THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA

Report by - LYNTON FOSTER 2008 Churchill Fellow

THE JACK GREEN MEMORIAL CHURCHILL FELLOWSHIP

to study overseas developments in small scale cheese making

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2008 Jack Green Memorial Churchill Fellowship

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Introduction

During a 10 week period from Mid-May till the end of July 2009 I travelled to England, France and Ireland to study some aspects of Cheese-making in these countries. My object was to gain further insight into small-scale cheese-making in these countries, with the particular aim of using this knowledge to assist me to establish a small artisanal cheese-making business in Tasmania.

I plan to use the information and experience gained to prepare a business plan for a small cheese manufacturing and retail business in Southern Tasmania. The business would be heavily reliant on tourism, and there have been some very successful small cheese businesses established elsewhere in Australia which take advantage of the combination of Wine and Cheese, by establishing in conjunction with a winery, or in a wine producing area.

The business hopes to gain by providing unique selling points, the combination of wine and cheese, and by exploiting synergies at all levels, such as energy use and infrastructure, manufacturing plant, equipment, labour, retail premises. The use of smart and clean technology is of particular importance to this venture if it is situated in a pristine agricultural and tourism area.

The products from the cheesery are to be targeted at the very peak of the gourmet food market, relying on the strength of the Tasmanian fine food brand, and in matching the premium wines produced. The possibility of competing on price in Tasmania and on this scale is seen as negative. High quality products are in demand in the dairy industry and are a suitable fit to this scale of operation.

My application was used to learn artisanal cheese making techniques in Europe, where small specialist cheese making is an established industry, and where skills and traditions which are unavailable in Australia are employed. I have made contact with Cheese makers in Northern England, Wales and Ireland who are interested in helping me to learn their techniques in making hand-made and distinctive cheeses. I have also used this time to see some French Cheese making techniques, particularly Alpine hard cheeses and Washed Rind soft and semi-soft cheeses. I am learning cheese making through my company, through short training courses and through voluntary work with small cheesemakers, but I believe the difference between making good cheese and great cheese is exposure to European cheesemakers.

By training at Enilbio in the Jura in France, making Comte, Morbier and other French Alpine styles and in working with Irish Farmhouse Cheese-makers using raw milk and their own creative techniques, I have experienced cheese-making with some remarkable, popular and successful award winning Cheese-makers. I have experienced some very high quality and individualistic styles. Based on these traditional styles, and paying due respect to this ancient craft, but also creative, and innovative, natural and representing skill, and best quality ingredients, locally sourced and carefully handled products. “New cheeses, Old Traditions.”

I acknowledge the assistance in particular of the following:
The Jack Green Memorial Churchill Fellowship
Dairy Australia
Dairy Industry Association of Australia
National Centre for Dairy Education Australia
Executive Summary

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EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE:

Highlights of this Fellowship included:
Time spent at Enilbio Poligny learning to make French cheeses including Comte and Morbier, and visiting Cheese makers in the Jura.
The experience of learning traditional washed rind maturing techniques from Irish Farmhouse Cheese makers who generously shared their skills and experience with me.

Major Lessons and Conclusions learnt and how I plan to Disseminate them and Implement them in Australia
Small scale, Farmhouse, Artisanal or Hand-made specialty cheese is a luxury product. The main market for this form of cheese is in wealthy urban populations. It therefore is incumbent upon the rural based producer to embrace a broad skill set, and have expertise in a range of disciplines. It is a product which requires skill, dedication and passion to produce. It provides scope to develop Agri-tourism “Food Trails” in conjunction with other Gourmet Foods and Wine, many successful examples of which were studied whilst overseas. It provides a ‘value added’ product which can improve the profitability of smaller, marginal primary producers. Typically, this can lead to dairy farmers becoming full time cheese makers. It fits well with family business models. Successful small cheese-makers work in co-operation with others in their local community, and form close links with suppliers, authorities and retailers, and work with them to improve quality and conditions for their products.

There is potential growth in developing this business as a major Tourist Attraction, i.e. Experiential Tourism, consumer education can lead to training courses. The small producer can extend their range across many other complimentary foods and products. “It’s not just about the Cheese”. A range of sales options are possible from direct cellar door to farmers’ markets to internet sales to distributing directly locally to interstate and overseas through distributor networks. Successful cheese-makers find the best mix from these options to suit their circumstances. Location is one of the most important factors leading to success.

Consumers of specialty cheeses will be drawn to high quality selling points, such as “Organic”, “Hand-made”, “Raw milk”, “Slow food” and the use of AOC style guarantees of ‘Terroir’, and in order to maintain consumer demand small producers must embrace these concepts and work with others to develop them. Cheese-makers must challenge themselves to not only maintain high standards, but to continuously improve their products, innovate and develop new products, based on traditional techniques and communicate this effectively to their customers. Personal contact is very important. In order to target the highest end of the quality cheese market, cheeses must not only be of high quality, but distinctive, individual products with ‘unique selling points’.

The object therefore was to assess the usefulness of available technologies, both traditional and modern, and to learn the most important factors contributing to success in small cheese production. I plan to use this information in planning and development of my own small business, and by sharing this information through this report, and through future involvement in this industry, promote small-scale cheese making in Australia.
Programme: Lynton Foster Churchill Fellowship 2009

May 25th: Arrive London Heathrow 1330
Neales Yard Cheese shop, borough market 11.30 and cheese store10.00 am
Michael.jones@nealsyarddairy.co.uk
Address for the cheese store: 114 Druid Street London SE1 9AB
Visits to La Fromagerie, Paxton & Whitfield, Fortnum & Masons and Harrods.

May 29 to June 1: Wensleydale Creamery, Hawes, Gayle Lane, N. Yorks DL8 3RN. Tel: 01969 667664
Visit to Garstang with Adrian Hill (Hills Fine Foods, tel: 07971094495
Adrian.Hill@hillsfinefoods.co.uk) to Lancashire cheese producers: Dew-lay Cheesemakers, Garstang, Preston, Lancashire PR3 0PR tel: 01995 602335 E:
ukorders@dewlay.com W: www.dewlay.com, Leagram Organic Dairy Ltd. Contact: Bob Kitching tel: 01995 61532 E: info@cheese-experience.com W: www.cheese-experience.com, Mrs Kirkham’s traditional Lancashire Farm-made cheeses, Beesley Farm, Mill lane, Goosnargh, Preston PR3 2FL tel: 01772 865335

June 2: Arrive Paris CDG 10.20 am
June 5: Pick up car: 9.00 am. Travel to Lapoutroie, Alsace (June 6 Lapoutroie, Visiting Jacques Haxaires Affineurs, 1, Munster Dodin, Maison Dodin, 1A rue du Docteur Macker, 68650 LAPOUTROIE tel: 0389475005 E: maison.dodin@calixo.net and local Munster Cheesemakers Gerard & Cecille Pierrevellai n, Ferme Pierrevellain produits biologiques, La Goute, LAPOUTROIE 68650, Alsace. Tel: 0389472303
June 8: Depart Lapoutroie travel to Wangen im Allgau: Hotel Landgasthof Mohren, Bodenseestrasse 7, Wangen im Allgau, OT Neurensberg 88239, Germany. Phone: 49(0) 7528950-0, 2 nights
June 10 to 18: Attend Ecole Nationale d’Industries Laitiere et des biotechnologies, Rue de Versailles- BP 49, 39801 Poligny Cedex. Tel: 03 84 73 76 88, contact: Sebastien Roustel, Chef de Projet Recherche. Visits arranged with local Cheesemakers of Comte, Morbier, Mont d’Or cheese visit Roquefort-sur-soulzon, visit to Societe and Papillon caves.
June 29: Visit Isigny-Ste-Mer, 2 Rue du Docteur Boutrois, 14230 Isigny-sur-Mer, Normandy, France. Tel: 33 2 3151 3388 contact: Joelle Larue.
July 2: Arrive Cork, Ireland 1705.
July 4 to 7: At Gubbeen training with cheesemaker.
July 8: Depart Gubbeen drive to Durrus Farmhouse Cheese. Durrus, Bantry, Co. Cork contact: Jeffa Gill, tel: 027 61100
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2008 Jack Green Memorial Churchill Fellowship

Programme: Lynton Foster Churchill Fellowship 2009

E: bh@wcnc.ie
July 11: To Cape Clear Island: Ed Harper  E: Goat@iol.ie
July 12 Arrive Milleens Cheese, Eyeries, Beara, Co. Cork, Contact: Quin Steele
www.milleenscheese.com
July 13: Depart Beara drive to Castlegregory. Visit Peter and Olga, Kenmare Cheese
064/6684236
Contact: Maja Binder tel: 066 7139028. majabinder@hotmail.com
July 15: Depart Castlegregory to Kenmare: Farmers Market 16/7, to Bantry 17/07, visit
Bantry Farmers Market, then “Milk Market” 18/07, Limerick,
July 19: Visit St. Tola Goats Cheese, 065 6836633 Siobhan ni Ghairbhith, visit Mount
Callan Farmhouse Cheese, Lucy Hayes. Tel: 353 65 7072008 e: mtcallan@oceanfree.net
July 20: at J&L Grubb, Beechmount, Fethard, Co. Tipperary. Contact: Louis Grubb tel:
353 52 31151 www.cashelblue.com jlgrubb@eircom.net
July 21: Depart Cashel drive to Belturbet, Co. Caven; visit Silke Croppe, Corleggy
Cheese. corleggy@eircom.net www.corlegy.com
July 22: Visit David Tiernam, Glebe House, Dunleer, Co. Louth
maireadtiernan@eircom.net www.glebebrethan.com
July 24: Visit Sheridan’s Cheesemongers depot near Oldcastle
www.sheridanscheesemongers.com
July 25: Visit Ralph Heenan, Mossfield Organics info@mossfield.ie
to Dublin
July 29: Depart Dublin 6 pm Aer Lingus to London (Heathrow) 1915

July 30: Depart London LHR 2205 via Singapore to Melbourne arrive 0445
July 31: Depart Melbourne 0840 Arrive Hobart QF1011 10.00.
Report: Description of Fellowship and lessons learnt.

England.

Hosted by Sarah Stewart at the Neales Yard warehouse in Southwark, then by Michael Jones at the retail store in the Borough Markets.

Sarah is a very knowledgeable and confident young lady, and a wonderful host. She took me on a journey of discovery of the best of British Cheese, expanding my original plans as we went to include many more producers in Ireland and Northern England. We sampled many cheeses from across Britain and Ireland. Sarah explained that Neales Yard (30 years old next July), long regarded as an iconic cheese-monger in this country, and major exporter of British cheese world-wide; works with producers closely, by providing constant feedback, and input as to the retail possibilities of their products, and changes that may improve them. It was obvious that considerable affinage takes place at the warehouse, with store rooms full of all types of cheese being aged, and matured in suitable conditions of humidity and temperature.

There appeared to be some smear ripening taking place, and some advice was offered as to possible set-up and expansion problems and solutions, for instance the example of a small producer, good product, built a new factory and immediately the product lost character and they needed assistance to regain traditional flavours, moisture and texture.

This visit has given an insight not only into British Cheese, but to many French and Italian styles and to the important links with retailing. Neales Yard has an enormous range of Cheese, at the very centre of the Borough Markets, which provides high quality genuine food for Londoners. Borough Markets is London’s oldest greengrocery market still trading on the same site, having been at its current location since 1756. There has been a great deal of effort in retaining its authentic ‘old fashioned’ appeal, both architecturally, and in the culture of the shopkeepers ‘spruiking’. The display of cheeses in a humidity and temperature controlled
premises, on a long marble counter was very impressive. The prices which were able to be achieved for the best quality products in a city such as London were also very impressive, and I noted large orders being picked up, prepared and ready to go, in excess of one hundred British Pounds by individual customers, one of whom I spoke to, and who said this was to be eaten by his guests at one dinner party. I noted that this business which is now a by-word for quality.

Neales Yard is also using its retail branding for cosmetics and coffee.

