



Cow to Kettle

Raw-Milk Cheese Makers Embrace Traditional Cheese Methods

(Top spread, left to right) Cada Dia Jersey cows graze on the 50-acre dairy farm in Prineville. Cheese wheels are painted with wax imported from Holland and left to age in the cellar.

Dairy farmer and Cada Dia cheese maker Pat Sullivan runs his fingers through a combination of grass and clover on the ground a few yards from 20 Jersey cows grazing on his 80-acre dairy farm in Prineville.

“The clover is protein and the grass is starch for the animals,” Pat says, with a Virginia accent. “We are a groundup operation here. The sun and the earth

produce food, the cows make rich, creamy milk full of healthy vitamins like Beta Carotene and Omega 3 and 6, and then we turn that into raw-milk farmstead cheese.”

At most large dairy farms, cows are fed dry hay and grains on large feedlots and milked up to three times a day. Pat’s Jersey cows are instead milked only once a day and are given five months off in the winter to restore their bodies.



“These guys have got it made,” Pat says with a laugh, scratching one of the cows behind its ear.

This farm operates on a micro-scale: on a typical day cows produce 45 gallons of milk, which is subsequently made into one or two wheels of cheese. Most dairy farms process 4,000 gallons of milk daily and most cheese makers have no involvement with the animals or the farm where they buy their milk.

Pat, his wife Cher and their two teenage daughters, Afton and Hannah, moved to Central Oregon from New Mexico a year and a half ago to live out a dream ten years in the making. Together they built their straw bale home, milking parlor and cheese-making facilities, six months before a herd of cows and heifers arrived at their door in May, ready to be milked.

Pat worked as an engineer on the oil fields of New Mexico and

Texas before taking an early retirement and buying an 18-acre farm in New Mexico, in a town of only 100 people. For years, he raised cows, studied the cheese-making process and lived a back-to-the-land lifestyle without television and other distractions.

When the real estate market peaked in 2007, Pat put his property on the market as an experiment, and when it sold he had the capital to invest in a more serious farm in Central Oregon.

“Most people that have the kind of money it takes to get an operation like this up and running would not be interested in milking cows for a living,” Pat explains. Although his aspirations for marketing and selling his products are mostly on a local level, he imagines the business will be quite lucrative once he develops a solid reputation as an artisan cheese maker.

→ *cada dia cheese*

“The dairy business in America is about quantity, but we are focusing on quality by caring for our animals and going back to cheese making methods that are hundreds of years old.”

—Cher Sullivan, Cada Dia Cheese

(below) Cada Dia Cheese curds are stuffed into a cheese mold and become a solid wheel within 24 hours.

The process Pat uses to make cheese is a New Zealand method called “cow to kettle.” Immediately after the cows are milked and each batch is filtered, the milk is poured into a 150-gallon vat filled with cultures that turn the milk into curds and whey. The temperature of the milk goes from about 99 degrees in the cow to 105 degrees in the stainless steel vat. Most dairy farms pasteurize milk as soon as it leaves the cow, reducing the temperature to 37 degrees, killing off all the bacteria and then waiting 24 hours for other bacteria to multiply back in the milk.

“Milk never gets better. It just starts degrading once it leaves the cow,” Pat explains. “The best



cheese in the world is made from raw milk—at least that is what the connoisseurs say, that it is richer, creamier and has more body. They can talk about cheese like fine wine.”

After stuffing the curds into a cheese mould, which squeezes out the last of the whey, a solid wheel is formed in 24 hours and then painted with wax imported from Holland to hold in the moisture before it is brought down to the cheese cellar and left to age. Nearing the end of their first year of production, the Sullivans have amassed 9,000 lbs. of cheese in their cellar and have begun to sell at local farmer’s markets.

“The dairy business in America is about quantity,” Cher says, “but we are focusing on quality by caring for our animals and going back to cheese making methods that are hundreds of years old.” **CO**



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