractive table cheese.

American Provolone is made from cow's milk, either raw or pasteurized. Starter is added to a Cheddar-type vat and the milk set with rennet and enzymes. Once the whey is removed, hot water is added and the curd is worked until it achieves a shiny, elastic and stringy consistency. Because the curd is stretched during production, Provolone, like Mozzarella and Scamorze, is classified as a "pasta filata" cheese, meaning stretchy curd.

Once the cheese is of proper consistency, it is cut and molded into various shapes and sizes, each of which is characterized by a distinguishing name. Typically, the style called Provolone is pear-

shaped and in the United States weighs about 14 pounds. Larger styles of 50, 100 or 22 pounds are called Provolone giganti. Smaller sizes of one to five pounds are visually sphere-shaped and are called a variety of names: Provoletti, Provolotini and Provoloncini. Salame is the name given to sausage-shaped Provolone weighing 10 to 12 pounds, and Salamini if smaller.

After being shaped, the curd is then chilled in cold water to harden and salted in cool brine for several days. Once dried, supporting strings or ropes are tied in place and the cheese is hung to cure. Curing the cheese for a few months yields a flavor that is mild and creamy (Dolce); lengthier curing times produce a sharp, pleasantly piquant taste (Picante). Time and temperature are closely monitored throughout the curing process.

Provolone may be smoked to enhance the taste and aroma, then waxed, oiled or wrapped in a protective plastic coating. American-made Provolone has a moisture content of not more than 45 percent, a fat content of 44 to 47 percent. The salt content is a low 2 to 4 percent.

The distinctive taste of Provolone lends itself well to appetizers, snacks, entrees or desserts. A happy accompaniment to ham, it is equally good with a hearty peasant meal of bread and sausages. It can end a meal elegantly, served on crackers with ripe pears, apples or grapes. Grated, it adds interest to casseroles and soups. And since it melts smoothly, it is an excellent

Methods Can Increase Lamb Production

MINNEAPOLIS, MN. — Intensive management practices and innovative veterinary techniques can enable sheep producers to double or even triple lamb production per ewe, Robert Ashley Robinson, BVSc, Ph.D., of St. Paul, MN, told editors at the annual meeting of the American Association of Agricultural Editors.

Dr. Robinson, Vice President of the American Association of Sheep and Goat Practitioners (AASGP), described opportunities to increase reproductive efficiency at a Livestock Health News Conference co-sponsored by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) and three other national veterinary organizations.

"Some farmers now produce well in excess of 200 lambs weaned per 100 ewes mated, and the more ambitious are aiming to produce one pound of lamb per ewe per day over a 365 day period," Dr. Robinson said.

Sheep have a gestation period of only five months, but unlike cattle or swine, they tend to be seasonal breeders, and most ewes lamb only once a year, Dr. Robinson explained. Some ewes will lamb twice yearly or at least three times

choice for cheese cookery.

Provolone keeps well; simply wrap cut Provolone tightly in plastic and refrigerate. For the best flavor, serve at room temperature.

every two years. Another strategy is to induce multiple births, he said.

Cross-breeding with certain breeds can have dramatic effects on flock reproductive performance by extending the breeding season (e.g. Dorsets) or by stimulating earlier onset of puberty and increased ovulation rates (e.g. Finnish Landrace).

Breeding soundness evaluations of rams should be conducted on a regular basis, Dr. Robinson said, because even temporary infertility can have a dramatic negative effect on reproductive efficiency. These evaluations also assure the timely culling of rams affected with various infectious diseases that influence semen production.

New techniques now available through veterinarians include a pregnancy diagnosis that tells farmers which ewes are pregnant and how many fetuses each is carrying to facilitate extra feeding of ewes carrying multiple fetuses. Embryo transfer and artificial insemination are techniques with great potential for improvement of reproductive efficiency, but the sheep industry has been slow to adopt them, often because of technical problems, Dr. Robinson said.

Exposing ewes to vasectomized rams can also improve reproductive efficiency by inducing ovulation before mating with a fertile ram. Vasectomized rams are also being used to identify ewes that are

not pregnant for culling.