**Visit to La Fromagerie:** Marylebone Village, one of the most famous cheese shops in Britain and the world, featuring hand-made cheese from France, Spain, Italy and Britain. Featuring a cooled and humidified cheese room, entered through sliding doors, an immediate olfactory treat, and cheese presented at its best, using wooden shelves in a peg board fashion, and traditional straw matting. Staff were knowledgeable and the shop included a French affinleur, who took me through a few of his particular favourites, and gave me some interesting tips on keeping cheese. (e.g.: To keep cheese in a refrigerator use sugar cubes in Tupperware). I was introduced briefly to Patricia Michelson, the proprietor, who is an advocate of Slow Food; a tenet of the movement is to protect the traditions of food production. By sourcing directly from small producers, building strong relationships and providing a market, La Fromagerie contributes to the continuation of the hands-on art of cheese-making. The presence of a wide variety of complimentary foods, smoked meats, preserves, breads, wines, coffee, organic vegetables, and a small restaurant area, made this a real foodies hang-out, and had attracted other like-minded food stores to the area.

The importance of this sort of value adding to food in Europe was to become evident to me. In order to provide proof of quality and points of difference, heavy emphasis is placed on organics, food miles, slow food, low carbon footprint, social justice, and all manner of value-added branding in food. The result is more expensive food, but apparently this is accepted and expected by consumers in this market (yes, cut-price supermarkets still exist, but they have real competition), and it leads to an interesting use of food as a medium for all sorts of social comment. I got the impression that it was a medium being used to express ones individual view point, to a much greater degree than in Australia, but that retailers had been quick to recognise this, and were very sophisticated in exploiting it very effectively.
A visit to Winston Churchill’s favourite cheeseshop was almost obligatory, “A gentleman only buys cheese from Paxton and Whitfield”. This small shop contained all the essential humidity and temperature controls which allowed the cheese to be displayed piled high on the counters and shelves, allowing the senses full access to that earthy pungency that cheese creates, and which itself, creates in the buyer a yearning for real handmade cheese. Set in the centre of Mayfair, this ‘humble’ cheeseshop rubs shoulders with gentleman’s tailors, and boot makers (Fosters’ and sons), and specialised in cheese accessories, such as beautifully hand-made wooden cheese safes with slate shelves, something Tasmanian woodcraftsmen could turn their skilled hands to. The location of gourmet cheesemongers in the most exclusive shopping precincts is evidence of the esteem in which this product is held in Europe. It is this ‘link in the chain’ which provides the high retail prices which allows small-scale, high quality artisanal Cheese making to survive commercially.

Also visited in London were the large retail establishments Selfridges, Fortnum and Masons and Harrods, which, while impressive, lacked the authenticity of their smaller competitors. They are though, with out doubt the best food halls I have ever experienced. The quality of the merchandise, and the knowledge of the highly trained staff was evident, and the time and effort put into display approached a work of art, with fish sculpture, hung game, highly polished fruit, in addition to charcuterie and of course, cheese. Undoubtedly these are the most celebrated temples of food retailing.

Having travelled north to the Yorkshire Dales, we visited Wensleydale Creamery (in Hawes, North Yorkshire) which has previously been visited by other Tasmanian cheese-makers, this area inspiring the Bennett family’s development of the Ashgrove Cheese range, based on British “Territorials”, regional cheeses, mainly from Northern England, which were sadly nearly legislated out of existence by the food ministry during the second world war, when all but three varieties of British cheese were banned in the name of efficiency, including Lancashire. While 202 farms produced Lancashire in 1939, only 22 continued the tradition by 1948, and the number had dwindled to 7 by 1970. It has taken them many decades to recover, but there is much interest, and some interesting small businesses hanging on and re-establishing in this area. The Hawes Creamery is one of the last remaining traditional businesses, making varieties such as Wensleydale, Lancashire, Red Leicester, in small batches. The plant is old, dated and industrial and, as Hawes is a popular tourist location, there is a museum, and cheese tastings, and a large café. The factory can be viewed through windows featuring interpretation panels along a walkway; visitors are given tastings, and an audio-visual. A fairly uninspiring example
of food tourism, but admittedly quite popular with a large number of tourists present, the plant in full production on a Sunday.

**Garstang:** Met Adrian Hill, of Hills Fine Foods, Adrian.hill@hillsfinefoods.co.uk, a Distributor and ex-cheesemaker who has kindly agreed to take me on a tour of some local Lancashire Cheese-makers. Adrian has worked in this area for many years, and is well known to all in the local industry as “Adrian the Cheese King”. Lancashire cheese-making country is renowned for its rich grassland which leads to high quality milk and inevitably cheese. The Lancashire Cheese-makers are all located around the town of Garstang, within a few miles, on the edge of the forest of Boland (the name derives from Bu Land, Norse meaning Cattle land.) Cheese-making in this area can be traced back as far as the 12th century; around the 1790s the Lancashire tradition of cheese-making began resembling the methods of today. The method involves breaking the curd and blending it with curds from the previous days milking, the mixed curds were pressed using a stone cheese press, turned, clothed and salted to make a cheese. This in part was due to the smaller farm sizes, not producing enough milk in one milking for cheese-making, and resulted in a softer cheese but with distinctive acid flavour.

In 1892 Joseph Gornall, a county Council employee, invented a patented cheese-maker which helped standardise the method of making Lancashire cheese, was cheap, and allowed farmers with minimal knowhow to value add by making cheese on their farms. Some of these Gornall Cheese-makers are still in existence, and much prized as museum pieces.

**Dew-Lay Cheesemakers** was established in 1957 by George Kenyon and is now run by his sons Neil and John. Dew-Lay has won many awards for its fine cheese, including the 2005 Supreme Champion title in the North West Food Producer of the Year Awards for their Garstang Blue Lancashire, a soft delicate blue with a smooth creamy texture, not unlike the popular Bass Strait Blue from King Island Dairies. By working with local farmers over three generations, Dewlay has formed strong links, and source their milk direct from the farm. The union transcends contracts and supply; it is about generations of families working together. The milk comes from within five miles of the dairy, which is an 18 acre Greenfield site, set just outside Garstang. There is a first floor viewing gallery with wall paintings explaining the cheese-making process. The visitors’ entrance also houses a small museum of dairy artefacts. Dewlay products include Cheddar, Double Gloucester, Red Leicester, Lancashire (Tasty or Creamy) light varieties, and of course, Garstang Blue. This is packed in sizes from 3kg, 1.6kg, 950g, 200g down to slices and grated cheese. The packaging reflects commercial trends, and is suitable for large scale distribution through supermarkets and chain distribution. This is quite a large family business, which has taken the industrial approach, and has developed some unique machinery, of their own design especially for pressing, which gives impressive results in achieving standard weights, with good conversion rates, and waxing their cheese on a continuous rotary dipping machine.

**Leagram Organic Dairy Ltd** is the business of Bob and Faye Kitching, set in the picturesque village of Chipping. Bob has 30 years experience in cheese-making, he is a passionate exponent of artisan cheese-making and is also a collector of cheese paraphernalia, and has an impressive museum. He has created award winning cheese, including Lancashire, crumbly or tasty, Cheddar, a buttery double Gloucester a Red Leicester and his own unique creamy sheep’s milk cheese. All territorial varieties are produced under organic standards, and are traditionally hand made. All cheeses are waxed. Bob also conducts cheese-making classes, and demonstrations, including a
unique demonstration where he can make a cheese and explain the process in about 45 minutes. Jane Bennet of Ashgrove Cheeses has visited Bob, and I have seen her perform this demonstration at Agfest in Tasmania. An important aspect of Specialty cheese marketing is customer education, and in order to educate, one must develop the ability to present a good show.

The Kirkhams at Goosnargh make a traditional farmhouse variety of Lancashire Cheese. ‘Mrs Kirkhams ‘(Graham Kirkhams mother started making this cheese), they have been making cheese on their farm for more than 30 years. Using only unpasteurised milk from their own herd this unique cheese is made by blending curd from 6 milkings (morning and evening for 3 days, however this varies depending on time of year and thus quantities produced. They make 1800 litre batches, maturing in cloth, for from 6 weeks up to 6 months. Each evening they still make up a traditional “pint” starter for the next day. They use traditional animal rennet and make in 20kg rounds, cloth bound, finished with butter. It has the sought after moist yet crumbly texture and a fresh salty taste with good acid tang. It is a favourite in shops such as Neales Yard and La Fromagerie, due to its unique flavour and authenticity due mainly to the use of traditional methods and unpasteurised milk. Recently an expansion project, involving a new dairy nearby the original tiny rooms has resulted in some teething problems, due to the “bedding in” process of moving to new premises. Some loss of character and quality issues resulted for a short time, and the services of a French cheese expert were called upon, who seems to have solved the issues, in a remarkably simple and effective manner, which unfortunately I cannot reveal in this report.
France.
The Raw-Milk Cheese Debate. As a pre-amble to this section of our journey, we
stopped briefly in Paris where an incident occurred which had a great impact on me.
I have come from a background of full scale commercial dairy production, and wish to
become a small scale producer. Therefore I have been subject to much conflicting
opinion on this issue, from the mainstream of the industry, and from the emerging
boutique side. I have so-far sat studiously on the fence.

Food Safety Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), the peak food regulatory body in
Australia has held fast to laws requiring all dairy products to be pasteurised in Australia
for many years. As I speak the barriers which have stood as a safe-guard for this
industry, set up in a time when Australia was a large dairy food commodity supplier to
the world, with very long supply chains, and huge industrial dairy plants, are under
review. This is due to sustained pressure from three distinct groups:
- Small producers wishing to make raw milk products because of improved quality and
  flavours, in competition with raw milk imports from Europe, which are allowed in
  Australia,
- Ethnic or cultural groups, who for the same reason, and for traditional and cultural
  reasons, wish to have access to the products they are used to eating in their home
  communities,
- Health conscious people who are aware of the increased health benefits of raw milk
  products due to the existence of live beneficial micro-flora in raw milk.

It appears possible that some small producers may receive limited approval to commence
raw milk cheese production in Australia. The argument has often been put that there is
no discernable difference in taste in raw milk products. That modern technology has
been able to completely copy the taste profile of raw milk cheese. The challenge has
been put to me to blind taste raw-milk and pasteurised cheese and detect the difference. I
have done this in a controlled way, and admit I was unable to discern constant differences in
Australia.

In Paris at the Petit Pont Café, next to Notre Dame I had a piece of raw-milk camembert, not
a particularly expensive piece, just standard café fare, but the immediate and obvious flavour was
unlike anything I had ever had before. For the first time I understood the reference in tasting
real Normandy Camembert to a ‘cooked cauliflower’ taste. The aroma, texture and
flavour were distinctive, unforgettable, and much better than anything I had ever tasted. In short a revelation to me. No doubt this had
much to do with the circumstances, the ideal serving temperature and condition of the
product, but this is a moment I can never forget, and despite my natural disinclination to
commit, I cannot deny that the raw-milk Normandy Camembert I tasted was superior to
any Australian Camembert I have ever tasted in my life. If this is the result of producing
cheese from raw-milk, it must certainly be something I aspire to. Having said this, I
think it is only prudent for all Cheese makers to have the capacity to pasteurise; it only
takes one outbreak of tuberculosis or the like, and the authorities will certainly demand
all cheese is pasteurised for some time to come.
We visited Lapoutroie, a village high in the Vosges Mountains in Alsace to see Munster-Gerome being matured, and see AOC cheeses production methods. AOC (Appellation d’Origin Controlee) is the protective legislation applied in France to foods including Wine and Cheese, to protect traditional and regional products from inferior products being passed off under their name. It provides surety for the consumer that the product is from a particular region, and made to strict methods of production. Munster-Gerome achieved AOC status in 1978 (Munster being produced in Alsace, on the eastern side of the Vosges Mountains, Gerome on the western side). The AOC Regulations for Munster state in part:
- The divided curd must be neither washed nor kneaded before moulding
- If the cheese is ripened in a region other than the place of production, the label must indicate the place of production, and the place of affinage.
It is a washed rind cheese, with an ancient history, going back to Benedictine Irish Monks (hence the Munster) in the 8th century. A theory exists that the use of brevicum-linens to create a pungent rind was developed by the Monks because their strict dietary laws allowed them very little meat in their diet, they were perhaps sub-consciously craving the taste of meat, and over the years their cheese, probably their major source of protein in their diet, came to resemble these flavours. Whatever the reason, ancient and medieval food processing which was predominately a way of preserving food without refrigeration, is often the reason why we still process foods today, despite the existence of adequate storage conditions we still have a taste for smoked, dried, salted, pickled, brined, alcoholic, fermented and spiced foods; of which cheese is a prime example.
In seeking cheese styles for my proposed venture, I am seeking distinctive and interesting authentic styles, which are not made in large quantities in Australia, and I believe the use of washed rind or smear ripening techniques may provide the point of difference I seek. There is also an interesting link through these ancient Monasteries between Ireland and European cheese making traditions which demands my attention. Brevibacterium Linens, or B. Linens, Brevi Linens, or Brevi is a coryneform bacterium that tolerates high salt concentrations and is capable of growing in a broad pH range. They also survive drying and carbohydrate starvation, and have been used by cheese-makers, both traditionally and industrially in many countries, on many different styles of cheese as a natural rind development agent. By introducing them to the rind, usually by washing in a light brine solution, but sometimes simply atmospherically, a distinctive yellow/orange rind develops, which imparts interesting flavours to the cheese, sometimes described as nutty, or gamey (or rancid) and also through rind development protects the cheese during maturation. It is a labour intensive process requiring well controlled conditions of humidity and temperature, and frequent washing, usually by hand, during
maturation. It is suited to small scale hand-made production. These cheeses are often dismissed in Australia as “smelly-sock” cheese, and if not cared for correctly, the bacteria can develop offensive odours at higher temperatures. There has been little exploitation of this style of cheese in Australia compared to Europe however, and therefore I believe a gap exists in the Australian market. Both in soft and hard cheeses these natural washed rind cheeses are interesting, distinctive and full of flavour.

