



Expert cheese-making instructor Kathy Biss watches as class members document data of the cheese they are making.

## Scottish Expert Shares Cheesemaking Secrets

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TIMBERVILLE, Va. — At first glance the scene from the enclosed observation deck in Shenville Creamery on Evergreen Valley Road, more closely resembles a hospital operating room. The team working there appeared almost sterile, "suited up" as they were for immaculate cleanliness in a cheese-making quest guided, directed, and taught by an expert from Scotland.

Some participants stood around stainless steel vats of pasteurized cow or goat milk and stirred the curdling liquid. Using paring knives, others lifted out curds as they formed and cut them into small uniform pieces.

Nearby, talking seriously to each other around a table, several people examined vials of a substance and recorded the data on sheets of paper.

A round solid chunk of cheddar in a wooden press was not far away.

About a dozen persons from Virginia, North Carolina and Pennsylvania convened for a three-day workshop conducted by Katherine (Kathy) Biss. The workshop's foremost purpose was to improve technique and refine cheesemaking skills.

During the three-day event, pasteurized milk from both cows and goats was used, but from April through September at her home in the Scottish West High-

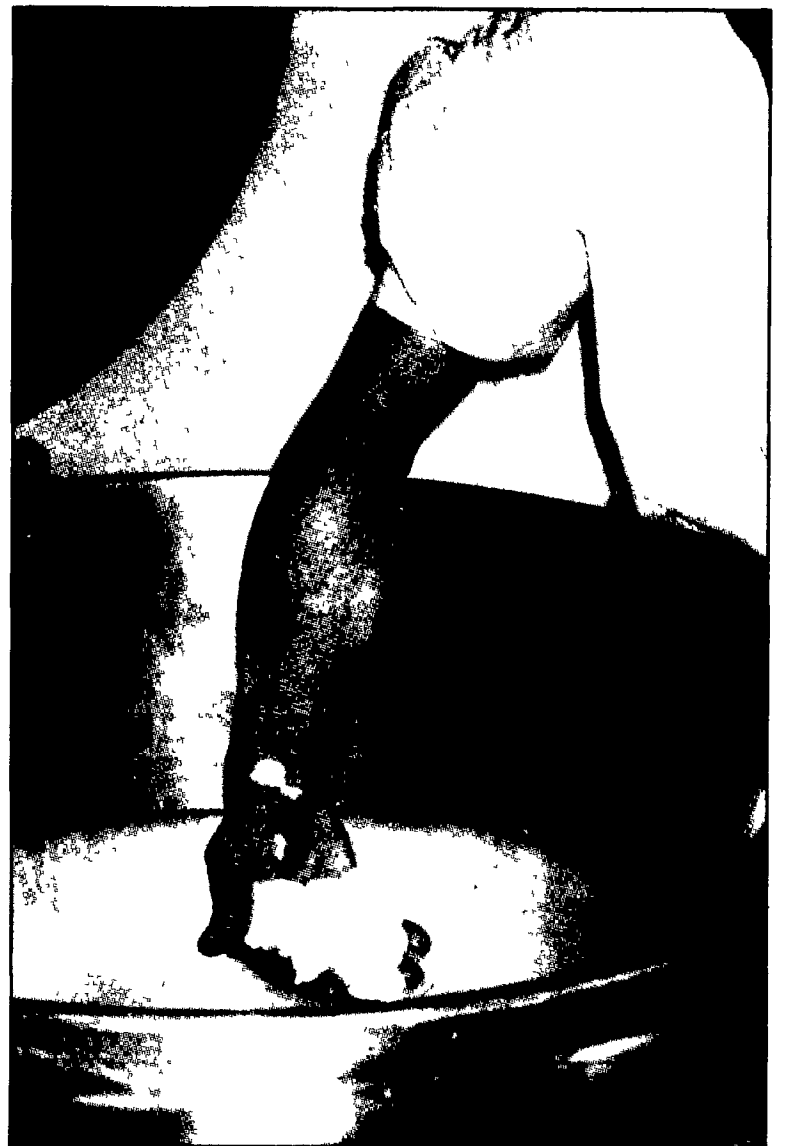
lands, Biss makes cheese with the milk taken from the Friesland sheep she raises.

"The aim of the course is to produce hard cheeses," Biss said. "I find in the states, few people know how to make hard cheeses. A proper cheddar—you can't shortcut," she said.

"It's not only a science, it's a craft," said Biss with the voice of experience gained from 25 years of conducting regular workshops in the United Kingdom.

"Cheesemaking is a skill that is being gradually lost due to mechanization," Biss said, explaining that recipes adapted to machines lose their identity.

"People are fed up with the yellow rubbery stuff you buy in supermarkets," she said.



Making good homemade cheese has its technical side. Here the workshop participants are testing the acidity of whey.

One participant, Vicki Dunaway who also coordinated the class, is licensed to produce and market cheese. At the little workplace in Willis, Va. that she calls Ladybug MicroCreamery, Dunaway makes a wide variety of cheese products.

In a separate conversation Dunaway said that to make any kind of cheese you need milk, culture, and enzyme. She explained that the different cheeses made throughout the world come by manipulating the crucial factors of temperature and time.

"Temperature is critical in making cheese of any kind," she said. "A fresh mozzarella, once made, is ready to use."

Not cheddar. The technique is trickier. Dunaway indicated if only she can get the process down, she would love to have cheddar always.

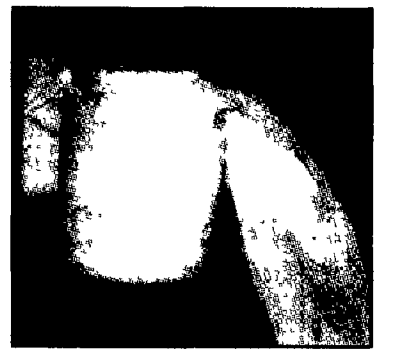
So it was with most of the participants. They knew the basics but were having inconsistent results with hard cheeses.

Chris Owen, for instance, in experimenting with pasteurized goat milk cheddars at the Spinning Spider Farm in North Carolina. She said the main stumbling blocks for her involved the consistency of culture and the aging process.

At the end of the workshop, Owen said that she had been introduced to a whole new level of documenting and manipulating a batch while it was in progress.

Barbara Harrick went home energized by the information that was passed around the workshop. Within a week at her Fairfax, Va. home she was tackling a homemade brie.

"I have a lot more confidence than I would have had a month ago," the hobbyist said over the telephone. Harrick was newly armed with refining techniques, problem solving skills, and inspiration gained from the course and knowledge the others shared.



A cheddar is pictured in the cheese press.

In the beginning, most cheesemakers consider themselves hobbyists. Later they often applied and received a commercial license. Others were in the licensing process.

The exceptions were Marvin Tice, the production manager, and Kay Plogger, Shenville Creamery employees whose jobs include soft cheese and yogurt production.

"We feel it is a unique opportunity to focus on aged cheeses," Leon Heatwole, Shenville owner, said about having employee representation in the workshop.

"I always thought it would be nice to have a cheese that you were known for. I hope this is the first step toward that."

In September 2000 Heatwole and his wife, Ida, opened the creamery to provide pure, fresh milk to the consumer solely from their 200-head Holstein dairy. The milk trip to the recyclable glass bottles from the cows is very short since it is processed on the farm. The milk is sold in homogenized and unhomogenized form with a cream line.

Workshop participants took one kind of every cheese variety that they made along home to age it. When the cheese reaches maturity, the participants plan to share taste tests with one another.