Other new techniques sheep practitioners are now able to offer producers include estrous induction (bringing ewes into heat), synchronization of cycles to get all ewes in a flock lambing at the same time, and induction of parturition to control the timing of deliveries. Two promising new techniques now being used successfully overseas have yet to be approved in the U.S.: use of androstenedione as a vaccine to increase the ovulation rate and melatonin, a hormone that advances the breeding season.

Dr. Robinson highly recommended veterinary investigation of abortion outbreaks in sheep flocks, noting that several effective vaccines or management changes are now available to prevent recurrences.

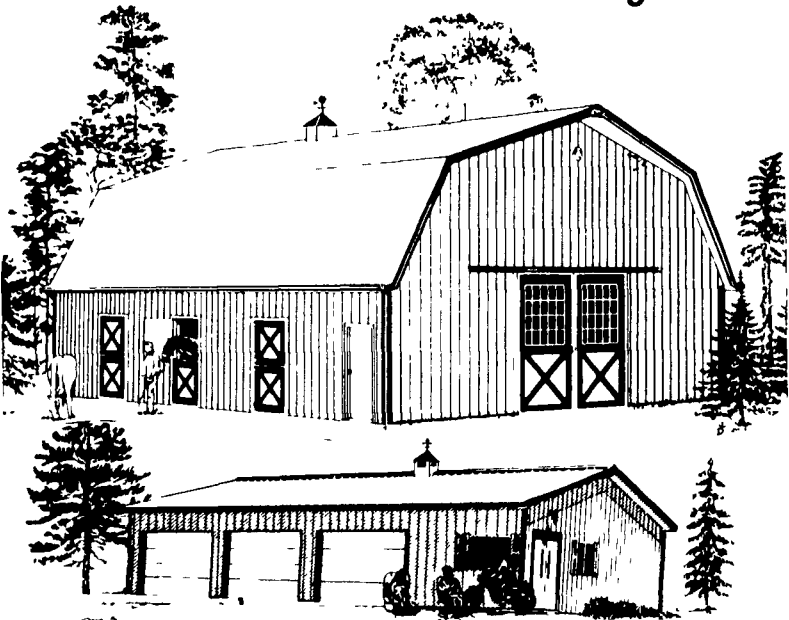
"Upwards of 15 to 20 percent of all lambs born die before weaning. Once a veterinarian determines the cause of these losses, it is possible to reduce mortality significantly by implementing preventive measures," Dr. Robinson said.

"By implementing an accurate, computerized recordkeeping system and having a veterinarian examine the flock at three or four times during the year, sheep farmers can institute changes in nutrition and management based on data instead of seat-of-the-pants intuition. The result will be significant increases in reproductive efficiency," Dr. Robinson said.

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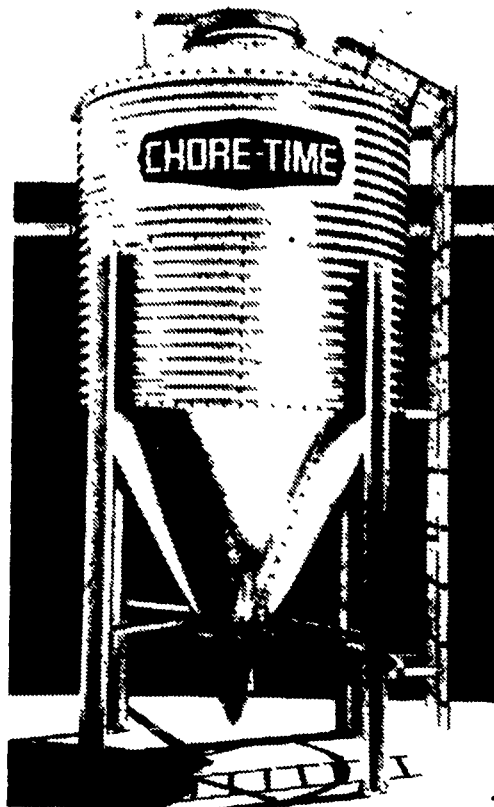
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