My first visit occurred at dawn and was unplanned. I had noticed a dairy farm up the hill, and saw a sign saying it was bio-organic. I was told the milk could be bought raw from a coin vending apparatus (using your own container) from a location in the village. This was so outside my scope of experience that I was fascinated, and wanted to explore. I will only say that I was disappointed. I would certainly not purchase milk in this way, having seen the condition of the premises, and it left me wondering about the standards of organic farming generally. In many European countries the animals are kept in barns for long periods of the year. This is primarily because of weather conditions, however it has developed into a form of factory farming, where it is regarded as more efficient to barn the animals and take the fodder to them, than to let them graze freely. The use of silage is related to milk quality and contamination. Fodder is brought to them, and waste is removed from the barn, often with a large blade attached to chains installed in the shed, and placed in a large tank on wheels, which is towed to the fields where it is used to fertilise the paddocks. It is an efficient way to re-use waste, provided the waste is removed frequently and completely. If this doesn’t happen the conditions in the barn can quickly become unhygienic. Organic certification is no guarantee of quality. The next organic farm I visited was in very good order.

**Gerard and Cecille Pierrevelain** run a small organic dairy farm at La Goulte, up the mountain from Lapoutroie. With their own small herd, which are barned below the house, in the traditional manner, and fed from fodder produced on the farm (Holstein/Vosgien cross) they produce and sell traditionally hand made Munster Cheese, milk, butter, crème fraiche, tomme as well as a range of syrops (cordials) and conserves. All their products are made by hand by themselves, and matured on-site in their own ‘cave’, in the cellar of their house and sold by them through their own cellar door or through farmers markets. The small cheesery at the side of the house was tiny, but contained all food producers’ required fittings as per a larger factory, and was spotlessly clean.

They make cheese every day, 365 days a year. 45 litres of milk per day yields 10 kg of Munster Cheese. It is a raw milk cheese, heated to 21-22 degrees, no starter culture is added, natural animal rennet at the rate of 10ml per 200 litres, slow set, all whey is collected and fed to the cows, or disposed of ‘a la ferme’ The cheeses are turned 3 times in
the first 24 hours, dry salted (day 2) then turned every 2nd day for the first week. It is washed 6 times in plain water, over 6 days.
Maturation takes place in a stone cellar with a tile floor beneath the farmhouse. No measurement of fat, pH etc. used, seasonal variations occur, and are expected. The best cheese is made in spring and autumn.

Cecille explained to me that the requirements they had to meet for their organic certification and food producers licence were not difficult and involved inspections each 6 months.
They do not use a distributor; they sell all their products themselves locally. They are a mature couple whose children grew up on this farm, and have now left the farm. (I found myself wondering why anyone would want to leave.) Certainly the allure of the city, but hopefully one day they will return. Sure it is hard work, but the honest simplicity of this life was endearing. Certainly they weren’t ever going to make a fortune, but as landowners and small farmers they were comfortably off, and I got the feeling they weren’t overly concerned about the global economic downturn.

**My visit to Maison Dodin** was conducted by the supervisor of affinage, who explained to me that this company, which was established in 1908, by Adrien Bertrand the grand father of present owner Gilbert Dodin, was very proud that all affinage was performed by hand. No brevi is added, the cheese is washed in fresh spring water, all washing and turning performed by hand, but kept on wooden shelves, in which the brevi bacterium thrives. This, he said, was the best way to mature Munster, and their main point of difference over their competitors. The product is pasteurised, and made outside the valley, and transported to this area for affinage. This is stated on the label, as per the AOC requirement. They make Munster in 3 sizes, 1kg, 500 g. and 250 g. with or without cumin (a traditional additive, actually caraway seeds, the confusion would seem to be in translation.)
J. Haxaire is without a doubt the best known producer and affineur of Munster, and has been established in Lapoutroie since 1929. Their plant on the outskirts of town is small, but industrial, using the same bassine production line equipment I have seen to produce white mould cheese in Australia. This is widely used in France, and involves polypropylene 100 to 200 litre tubs (bassines) on wheels or tracks, in which renneting coagulation and cutting takes place (starter culture usually being added in large tanks after pasteurisation) the whey is then partially siphoned off through an overhead pumping system (about 30%) before the bassine is inverted on a large mechanised frame onto a chute leading to curd distributors on multi-moulds. This is a fairly typical industrial approach, and only after salting (day 2) at affinage does the cheese commence the smear ripening using hand washing techniques to introduce the brevi bacteria, which gives the cheese its characteristic appearance and taste. As maturation takes place under controlled temperature and humidity the brevi forms a pinkish-orange rind. The colour of this rind can differ considerably, due to conditions and strains of bacteria and, unfortunately the use of dyes. Beware the bright reddish examples.

I was to learn in the coming weeks of the sheer size of the dairy industry in France, and of the cheese industry in particular. The scale of operations is so much bigger than in Australia that operations I thought of as big, the French thought of as quite small. This led me to confusion on occasions, when I had intended to visit a business described as small, and found it to be in my estimation quite large. It also became clear to me that some of the words that sell cheese are ‘small scale’, ‘hand-made’, ‘artisanal’, ‘traditional’ etc. and many organisations, who could not justify these claims, used this description. Both of the affineurs I visited had their “caves”, maturing cellars, on the banks of the same fast flowing mountain stream that passed through the village. Both were built so close that the stream actually washed past their outside walls. I surmised that this was no co-incidence, and they were taking advantage of the natural dampness and moisture in these locations, perfect for maturation. I asked the question, and received a negative response, that it was pure co-incidence, and had no bearing on the maturation conditions. I have my doubts, the buildings were both constructed by previous generations, and even if the present occupants didn’t realise it, I feel sure they were cleverly and deliberately taking advantage of the natural conditions, which would favour washed rind development perfectly.
We left Alsace and headed across Switzerland en-route to Bavaria, to visit Bio-Kaeserei Zurwies in Wangen im Allgau, a beautiful area just inside the German border by Lake Constance. I had made arrangements from Australia to visit the new factory nearing completion of this company, and had timed my visit to meet their advised time-frame. Unfortunately, on my arrival, I was informed that it would not be possible to accommodate a visit from me, and I should “come back next week”. As I had other appointments, this was not possible, so a long detour across three countries was wasted. This was disappointing, and a lesson to me, I made more follow-up phone calls and confirmation calls from here-in, but in Wangen, I visited another cheese-mongers, which demonstrated that the demand for speciality cheese was high in this country as well, but I noted that the preferred styles were largely based on French and Swiss cheese styles, and as I was to see the authentic styles shortly, I was comforted that I had not missed much. Also evident in this shop was the same raw milk filling station set up I had seen in Lapoutroie, and I began to see evidence that this was wide spread and popular in many countries in Europe. Also noticeable in this area was the wide-spread barn feeding of live-stock, even in mid-summer, and the very large farm buildings with roofs covered in large solar panel arrays. I was later told that subsidies for solar panels were so high, that not only did they pay for themselves, but there was quite a lucrative income stream with energy buy back schemes, so much so that buildings are now built with steeper roof angles and at the best angle for solar generation, and there is an expanding black-market in solar panels, with farmers waking to find their panels had disappeared in the night.
We travelled to Poligny in the Jura, the rugged and beautiful area of France bordering Switzerland, for the centre piece of my fellowship, in order for me to spend almost two weeks as a student at ENILBIO, the Ecole Nationale d'Industrie Laiterie, www.anfopeil-enil.com e: anfopeil.enils@wanadoo.fr the largest of six such colleges in France, and an incredible opportunity for me to learn French cheese-making skills and techniques.

I was introduced on my arrival by my contact Sebastien Roustel to an English speaking teacher Arnaud Peter, who was to be my tutor and translator for the entire time. He worked with me to translate, and explain all processes, and provided learning support notes in English. A brief discussion to clarify my expected outcomes from the 2 weeks was followed by a fine tuning of my course curriculum to suit my needs, and a familiarisation tour.

The facilities of the workshops and research laboratories were the best of their type I had ever seen, and superior to anything in Australia. The college offered a number of practical based qualifications, including the 2 year Cheesemakers (Food Technology) course which was the program I was attached to.

I worked alongside students aged in their mid to late teens, who were able to demonstrate quite advanced skills as cheese-makers, in a variety of styles, and were preparing for their final exams, before joining the workforce, in the enormous French cheese industry. The funding for this institution was a combination of French government, EU, and private enterprise, and the amount of co-operation with private enterprise was obviously high. During my time there, I was introduced to the General Manager of Bongrain, ex-owners of Lactos in Tasmania, who told me of his visit to Tasmania as he was touring the facilities with his entourage, and to Thierry Raud, Sales Engineer for Cheese equipment company Chalon Megard. The institute also conducted research, and was involved in concurrent research projects on behalf of private enterprise. The students produced good quantities of all the local cheeses, Comte, Morbier, Polinoise, Crème Fraiche, Yoghurt, Butter, as well as beer, which was sold through their own retail shop, as well as through supermarkets and shops in the region, thus subsidising their funding. In a similar way catering colleges in Australia conduct semi-commercial operations and run training restaurants.
My program at Poligny included participation in practical hands-on cheese-making classes making regional specialities Morbier, a semi-hard thermophilic natural rind cheese with a distinctive band of ash (vegetable dye) through the centre, Fresh cheese, “fromage fraiche” and derivations, as well as by-products such as butter and yoghurt, Soft white-mould cheese, a local speciality known as “Polignoise” a square cheese, produced using scaled down commercial methods, such as the familiar bassines, and multi-moulds on a conveyor, and of course, Comte manufacture, definitely the major achievement of this area, and a cheese I came to admire. Also in my program was some affinage of all the above, and theory sessions, held one to one, and backed up with extensive study notes in English, which included analysis of the practical technology used including make-sheets and instructions, and a presentation of further cheese-making techniques, a background to the French dairy industry, milk: origin and bio-chemistry, basis of micro-biology, fat standardisation and separation technology (including filtration technology), heat treatment, basis of cheese technology, range of dairy products and issues associated with packaging. This was an attempt to cover most of the essentials of a two year course in 2 weeks, and took account of my previous experience, and specific areas of interest.

To accommodate this program, attendance at early starting practical sessions (which is good training for the students wishing to find employment in this industry), was followed by “one on one” theory sessions in English. Additionally I was taken on field trips to “Le Maison du Comte” www.maison-du-comte.com the headquarters for the industry body controlling this cheese, where I was given a guided tour and audio-visual providing an insight into the culture and business structure surrounding Comte production, There are over 3000 milk producers, 170 Fruitieres, and 20 Maturing houses processing 51,000 tonnes of Comte each year, all within the Jura region. Comte is a giant 45kg AOC raw milk cheese, made in copper vats and closely controlled in this area. It is rich, floral, developing nutty flavours, and relies on the milk of Montbeliard cows, fed on mountain pasture. It takes 530 litres, the day’s milk from an average sized herd of 30 cows, to make one 45kg cheese. It is made in small co-operative factories (fruitieres), to which the milk is transported from farms within a 15km radius. Affinage occurs in humidity and temperature controlled caves, often old railway tunnels or forts, and strong ammonia is released over this period, affinage involves washing and turning these giant cheeses to develop a natural mottled grey/brown rind, and is often carried out by robots, however the hand-turning of these cheeses, a skill in itself still is done commercially, and is an OH&S nightmare.

It is eaten as a table cheese, but also features in many regional specialities, like fondues, and melted over new potatoes, and adds great flavours to any dish. Grading takes place, with marks awarded out of a possible 20 and only the best cheese (15-20) gets given a green band. The next grade is a brown band (12-15), and the rest (which is not allowed to bear the name Comte) is sold simply as “Gruyere”, much to the disgust of their Swiss neighbours. It is the most popular AOC cheese in France, where we tend to think soft cheeses are most popular in France, and has a great tradition. It is another washed natural rind cheese, but as it is a hard cheese, affinage takes up to 2 years, and brevi-linens is
used sparingly, or merely allowed to migrate from the spruce boards on which the cheese is matured.

Another visit to a cheese-making equipment supplier Sogebul (www.sogebul.com), a major supplier to manufacturers in this area of Comte, Morbier, Mont D’Or and Bleu de Gex,

I also visited a co-operative fruitieres “La Fruitiere des Coteaux de Seille” coteauxdeseille@gmail.com. This co-op was a small but highly mechanised fruiterie, with 8 staff, formed by a merger of two older Fruitieres, St Didier and Lavigny. They processed 5.5 million litres of milk annually, collected from the surrounding Val de Seille region. They produced mainly Comte, but also Morbier, Tommes du Jura, Raclette, and “Fromage Blanc” and also sold other cheeses produced nearby, butter, jams, cordials terrines and local wines and beer. The cheese-maker allowed us a full day with him, and was able to spend quite a long time discussing his business, and also commenting on my proposed plans. He had worked in Holland and France for 25 years, and said the factory we were in represented 75 years of development. Of particular interest was the affinage, and the use of real calf’s stomach, dried, cut up and dissolved in heated whey overnight as rennet, a smell I will never forget.

The use of traditional rennet was one of the significant quality selling points for traditional cheeses in Europe, whereas the use of vegetable rennet or chymosin in Australia is almost universal. This process was also used at Enilbio in Poligny.

Fruitieres therefore are small satellite industrial production plants, placed within easy reach of milk suppliers, and thus allowing milk to be sourced from smaller dairy farms, with much shorter and more economical milk delivery routes. This makes sense with cheese, a product which as a finished product is 10% the volume of raw milk. Quality control is better, and there is little administrative labour requirement, notably much is outsourced. This is a major cost on large and complex manufacturing sites. As a workplace, the small team approach encourages engagement and thus motivation and acceptance of responsibility and adoption of work ethics, in a pleasant atmosphere and location. The efficiency of this process is difficult to assess as opposed to a large industrial complex. They operate as components of a much larger process. No doubt infrastructure costs per unit of production are higher, but not necessarily labour, and small working units gain much for quality, control, and raw milk supply chain efficiencies. This process of de-centralised manufacture, while maintaining centralised distribution by the affinier could be a way forward in Australia, for large companies wishing to be
involved in Specialty cheese production. It lends itself to an extended range of products being produced in small remote plants, specifically built for different styles of cheese, or to take advantage of specific regional advantages, with one umbrella organisation controlling sales and distribution.

The value of this training to me is immeasurable. The depth of knowledge of these students, and their passion for the creation of cheese was impressive, and this institution, one of six in the network, explains much about the pre-eminence of the French cheese industry. I was exposed to processes which were both traditional and state of the art experimental, and sometimes a mixture of both. The facilities at Enilbio included research laboratories, a trial brewery, a number of research workshops, where equipment included microfiltration, CO2 injection, and other experimental work was being undertaken, workshops for Comte containing four copper vats and commercial vacuum moulding equipment, workshop for Morbier, with similar specific equipment, the workshop for soft cheese mentioned earlier, and for fresh cheese products, and separate state of the art maturation rooms for all cheeses, specific to those styles, and featuring state of the art humidity and temperature control equipment. There were specialist teachers assigned to each individual cheese workshop, who managed their areas with a proprietorial style, and commanded respect. They were backed up with support staff who maintained the semi-commercial role of the school, drawn from industry, caring for the affinage, assisted by the students. All cleaning tasks were undertaken by students, and they appeared competent to move seamlessly into employment. A feature of the workshops and maturation rooms was a central overhead viewing platform, with windows over all workshops, audiovisual displays, educative panels, and floor windows to view the cheese maturation rooms. In opening the college up to industry and to the public, it had become an important icon of the local community.
Copper Lined Vats are mandatory under AOC rules for Comte production, and are widely used in this area and in Switzerland. I was curious as to whether there was a scientific basis to this, or merely tradition. I asked many people, and got conflicting answers, ranging from:

- We use copper vats only because we have to under AOC, it has no effect whatsoever on the cheese, they are expensive and require a lot of extra work cleaning, they need to be cleaned at least every 2 days, even if not used, and will not last as long as Stainless Steel. Whatever you do, don’t buy a copper vat.

- Copper vats conduct heat better, and thus lead to a more even heat distribution, better coagulation, and hold their heat longer, meaning more stable, accurate temperature profile. They are useful but not essential; you can still make Comte without them.

- Not only does copper assist with heat distribution, which is critical, but it definitely has a chemical reaction with raw milk which assists with the set, and gives the cheese a distinctive flavour which cannot be obtained without a copper vat. You definitely cannot make this sort of cheese without a copper vat.

If a second-hand copper lined cheese-vat was available at the right price, it would certainly assist in making these style of cheeses, but one should not regard this as essential, but preferable.

Many of the students lived in dormitory accommodation attached to the college, and the midday meal was something of a culture shock to me. In following the French tradition, this is the main meal of the day, and adequate time is allowed to sit and eat unhurried. A canteen and dining facility was provided at reasonable cost which supplied up to a four course meal, with salad bar, hot and cold options, two or more hot main course options, changing daily, wine, deserts, cheese which was produced in the College, and I confess that I found this a most civilised way to break the day, and led to a much refreshed afternoon. To compensate for this break, the day started earlier, and went later than we are used to. My time at Poligny was too short, and I left reluctantly. I would like to return one day, and I recommend this institution as a centre for learning, expertise, and knowledge of cheese and the French dairy industry.
Leaving Poligny we visited a large affineurs caves on the French/Swiss border, the Fort des Rousses. Built by Napoleon to deal with incursions through the Jura, the Fort des Rousses is a classic example of 19th century military architecture, surrounded by a moat and with high beams protecting the interior building. But the main part of the fort is below ground with tall vaulted chambers extending four stories down, carved into the bedrock. Originally designed to accommodate 3000 troops, 1500 horses and munitions, the Fort has been turned to a new purpose – aging Comte. When Jacques Chirac eliminated French national service, he also sold off many of the old military bases, including the Forts des Rousses. It was quickly acquired by Jean Charles Arnaud, descendant of a local family of affineurs that have been aging Comte since 1907. Arnaud quickly saw the potential of the fort with its deep cellars that stay a constant 8 deg. C regardless of outside temps. Under Arnaud’s supervision, the Fort Des Rousses now ages about 10% of France’s Comte production and ships under the name “Fort des Rousses Comte Juraflora” My family and I joined a tour and were shown through an audio visual, models, a museum, and the caves, 80,000 cubic metres of storage, the first thing to notice, was the powerful ammonia, at concentrations which stung the eyes, and took some getting used to. This is a by-product of natural rind cheese maturation, but I was later told it is not unknown for affineurs to use ammonia to encourage the growth of brevi-linens, and create the atmosphere they prefer for their cheese.

There was a robot that proceeds down the lane between the shelves stopping at each cheese sliding it off the shelf, turning it, brushing it and reinserting it, before proceeding to the next. With over 100,000 wheels in the fort at any given time, that’s over $100 million worth of cheese – and those are European prices. The degustation to follow was of three different aged Comtes, comparing the floral creaminess of the young Comte with the nutty honey flavors which later develop. I have to admit to a developing respect and appreciation for this type of cheese. This was our last stop before leaving the Jura, and it was gratifying to see my children also beginning to appreciate the cheeses of the Jura, I hope that this might lead to another generation sharing my interest.

A DISCUSSION OF AOC LEGISLATION: Of particular interest to me was the involvement of the lecturers in the AOC system. During my visit a new AOC application was being prepared on behalf of two companies, who wished to apply for AOC accreditation for a particular cheese, but needed a neutral ‘go-between’ to negotiate the essential elements that they needed to come to agreement on, and then present to government as characteristics which needed to be protected under AOC. I found this a most interesting process, and was interested in following this through, in order to learn
more of the process, with interest in the possibility that one day (particularly in Tasmania) Appellation Control may be legislated for.

There has been discussion recently of trying to legislate to protect the Tasmanian brand and Tasmanian regional high quality brands, such as King Island, however I am wary of any application of AOC style legislation in Australia. Prior to my departure I was on King Island when the local abattoir threatened closure, and was made acutely aware of the potentially devastating effect of this on the local economy.

The opinion of many King Islanders was that if the abattoir was closed and King Island cattle were taken to Longford in Northern Tasmania for slaughter, there was no way of controlling the branding of cattle slaughtered off the island, and the King Island premium quality brand would be devastated. Potentially all cattle slaughtered at Longford could be branded King Island, and controls were inadequate to ensure this didn’t happen. An example was quoted to me of ‘King Island’ rabbits being sold in Sydney, there has never been a rabbit on King Island, and they were never introduced there, and are certainly not farmed there. Clearly if this is the case legislation and protective mechanisms are inadequate.

There were many politicians on King Island from the Tasmanian Premier down at that time, and there was discussion of some sort of protection of the King Island brand. The preferred model on King Island was for the local community to own the brand King Island, and license it to producers, but this would take administrative infrastructure. The same discussions on ‘terroir’ protection legislation have also taken place regarding Tasmania’s super premium wine areas, and there have been meetings regarding this issue, and consultation between industry and state government.

The purpose of AOC is to maintain food traditions and ‘terroir’ in Europe, to protect regional producers from imitation and brand degradation, and to re-assure consumers. The rules apply not only to the area products must be produced in, but according to the lecturers at Poligny, a more recent trend is to apply rules to the methods of production. On the surface this appears sound, but as a factory floor dairy worker of 15 years experience, I can see that trying to freeze production methods in time would make it impossible to improvise, develop and improve products. Change is a part of life, and I can think of nothing more frustrating than knowing that even if you come up with a great new idea or improvement, you are not able to implement it. This would certainly not suit the Australian temperament, it is counter-productive and a disincentive to development and I doubt that it suits the workers in French industry either. The protection of regional producers from fraudulent claims is necessary in Tasmania and France with its many years experience of AOC controls would be an obvious model, however the attempt to legislate methods of production is not likely to lead to maintenance and improvement of quality, as it sets out to achieve.
The Roquefort Caves. When I told people in Poligny of my interest in seeing the caves where this famous blue sheep’s cheese is aged, I was told not to bother. “Why are you going there?” “Are you a tourist?” “It’s all fake you know, all you will see is polystyrene blocks covered in wax, and the real factories are big industrial plants.” Roquefort is a hard blue mould sheep’s milk cheese, given AOC accreditation in 1979, but with strict laws governing production, including affinage and milk quality, going back to 1925, and an ancient history prior to that, including some interesting folk-law. It also plays a pivotal part in one of the modern day dramas of the Australian Cheese industry, and the raw milk cheese struggle.

The folk law states that a love-sick shepherd, pining for his beloved, forgot to eat his lunch, and left it in a cave. Returning some weeks later he found it covered in blue mould, and decided to eat it anyway (as you do), and found it to be delicious, and importantly, didn’t die. The rest is history, the Roquefort legend was born. Such stories are not uncommon in the French cheese industry, and represent the early efforts of food marketers, finding romance in their products in order to attract the attention of their urban based customers. Other such stories involve Napoleon slicing the top off a pyramid shaped cheese in a fit of pique on his return from Egypt, and a priest escaping the terror of the revolution showing his saviours in Normandy how to make Camembert. So much for fairy tales, I suppose tales of the lush grass on King Island deriving from the straw palliasses washed ashore from early shipwrecks are no different

The caves at Roquefort sur soulzon, on the chalky mountain of Cambalou, 15 kilometres from the Millau Viaduct, are a natural phenomenon. Because of the geological structure and soft rock collapses, vents or ‘fleurines’ exist, allowing breezes to enter, and modify humidity and temperature, while naturally circulating the blue mould spores (penicillium Roqueforti) which is endemic to the caves. The vents may be up to 100 metres high and maintain temperature at 9c., and humidity at 95 %. The heat generated within the caves by the cheese ripening contributes to the maintenance of temperature stability, and this varies within acceptable parameters all year round. The maturation process involves piercing, and about 4 weeks maturation, during which blue mould develops, after which the cheese is wrapped in foil, to ensure that the blue mould develops uncontaminated from then on. The cheese has developed over centuries, to be perfectly matched to the maturing conditions. The exploitation of these natural facilities is a triumph in itself, and a very economical form of maturation. (Unfortunately this explanation doesn’t sell cheese to city folk.)

Sheep’s milk makes excellent cheese. It makes beautiful curd. There is a long tradition of cheese made from sheep’s milk in southern France, Spain and Italy, in fact sheep and goats were probably milked well before cows. It is highly concentrated compared to cow’s milk and yields more than twice as much cheese as cow’s milk per litre. It is higher in fats, protein and minerals but with similar lactose, so it is healthier, and easier to digest than cow’s milk. The yield in raw milk from sheep however, is much lower than from cows, typically in a year, a cow can produce 6065 kg over 305 days, while a ewe produces 200kg over 180 days, which translates as 45kg of Roquefort. The main variety of sheep milked for Roquefort is Lacaune, a very large sheep, they are valuable animals, and are kept barned most of the time. The typical flock size is about 300 and growing, which means the milking is large scale, involving rotary milking machines. The milk for Roquefort is pooled, and drawn from widely ranging sources right across Southern France. Any claim of “terroir” therefore, must be questioned, but AOC rules are mainly to do with the location of affinage. This has maintained the monopoly in this area that this cheese enjoys.
Still this industrial, blue mould, raw sheep’s milk cheese demands high prices in Europe, and even higher in Australia, about $120.00 per kilo in Hobart 2009, and this is where the Australian connection occurs. From 1996 Roquefort was banned as an import into Australia, as were all raw milk cheeses, creating a storm of protest, some bans were relaxed, but not consistently. In a notable and high profile instance in 2002 an importer was forced to dispose of 80kg of Roquefort by IFIP (the Imported Food Inspection Program), in enforcing the ban on raw milk cheese. The decision was appealed, the cheese spent over a year in a warehouse, FSANZ Food Safety Australia New Zealand made further exemptions, but not to Roquefort, and after much expense and time in court, the appeal was lost, and the cheese destroyed, driven to the tip in a hearse, with a coffin draped with the French flag. The authorities had provoked a storm of opposition, both domestically and internationally, from French producers, and French trade officials. In meeting their obligations as signatories to the World Trade Agreement, Australian authorities agreed to review their decision. In 2005 FSANZ published a 192 page report which attempted to justify why Roquefort, a raw milk cheese, was safe, and should be given an exemption to be sold in Australia. (Final Assessment Report Application A499 to permit the sale of Roquefort Cheese) This report makes interesting reading, especially the assessment of the suitability of the Roquefort caves for safe food processing. The process involved an on-site verification audit team visiting the caves on 4th, 5th and 6th April 2005. Some excerpts: (p. 174): ”... The condition of the caves does not comply with standard requirements for food storage facilities: cave walls, floors and ceilings were roughly finished, unsealed, mouldy and damp, often to the point of dripping.” (p. 177): “...The audit team found the systems in place for the production of Roquefort cheese to be sophisticated and well implemented and capable of delivering safe cheese that meets Australian requirements.” (p. 178): ”...the conditions of the caves do not comply with the standards which would be expected in Australian storage facilities, however these caves form an essential part of the process for the development of Roquefort cheese. Monitoring of the cave environment and product subsequent to cave storage ensures that there is minimal risk of contamination of product, and identification of product should it become contaminated.” I was confused by these apparently contradictory statements, and this report, which made recommendations of change to establish protocols for “a level playing field” for Australian cheese manufacturers, has formed something of a watershed for legislative directions since then. What did the team see? Was there cause for concern, or is the fact that Australian standards are expected to be higher, but that there is adequate control in France, mean that our standards are irrelevant? Does the fact that the caves were an essential part of production in some way exempt them from meeting expected standards? Does the existence of adequate monitoring systems allow discretion to allow sub-standard storage conditions? Will these questions eventually lead to an argument being mounted in Australia for the use of traditional or natural maturation conditions such as these? I was highly sceptical of the conclusions, especially the control of humidity and temperature, and it led me to the belief that either: a) The report was not accurate or well considered and therefore Roquefort should not be allowed into Australia, under the current laws.
Or b) The report was accurate and well considered, and therefore Roquefort should be allowed into Australia, as well as all other traditionally matured raw milk cheeses which have adequate monitoring systems and ALSO these sort of traditional maturation
conditions should be allowed to be used by Australian producers, given adequate monitoring and controls existed.

There are many examples of natural caves, railway tunnels, old Military Forts, and the like being used for this purpose in France, they are not only picturesque, but an economical form of recycling and energy efficient. Their use gives French producers a competitive advantage, and if all other circumstances are equal, there should be scope for this to occur in Australia. I visited the caves of Societe Laurence.guibal@roquefort-societe.com and Fromageries Papillon contact@roquefort-papillon.com. Societe is the largest producer, a subsidiary of the Lactalis group; it controls over 66% of the market, over 60 million litres of milk per year. Interestingly they use slightly different conditions in their many caves to produce variations of Roquefort, softer and less salty styles have become more popular than the traditional styles, and they are seeking new domestic and international markets with these style. The question is: Were the cheeses developed to meet the market, or did the conditions lead to these differences, and then the market was sought? The tourist experience was certainly well developed, with a moveable animated model landscape to explain the geology, sound and light show, museum, a film, and tastings. Interestingly I was joined by two other Australians on this tour, including one other cheesemaker. Possibly the interest in the ‘Roquefort report’ in Australia is quite wide-spread. There were certainly some ‘props’ used by the tour guides, which consist of models of Roquefort cheese and concrete “bread loaves”, the traditional method of incubating Penicillium Roqueforti which occurs naturally in these caves, for later use in the manufacturing plants. This was indeed the tourist perspective; however these were definitely working caves. There was plenty of real cheese maturing here, safely behind Perspex walls, or in staff only areas to protect from contamination from tourists. The floors and walls of the ‘cave’ in these areas were rough cast concrete, evidently recently cleaned, and the shelving though ancient and wooden was in good condition and clean. There were the obvious sounds of work being performed nearby, both mechanical and manual, and quite remarkably, the fleurines were present, screened and providing quite obvious cool, moist airflow. The temperature, in mid-summer, was 10 degrees c. (blankets were provided for the children). There were temperature and humidity measuring devices and written records of measurements being kept. There was also mechanical atmospheric control equipment, as back-up to the natural conditions. The area was neat and clean, and showed signs of a habit of good housekeeping, and tourists were kept well separated from the product, which was transported to and from the caves through separate tunnels, by forklift, unloading and loading refrigerated trucks, which transported the cheese to and from the large industrial complexes and finished product storage cool rooms at the bottom of the valley.

In all, what I saw looked well controlled and adequate. This was definitely an old facility, but a functioning one, with efforts to meet modern food standards. It is easy to become cynical when faced with stories of polystyrene cheeses and love-sick shepherds, but in truth the Roquefort caves do what they are supposed to do. I have to admit my scepticism was ill-founded; I am left convinced that similar conditions could be developed and exploited in Australia.

An interesting story was told by the guide, of a recent “tit-for-tat” trade stand-off with the U.S.A, again with the issue of stopping raw milk cheese imports, and with threatened sanctions against US beef into France in retaliation, causing a quick back-down. Quite a familiar story, which was met by the French audience with some laughter, a smattering of applause, and even a “Bravo!”
The French food industry is no stranger to this type of international negotiation. They have faith in the quality of their products, and in international demand for them, and as a nation of small farmers, are largely self sufficient in food. They are thus in a strong position to negotiate, they know this, and they play their cards with skill and confidence. If Australian producers are to compete with these masters of trade negotiation, we need to learn from them, and to establish the same type of close co-operation between government and industry, which results in a united front, and agreed direction and support for future growth. There are many conservative aspects to French production, such as AOC interpretation, of which I am wary, but in promoting and supporting their products internationally, there is much for us to learn.

In Normandy I visited two factories, both described to me as small, but both large by Australian standards. The sheer scale of the French dairy industry, especially cheese production, is immense. On the surface, the industry appears healthy. According to the Maison du Lait, which represents dairy producers, French cheese production rose 1.7 percent to 1.9 million tons last year from a year earlier. Sales at large stores rose 2.2 percent and French exports were 4 percent higher. But production of AOC cheese was down 1.2 percent last year and raw milk cheese production fell 3.8 percent. This is mainly due to the decision by some large producers of Camembert to relinquish their AOC accreditation, and pasteurize their cheese.

There is conflict in Normandy between large producers, who have recently given up AOC accreditation in order to treat milk when making Camembert, by microfiltration, pasteurization, and thermisation, to improve shelf life, and as a food safety measure, considered necessary with longer supply chains and supermarket sales. The use of the term AOC Normandy Camembert can now only be used for Camembert made “in the traditional way”. In describing their industrial factories as small, the co-ops are accurate in relation to the giants, but there is a definite marketing benefit therefore in claiming to be small and thus differentiating from non-AOC Camembert producer.

Val D’Ay Cheese Dairy www.reaux.fr was created by Theodore Reaux at Lessay in 1931. From the beginning the dairy’s main activity was Camembert production, producing unpasteurized, hand ladle molded Camembert. The dairy collects 19 million litres of milk a year from 80 producers within a 12 km radius, and produces 4 million camemberts, 350 tons of butter, and 1,000 tons of butter a year.

It is aiming to maintain its AOC label, achieved in 1983. Camembert production commences with standardization,
using a separator, to 28 grams of fat per litre to produce a cheese of 45% fat content. Temperature controlled maturing or ripening takes place to develop flavors on Day one, on Day 2, the heated milk is put into 120 litre bassines, traditional (animal) rennet is added, and the curd is set, and when pH target is reached, wheeled to the molding room. Every day they produce 12000 camemberts, which are hand molded by 12 people. i.e.: 1000 by each molding operator. Around 2.2 litres of milk are needed to make one camembert. This volume is added to the moulds in 5 ladlefuls, which are added at regular intervals. Molding is carried out at around 30 degrees C. The moulds are beaten to level out the surface, and encourage draining. The moulds are then turned, and a stainless steel plate put on top, for gentle drainage pressure. On day 3, cheeses are demolded, and trimmed by hand before racking. Dry salting is done, salt percentage is 1.8 to 2%, and then the cheese rests for 24 hours. Day 4 to 14 the cheeses are matured in ripening rooms (“haloirs”) at a temperature of 10 to 12 degrees, humidity of 90 – 95%. They are turned on day 8. The white mould, penicillium cambersis develops on the surface during this time, and on day 15 they are packed in traditional wooden boxes (poplar) and labeled.

They market their AOC Camembert under several brands, including REO, Th. Reaux, Le Val D’Ay, and Le Gasconde, exclusively reserved for fine cheese shops and delicatessens. They have an impressive list of awards from the Paris Agricultural Show, including Gold Medals in 2004, and seven more in the past 12 years. They are very proud that they maintain their AOC accreditation by using raw milk, and hand ladling into moulds. The process is however industrial in scale, with bassines wheeled continuously to the 12 molders, who work quickly and continuously. They describe this as a highly skilled job, and as the curd is removed from the bassine in a clockwise spiral, gradually working downwards, it leaves a pattern described as L’Escargot or Snail pattern, which is the name they give this technique. It looked to me to be a repetitive task, fraught with OH&S risks, and I imagined the conversation in the crib room, cursing the AOC requirements and longing for intelligent input into developing improved methods. This is a good example of how AOC regulations lead to a disincentive to improve systems. Hand ladling by small artisanal cheese-makers has merit, it is gentle and traditional. Hand ladling using human beings like machines in an industrial production line process, in order to meet AOC requirements is an entirely different matter. I noticed a nano-filtration plant, heat exchanger and separators in this plant, no doubt for the butter and cream production. One wonders if a health scare or some other problem occurred, could they quickly switch to full pasteurization.
**Isigny Sainte Mer** in the village of Isigny sur Mer is a large co-operative. I was particularly interested in their decision to use microfiltration, instead of pasteurization, and their role in the current raw milk camembert debate, where they decided to voluntarily relinquish AOC accreditation in order to use this process. MF plants are used in Australia in the following way: raw milk is separated, the cream stream is pasteurized, the permeate is passed through a micro-filtration plant and then recombined with the pasteurized cream. This is seen as preferable to full pasteurization, as it possibly effects the taste less, while achieving the same destruction of harmful (and other) micro flora.

My understanding from an article read some time ago was that this company had further developed this process, to completely replace pasteurization. This is not the case. The same process is used here, requiring partial pasteurization, and thus a large amount of equipment, and heat treatment. My belief is that this process could be developed further to replace pasteurization, possibly with the further development of ceramic filters, which might be a very important development for small producers, allowing them to process at much lower equipment and energy costs, and with less water usage. The process described to me was only microfiltration as an add-on to traditional pasteurization, which was disappointing. This company has a history of innovation, and had on display an interesting machine designed to mechanically replace the action of hand ladling curd. Their primary heating source was a wood fired boiler, developed in Brazil, using local plantation pine as fuel, and described as “zero-emission”.

Also in Normandy; the food trail: “La Route de la Table”, featuring co-operation of Specialty Cheese Producers, with other local foods such as charcuterie/small-goods, cider, hand made pottery, Calvados, chocolatiers. This type of promotion is widely seen internationally and promoted heavily, with EU funding, and is an important way of attracting tourists, and supporting small producers. Cross-promotion and co-operative advertising with the support of local and national tourism development bodies takes place, and there is mutual benefit and synergy for small producers in this way. The existence of other similar small businesses in the same area should therefore not be seen as competition, but complimentary, and likely to attract more people to an area, and widen the appeal of an area. In order to maintain high standards it is important to have good communication and clear agreement of standards and common objectives. There are similar strategies employed in Tasmania, which could be further developed for attracting
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self-drive tourists, and cross-promoting attractions, wine, food and accommodation. The ability to add value at the point of production leads to vertical integration, and is a sound method of maximizing profits, and employing the multiplier effect in local rural economies. This can turn marginal agricultural areas into regions of sustainable agri-tourism businesses. The social impact of this is to assist smaller producers to survive, and stay independent from large companies, thus remaining in family hands. This can also be of advantage to larger producers, who also can participate in co-operative ‘food trails’ in order to increase exposure, and as a contribution to the local area. In supporting smaller businesses around them, they thus assist to grow their industry, and a healthy small dairy industry assists large producers by providing an acceptable ‘shop front’ to consumers for the entire industry and can possibly provide them with innovation, experimentation and marketing which can later be adopted and carried forward by the larger companies.

Ireland

I spent two days in Cobh before heading to West Cork, and saw the Cork Butter Museum and the English Market. Both of these gave insights into the history of the dairy industry in Ireland. There are obvious comparisons between Ireland and Tasmania. And the relations of these two islands to their markets and cheese production. Both have a strong reputation for quality hand-made farmhouse cheese. Both are reliant on a strong tourism industry, with beautiful scenery and gourmet foods, and a relaxed culture, attracting the lucrative self-drive “experiential tourism” market, and also attracting migrants seeking a simpler life, who have been instrumental in establishing their cheese industries. Similarly both had dairy industries set up as bulk suppliers to Britain, which with their entry to the EU collapsed, necessitating innovation to survive, co-incidentally both in Ireland and Tasmania the main commodity was butter.

The Cork Butter Museum explains the ancient and medieval history of Irish dairy production, and also the early industrialisation to supply Britain with butter. The collapse of this market explains the necessity to concentrate on value adding and high quality products, rather than bulk foodstuffs. The Irish dairy history goes much further back though than that. Ancient texts naming and describing the cheeses once made in Ireland date back to the 8th century, but the descriptions and names are vague. Tang and Grus were hard pressed skim milk cheeses, Faiscre Grotha was a
type of fresh curd and That was made from sour milk curds. Coagulants such as calf and lamb rennet were used, but also Irish moss and bog violet. There have been many discoveries of preserved “bog-butter”, wooden buckets containing ancient remains of dairy products which were preserved in peat bogs, where they were placed in ancient times to prolong their useful life. Much of ancient Ireland’s culture and history is based on the keeping of cattle, and the power struggle between rival clans and kingdoms often resulted in cattle raids. In the 1970s a loose association of artisan producers reintroduced cheese-making on a small scale in rural Ireland and this soon grew to thirty small dairies. The new generation of cheese-makers drew upon skills and knowledge from all over the world. Each cheesemaker developed products that reflected their own personalities, experiences and interests, and today these cheeses are not only associated with a particular place but with an individual cheesemaker. Irish specialist cheeses have won international acclaim, but only a handful of the new cheese-makers still use raw milk in the production of their unique cheeses.

The English Market in Cork is a quality food market, set in an internal arcade in the city centre featuring the best local Irish produce: seafood, breads, meats and smallgoods, vegetables and of course cheese. Cork is roughly the same size as Hobart, and I was struck by the interesting comparisons, and possibilities of this type of permanent indoor market (as opposed to Hobart’s Salamanca Market) with particular interest in the City Hall building in Hobart, in the Sullivans Cove precinct, or perhaps the reconstruction so badly needed to replace the burned down Myers building, as a focal point for inner city renewal in Hobart. The market attracted people the inner city, and gave a unique character and purpose to an otherwise non-descript inner city landscape.

In explanation; the name, “English Market” refers to exploitation which lasted for centuries, when the best food was taken from Ireland to England, leaving the Irish bitter and starving, and contributing particularly to the suffering of the Potato Famine in the 19th century. The English Market therefore is a by-word understood to mean the best quality produce, but given the historical context, I am surprised it isn’t resented still. There are individually leased food stores, in an internal arcade, with a mezzanine floor surrounding, accommodating a gourmet food café featuring food sourced from the stores below. As always the fresh organic and slow-foods feature prominently. A theme of co-operation and inter-dependence between food producers, and a thriving network of farmers’ markets was to develop in my travels, of which this was the first step.
“It’s not just about the cheese…” Gubbeen Farm [www.gubbeen.com](http://www.gubbeen.com) is a 250 acre dairy farm run by the Ferguson family for 5 generations on the outskirts of the picturesque seaside village of Schull on the Mizen Peninsula below Mount Gabriel in South West Cork.

This area was the cradle of the Irish Farmhouse Cheese revival, and the humid climate, modified by the Gulf Stream is valued by local cheese makers for favouring washed rind cheeses. My host Giana Ferguson has been making Gubbeen cheese here since 1979, using milk from its mixed herd of 117 cows.

The moulded cheese is washed with white wine as it matures, to encourage the growth of the unique strain of brevi in the dairy which gives the cheese its particular flavour. Matured for between three weeks and six months, depending on size, the cheese has a pink-orange rind over a smooth yellow paste with a creamy mushroomy flavour. The Fergusons also smoke some cheeses, which have a black coating.

Giana has won prizes all over Europe for her cheese, and her son Fingal is carrying on the artisanal food tradition at his smokehouse on the farm, where he cooks and butchers the pigs his father Tom raises on the whey left over from the cheese-making, creating a wide variety of continental style charcuterie. Giana and Tom’s daughter, Clovissé, started growing herbs for the smokehouse and expanded her plot into an organic vegetable garden, while their adopted daughter Rosie handles everybody’s paperwork, and sells the products through distributors, direct to farmers’ markets in the area, and to the larger markets in Britain, Europe and America. This is an iconic example of a developed successful family business, using value adding and vertical integration.
Giana is also a founder member and active in the local West Cork slow food movement www.slowfoodireland.com and CAIS (the Irish Cheesemakers Association), and explained her philosophy, that “….its not just about the cheese.” To be fully involved in this business, it is a necessity and a responsibility, to make contact with other producers in the region, support them, organise co-operative events and marketing, and to actively participate in the community of local producers which exists, both for mutual financial benefit, and for the development of the region, and ones own business which this social interaction fosters. She has invested an enormous amount of effort in getting these organisations up and running, and remains committed to her involvement. Slow food presidia are local projects that work to improve the infrastructure of artisan food production. The aim of the Presidia is “to guarantee a viable future for traditional foods by stabilizing production techniques, establishing stringent production standards, and promoting local consumption…” in this way the organisation supports food authorities as a self regulation organisation.

**Slow Food** [www.slowfoodfoundation.com](http://www.slowfoodfoundation.com) is an international association involving 80,000 members all over the world organised into local chapters or convivia to gather and engage in awareness raising about food-related issues, and support local producers. It has recently been organised in Tasmania, with much work by local Cheese-maker Nick Haddow. A Biennial Slow Foods Presidium for Cheesemakers is held in the town of Bra in Northern Italy. This is one of the most important cheese shows in the world. It would be a marvellous opportunity for small cheese makers from Tasmania in co-operation to attend, and display their products, and certainly an ambition worth working towards.

While at Gubbeen farm, I was generously hosted by the Fergusons, living in a caravan on the farm, which had been stocked with cheese, eggs, bacon, sausage, oatcakes, milk and vegetables, all produced on the farm, I was impressed not only by this hospitality, but by their self sufficiency, not only espousing the slow food message, but living by their own convictions.

While there I worked alongside the cheesemaker. It was high summer, and a busy production period. The dairy has two cheese vats, 2000 and 1400 litres, both of which were used at capacity. Milk was pasteurised (pH 6.8%), cooled to 28/29 degrees, rennetted (animal), coagulation took about 40 minutes, at 33 C. A slow gentle cut with a 25mm blade, then stirred automatically with a slowly increasing speed, about 20% of the whey removed and replaced with hot water. (61 C.)
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Temperature was maintained at 32-33C. to achieve a pH of 6.4 at moulding. Two mould sizes were used, to produce cheeses of about 2-300 g. and about 5-600 g. They were lightly pressed using steel weights on top of the moulds, for a short time, to produce a firm, but soft paste. The cheese was demoulded and dry salted on day 2, curing took about 2 weeks, with rubbing in a wine mixture on day 3, 6 and 9. The cheese was turned, trimmed (lipped) at the same time. The smoked cheese was smoked on oak chips, and rubbed with apple cider vinegar before waxing. The smear ripening solution was their own ‘in-house’ mixture, and a trade secret.

The maturing rooms were mechanically humidified and temperature controlled, and all making, affinage and packaging took place on the farm, in the same factory. A small multi-skilled team supported the cheese-maker and most of the work was hands on, the only exception being a good sized automatic washing machine; much of the hard work in cheese making is cleaning, and the use of automatic washing machines for moulds and equipment even in very small businesses is very common, and something I personally endorse.

This was the perfect introduction to Irish cheese making, and to the way food producers in this area worked together. The West Cork Leader Co-operative society (an EU funded development agency) has done much to encourage this sector, using their Fuchsia Branding scheme to create a regional identity that will help to promote high-quality local produce. Red Fuchsia grows wild above the dry stone walls which enclose the narrow country lanes in this area, and were in full summer bloom during my stay, it is quite beautiful, and as a local brand it immediately captures the rural tranquillity and character of this region. In addition to cheese, they promote meats, sea foods, smoked goods, poultry, chocolates and many other artisan foods, as well as accommodation, catering, and the total direct value of output related to Fuchsia branding amounted to A$200 million in 2005. In addition to Fuchsia branding, other significant supporters of Small Food Producers are Bord Bia and the Irish Enterprise Board.
Bill Hogan of West Cork Natural Cheese Co. is a man who has fought the battle for raw milk cheese and won, but at what cost? Bill’s company makes Swiss-style cheese. It is made only during the summer months, using milk from the Newmarket Co-operative. It is a thermophilic cheese, using Swiss starters, Bill’s mentor was Josef Dubach from the Swiss Centre for Appropriate Technology, and Bill has translated his excellent book “Traditional Cheese making”.

I arranged to meet Bill in Schull before going out to his farm nearby, and in the short walk up the main street it became obvious that he is a well known and well loved character in this community. Bill spoke of the local community to me, saying he made a conscious decision to relocate to West Cork, in order to be amongst people who shared his outlook on life, and values. As with Giana he believed in the importance of supporting fellow cheese makers, and having them nearby for support in return. Bill makes two styles of Swiss cheese, Gabriel and Desmond. Both are aged for at least a year, and weigh around 7 kg. Gabriel is named after the local peak, Mount Gabriel, and whilst the milder of the two, is still a hard, dry cheese, with a granular texture and a powerful fruity flavour, which keeps building and growing in intensity as you taste it. Gabriel is not for the cheeseboard because it is too subtle and complex; it is a cheese you nibble on alone or with close friends. Desmond, the ancient name for south Munster, is unbelievably even stronger, with the powerful long lingering flavours which contain rich, sweet and developed acid notes. Its robust hot flavour able to withstand the most cloying blue or soft cheese, few other cheeses could compete with this depth of flavour and richness. I compared it, for want of experience, to a Parmigiano Regiano, but Bill disagreed.

Bill fought the Irish authorities on the issue of the safety of his raw milk cheese for two years, finally receiving judgement in his favour in 2005. Thermophilic hard pressed cheeses are much safer than soft cheese for a number of reasons, the higher temperatures used in manufacturing, the lower moisture content, the time they are matured for prior to sale, all factors contributing to quality control. But it was a long and acrimonious battle, and only won with concessions, which were costly. Consequently Bill now needs to rely on the co-operation of the Newmarket
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Co-operative to make his cheese, they protected him from the Department of Agriculture for several years during the legal struggles, but the plan is to return the cheese making operation to Schull in the near future. Some friends have a coastal farm with Kerry cows nearby. Kerry cows are the ancient breed domesticated from the wild aurochs in Ireland over 4,000 years ago. They are small black creatures, very hardy with excellent milk for cheese. Besides making raw milk cheese there on Cove Farm further out on the Mizen Peninsula they hope to start a modest no frills cheese school. He still ages his cheese traditionally at home in West Cork. This summer due to the economic downturn, regretfully he will not be making cheese. I have since spoken to other cheese makers who have had Bill’s help to fight their battles as well, and are very grateful to him, saying they wouldn’t have survived without Bill’s advice, but at the time it was a David and Goliath battle.

He is well informed on the Australian Raw Milk debate, and sees us as a bit too laid back and accepting of authority: “You’ve never had a revolution in Australia have you? Perhaps you need to learn how to stick up for yourselves?” But in pragmatic terms, I wonder if Bill’s battle has been worth it. It has definitely left him worn, both physically and financially. In many ways a pyrrhic victory. Still I think the good he has done for others in Ireland will pay dividends for many years to come, and for Bill, I don’t think there was any other choice, while there is breath left in his body, he knows no other way but to fight, and will always rise to the challenge.

“There are a couple of quotes from Gandhi which helped me get through the six legal cases we brought against the Department of Agriculture and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland.
(Our solicitor, Helen Collins, a grandniece of Michael Collins, the father of the modern Irish State, won all the cases.)” He said,

"First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win."

"A nonviolent revolution is not about a seizure of power but rather a transformation of relationships ending in a peaceful transfer of power."
On Cape Clear Island, the southernmost inhabited place in Ireland, part of the “Gaeltach”, the small and diminishing area where Gaelic is still spoken daily, within 5km of the Fastnet Rock, a blind man, Ed Harper, makes (or made) Goats Cheese, yoghurt, cheesecake and ice cream. Ed came from England in 1979, but it is interesting, as Norman Steele was to tell me at Milleens, that in ancient Ireland many who played the harp ie: “harpers” were blind. His Cleire Goat Farm is at Lisa Mona, 300 yards from the church and heritage centre, e-mail: goat@iol.ie and with his small herd, 35 goats, yielding 70 litres per day made 7kg batches of cheese in a processing room converted from a bedroom. He used to run cheese making courses, and has overcome many challenges, in setting up he utilised grant money specifically for use in the remote and depressed Gaeltach areas, and began to find good markets, and to sell all he made. He was on the point of expansion (he had designed an ingenious Cheese Factory, all based on gravity feed) when a marriage break-up set him back. He eventually recovered, and was beginning to get his plans back on track when the local food authorities informed him that he could no longer use the island’s only link to the mainland, a ferry travelling 45 minutes to Schull or Baltimore, to transport his products to market, because it lacked adequate refrigeration. For Ed this was the final straw. He sold his herd and is winding down. His son may take up the farm to run beef cattle.

The logistics of operating a commercial food production business on an island, reliant on limited access and isolated from mainland markets is something Tasmanian producers are aware of. Being at the mercy of the weather, freight schedules, and the sometimes inconsistent demands of bureaucrats is always going to be challenging. Given Ed’s circumstances, he probably lacked choices as to where his business was to be established, the grant money he needed to set up was only available as an incentive from the government to encourage businesses to set up in this special needs remote location.

In Tasmania there are two cheese makers on offshore islands, albeit of different scales, and their locations cause both of them problems. There are definitely advantages of terroir and lifestyle, and cheese is a product which it makes sense to produce close to the farm, because it is highly concentrated from the raw product, and thus easier to transport the finished product. However secure supply chain and access to markets is essential. Location of premises therefore is one of the major decisions, and a factor likely to impact seriously on success.
Prior to my visit I visited a local organic food retailer (Hudson’s at Ballydehob) who revealed their major growth sector in dairy was in goats and sheep’s products, they were sourcing from elsewhere in Ireland and Britain, demand outstripped supply, and the existence of a local producer was unknown, and very interesting to them. Sadly it was too late for Ed. The puzzling role of government in this tale, is the fact that they were so supportive in setting the business up in this location, and then so unsympathetic in their later demands, obviously a lack of communication and differentiation of purpose between departments, resulting in them giving with one hand, and taking away with the other.

Jeffa Gill of Durrus Farmhouse Cheese, durruscheese@eircom.net is another one of the original wave of farmhouse cheese makers, who has been making cheese since 1979. Situated at Coomkeen, near the town of Durrus on the Sheepshead Peninsula, she is most notable perhaps for being one of the only remaining cheese-maker in Ireland who continues to make a soft raw milk cheese. It is a washed rind unpasteurised cows’ milk cheese, curdled with natural animal rennet. It develops a typically orange-pink rind over a yellow paste, it is made in two sizes, 380g and 1.5 kg, the smaller matures in two weeks, the larger four to five weeks. It is mild and creamy to begin with but matures into nutty, fruity flavours.

The demands are high to maintain the cleanliness necessary to continue this, and thus I was unable to go into the factory, especially as I had been visiting other dairy operations in Ireland and France. This was more than compensated for by an afternoon discussing her cheese, and the issues surrounding the use of raw milk. Jeffa is a Presidium Coordinator for the Irish Raw Cow’s Milk Cheese Presidium. To encapsulate this she gave me the mission statement for the Irish Raw Milk Cheese Presidium, which is a document which outlines aspects which are seen as important in sourcing raw milk, testing it, producing cheese from it, and controlling its quality and safety all the way to the consumer in Ireland. It was put together by many stakeholders in 2005, and explains how Irish raw milk producers believe they
can safely produce and control their cheese. Unlike many presidia that concentrate on one particular product from a particular region, this project covers many different types of cheeses from across the island of Ireland. The presidium is made up of eight artisan producers, each with their own distinctive style of cheese-making, but who share a common commitment to producing a safe high quality product using raw milk sourced from their own or nearby herds. As this excludes pool milk, large production methods are seen as unsuitable for raw milk products. Amongst the criteria are that cows feed principally on pasture for eight or nine months of the year, that each batch of milk for cheese making should comprise no more than three milkings, and that the distance between the milking parlour and the place cheese is produced should be kept to a minimum. The Presidium is represented by a number of cheeses that are considered ‘ambassadors’ for Irish raw cows’ milk cheese. These represent qualities which encourage support for raw milk producers throughout Ireland, and widen support for the product. Only one cheese for each producer can be a representative at any one time. The objectives are to raise awareness among consumers, retailers, and food policy experts of the quality of raw milk cheeses, and to defend the right of small producers to make raw milk cheese in Ireland. It may be very useful in helping Tasmanian producers to work towards some similar commitment in the near future.

This is a dairy farmer who commenced making cheese to value add to her milk, and eventually gave the milking away to become a fulltime Cheese maker, which is not an uncommon story, and she now buys milk from her neighbours. For some time she had been running the business and had others making her cheese, but has recently decided to get the gumboots back on and do the work herself. Cheese-makers in small businesses often slide into a sales or managerial role, but few make a conscious decision to return to the factory floor. It is an indication of a true passion for the work, and a genuine enjoyment of the craft of hands-on cheese making.

In my travels I had seen, and was to see some more examples of cheese makers who, as their business had expanded had began to lose touch with the hands on and relied on staff to perform much of the day to day work. This is sometimes unavoidable, and inevitable, but not always desirable, and to keep hands-on means personal responsibility for quality, and staying in touch with important day to day issues, like milk quality, cleanliness and state of equipment, water usage and waste disposal. Additionally the economic downturn in Ireland has been far more savage than in Australia, and in these circumstances, the businesses that are of a scale and structure which makes it possible to be operated with few or no staff, stand a much better chance of survival.
Norman Steele and his son Quinlan at Milleens hosted me as they have done many other cheese makers both locally and from all over the world, since Norman and his wife Veronica started the Irish Farmhouse Cheese revival in 1976. It is a fascinating story. People have been migrating to West Cork for 6000 years, but when Norman and Veronica bought a derelict cottage near Eyeries on the Beara Peninsula, and enough land to run 27 cows, a big herd by local standards, for 200 pounds in the mid-seventies, they were the vanguard of another wave of migration. It was a time of alternate life stylers, hippies, and sea-changers, West Cork is now full of them, it is a quite cosmopolitan place, with a lively community, but back then it was remote, rural, depressed and very poor. Norman was a philosophy don from Trinity College, Dublin, and still maintains a lively intellect, and tells a good yarn, I began to wonder if I too would need a doctorate of philosophy to make cheese. To bring the young family from a comfortable suburban life as an intellectual into this would have been challenging to say the least. He maintains that the help he received from the locals in renovating his cottage, teaching him all kinds of rural skills, gave him a sense of responsibility to help other cheese makers to learn the skills in the early days.

To decide to make cheese, the first of many, shows courage and for it to have not only succeeded but led to a whole new industry was a triumph. He told me of the cheese making lessons, co-operative affairs where they all learned off each other on his kitchen table. While we sat at that table, the old wood stove gave a cough, and as he poked at it he told me about the first British Cheese Awards show he went to in London, the wood stove had misbehaved on that day as well, and he arrived in London still with soot ground into his hands, expected to serve cheese up. He said they must not have noticed, as he won the gold medal.

He also told me of BSE going through his herd in 2003, and the authorities, who demanded he destroy his entire herd, telling him not to worry, go out and buy some more. He told me that was impossible, that it takes animals born to this marginal land to settle into productive milking. He never restocked, and now buys milk from his neighbours, as do many small cheese makers in this area. He spoke, as many Irish Farmhouse Cheesemakers did, of the constant, and often inconsistent and misunderstood demands of the authorities towards small producers, using for an example, a piece of rustic old farm equipment he had placed on his driveway, because he thought it looked nice. An inspector took a dislike to it, and put on his list of improvements that it should be.
removed. Thinking this a trifling matter, below contempt, Norm ignored this, until the inspector, thwarted as he saw it, elevated the threat to the level where the continued operation of the factory was under threat unless the offending decoration was removed. His point was that they miss the important things, and become bogged down in trivialities, exposing a lack of understanding of the issues involved, and the impact of the application of their powers.

His youngest son Quinlan has taken over the cheese making, leaving Norman and Veronica time to attend to their far flung family, Veronica was away when I was there. Some early recognition by well known Chefs, the awards, and the sheer originality of their new product sealed its early success. The milk is batch pasteurised, uses traditional animal rennet, and the humid air of this part of Ireland encourages the growth of the moulds. They smear ripen by washing only with clean spring water, no additives, the brevi-bacteria already established in the maturing rooms.

They make a 225 g. and a 1.3 kg medium soft cheese, with a pinkish orange rind.

Considering the time this business had been in operation, I thought it would be more industrialised. Farmhouse cheese-makers tend to start out with very little equipment, but to accumulate more and more industrial equipment as time goes on. An over-riding theme for this factory was ‘keep it simple’. With the exception of a restaurant/commercial washing machine (always, labour saving in cleaning is a good idea), there was very little equipment in this small factory. The raw milk processing area was separated merely by a floor drain. It occurred to me that mechanisation on this scale was probably not of much help to begin with, and the room was clean, because there was nowhere for the bugs to hide.

I had confused equipment with sophistication, however in simplicity of process and design, there was an elegant sophistication here, which minimised waste, utilised smart design to reduce contamination and the lack of clutter meant less cleaning and focus on essential cheese making skills.

Quinlan was doing some brining and turning, on his own while I was there, and he explained his decision to move his family back from Dublin to the farm, and how little they needed to live on out here. With this small business, and what they produced on the farm they were nearly self-sufficient. Despite the success of their cheese, and the possibility to expand their markets, they had kept the business at a size and a scale which they could operate economically, without staff, resisting the temptation to expand, and as he said
in relation to the current economic conditions “It can get as bad as it likes, we’ll still survive.”

As a second generation cheese-maker on this small picturesque farm, it must have been very satisfying making a living in this way, remembering as a child seeing your parents doing the same. The opportunity to pass on a viable self-employment opportunity to ones children, even if they don’t accept it, is a major motivating factor in pursuing this type of small business.

My visit to Maja Binder majabinder@hotmail.com of Dingle Peninsula Cheese took me north from the Beara, to County Kerry, to the north coast of the Dingle Peninsula at Kilcummin near Castlegregory. Maja made cheese on small traditional Alpine Swiss cheese farms before moving to Ireland to join her mother, and decided to make the same style in Ireland. She works in a very traditional way, by choice, and describes her business as artisanal.

Her partner Olivier also makes artisanal foods, smallgoods, charcuterie, terrines and a variety of ‘wild foods’ using local ingredients, including seaweed, which they sell through the network of farmers markets across South West Ireland.

Her traditional copper Swiss cheese vat is heated by a simple gas ring, which she also uses to heat hot water in a stock-pot for washing up. She has a rendered concrete wall around her cheese vat, to help maintain heat, and collects milk from the farm which surrounds her in a small tank on wheels. She uses traditional Swiss farmhouse techniques, including cutting her curd with the traditional Kasebrecher, requiring careful technique, first gentle, and then quite vigorous hand breaking of the curd, continuing until just the right sized (grains of rice) curd is achieved. She says the reason for the simplicity initially was because it was all she could afford, and although she could probably afford more now, she has kind of gotten used to her way of doing things, and chooses to stay with what she has. This is in keeping with a philosophy of authenticity and traditional hands-on skills. She makes raw milk thermophilic cheese, with natural animal rennet, lightly stone pressed it is semi-hard, Swiss style cheese. She doesn’t use a pH meter, she hardly ever needs to look at a thermometer, her knowledge and skill is so internalised, and she makes cheese intuitively.
She has been making cheese here since 1996, but her fame came from her experiment with seaweed in cheese. Inspired by old Irish traditions of using seaweed as a food, Maja decided to use some Dillisk, a nutritious red leafy seaweed commonly found from June to September, and dried and eaten by the Irish still as a snack food. Maja playfully called her cheese Dilliskus (she has another with Cumin in it called Kilcummin). “I was making good cheese well before I decided to put seaweed in it,” she said, “...But the attention and awards only came after the seaweed.” It was a unique selling point that appealed to the Irish in this new use for one of their much loved traditional foods. Initially she laid it through the centre of the cheese, as per Morbier, however the cheese-mites loved it, and this provided them with a motorway straight into the heart of the cheese, so she solved the problem by distributing it evenly throughout the cheese. She matures her cheeses naturally, in a temperature and humidity controlled cabin, forming natural rinds.

I have to confess, it was the seaweed connection I came to see as well. The possibilities of seaweed in cheese making in Tasmania are obvious to me, and I was interested in trying something similar. The comparisons and similarities between Tasmania and Ireland continue to arise, and I regard this journey as an opportunity to take a look through a window into a potential future for the development of the Specialist cheese industry in this state, this is one such example. What I learned was that this is a very one dimensional way of looking at a very skilled cheese maker making a variety of other interesting cheeses. The use of additives in cheeses, soft and hard, Dutch, English, German, Australian, is quite common. Many purists dislike it, saying it is only a way of disguising boring cheese, and it is something to be approached with careful appreciation of the combinations and expected end results. In this case the combination of flavours is one of those perfect matches. The salty tang of the seaweed compliments the earthy richness of the nutty Swiss cheese, and is something that demands further experimentation.

Maja’s children play in the yard outside the cheesery, the beach is nearby, most summer days they go for a swim, they work hard, they live simply, and they make the most of what they’ve got.
I was interested in seeing some more of the Farmers Markets, and Olivier told me the schedule over the next few days, which included Kenmare, Bantry, back down in Cork, and Limerick, further north. I followed this trail for a few days. Kenmare was just a short stop, it is a large market town, and at the height of the tourist season, seemed mainly to cater for tourists. The role of traditional Irish farmhouse cheese as an attraction to Tourists in Ireland is very important, and it is an iconic product. There is scope to further develop farmhouse cheese in Tasmania to a similar role. The Irish example proves that a much higher density of artisanal cheese-makers than exists in Tasmania can be tolerated.

Bantry set in Wolfe Tone square by the harbour overlooking Bantry Bay was the largest, and most diverse. There was everything from farmers produce to antiques, second hand clothes, cheap hardware, seafood, and it went on most of the day. The cheeses and gourmet foods, dips, smallgoods, breads, olives etc. all seemed to be in the one area up one street, which makes sense. There were stalls from some of the cheese-makers I had already seen, such as Gubbeen, and I was told by one Cheesemonger, who I had also seen at Kenmare, that they would be attending Limerick tomorrow.

It was raining in Limerick, on the day Frank McCourt died, and I attended “The Milk Market” early, hoping to see some farmers at a farmers’ market. There were about four cheesemongers and a couple of small cheese makers there. Plus Maja’s partner Olivier, trade was brisk, I spoke to a couple of local cheese makers, including a Dutch migrant named Peter, making the cheese styles of his homeland, I asked the one I had spoken to in Bantry, over 200 km south if they had made much money, “Enough to pay for the site and the diesel.” He said, “I slept in the van last night.” This is a hard way to make a living, and leaves little time to make cheese. None of the markets I saw was as busy or as well organised as the Salamanca Market in Hobart each Saturday. It would be wise to be very selective in deciding which markets to attend, and necessary to limit attendance to only the one or two per week that would be the most profitable. The same goes for annual festivals, “The Taste of Tasmania” in Hobart, “Festivale” in Launceston perhaps, but this style of sales can eat deeply into time. The involvement of other family members is one possibility, but one of the main attractions of markets is the opportunity to meet the producer, and the authenticity of dealing directly with them.
I stopped on this trip at another Cheese-makers farm, Kenmare Cheese, run by Peter and Olga Ireson. (Lehid Upper, Tousist, Killarney, Co. Kerry, tel: 064 84236). It was Peter who told me of the help he received from Bill Hogan. When tuberculosis devastated his herd and he was forced to slaughter his dairy cows, the authorities also wanted him to destroy his remaining stock of hard cheese. With Bill’s advice he was able to prove to them that it posed no risk to public health, which dissuaded them, and he said it was this alone that had kept him afloat while he recovered and restructured. He makes a range of thermophilic waxed cheeses, with additives, which he sells through his own cellar door, locally, and via distributors to the cities. He also produces organic meats, vegetables, eggs and poultry.
In County Clare I visited Inagh Farmhouse Cheese, home of Saint Tola Goats Cheese.

This is a 65 acre goat farm with 220 goats, Saanen, Toggenburg and British Alpine, being housed in a very large modern barn. The farm is registered organic; they produce an unpasteurised goat’s cheese handmade log of about 1 kg, and a crotin of 120g, plus cheddar and feta styles, using traditional animal rennet.

The surface mould is Geotrichum, which is traditional for goat’s cheese, and forms a characteristic wrinkly skin, surprisingly; they claim this mould occurs naturally. It is resident in the maturation rooms, and finds its way naturally onto the cheese; it is not added when the cheese is made. Underneath the slightly golden Geotrichum rind, the paste is soft, bright white. It matures to its best in about four weeks; there is a luscious layer just inside the rind, and a sweet, citric tang, with a nice clean finish.

The factory was new, having just been upgraded. It is traditional to name goat’s cheeses after Saints, and they chose Saint Tola. This is the name of a seventh-century Irish Catholic Saint. About the year 700 A.D. he established a monastic community in northwestern Co. Clare, between the River Fergus and the Burren. The High Cross located here, at Dysert O'Dea is referred to as Tola's Cross; this is used as the logo for this cheese.
At nearby Mount Callan, I met an Australian, Lucy Hayes, e: mtcallan@oceanfree.net whose Irish husband (Michael) has a beautiful herd of Montbeliards. She makes farmhouse traditional cloth bound cheddar. Mount Callan is only made during the summer months, the curds are pressed and bound in cheesecloth and naturally matured on wood in their stone cabin. The cheese develops a grey dusty rind, and is released at 9-12 months with a limited number aged for 18 months. It is a hard cheese made from raw milk using traditional rennet, and is available in 15kg and 4 kg truckles. They commenced making cheese in 2000 and have an impressive haul of medals from the British Cheese Awards, and were ambassadors for Irish Raw Cows Milk Presidia, Slow Food International, 2003 and 2004. It is a successful value-adding adaptation, utilizing the raw milk from these renowned cheese makers’ cows and producing on the farm.
It’s a long way to Tipperary…well, actually it’s not that far from Clare, I was going to visit the Grubb family, who make Cashel Blue and Crozier Blue, info@cashelblue.com two of the best known Irish farmhouse cheeses, and was to discover a family farm business building a full scale industrial cheese factory. It is inevitable that as small businesses develop they sometimes turn into large businesses, and this is the path this business had taken. As I had seen elsewhere, this successful family business had expanded to make room for a next generation, and many family members had ‘found their niche’ as this had occurred.

I really admire the family business model, and think it is a great way to work, involving your whole family, using “vertical integration” to find a niche for everyone in the clan, and thus value adding and cutting out the middle-men who bleed out profits at every level, a really worthwhile thing to build and leave for the future.

It is a model I would like to try to imitate in some ways myself, and the thought that you are possibly leaving something in place that will provide for your next generation is a really strong motivation.


Created in 1993 by Geurt van den Dikkenburg, head cheese-maker of Cashel Blue Farmhouse Cheese; it is handmade from the milk of Henry Clifton Brown’s flock of 350 East Friesland sheep, using the same equipment as Cashel Blue. It is the second generation of cheese made at Cashel Blue.

Cashel Blue was first made by the Grubb family on their farm Beechmount, north of the rock of Cashel, at Fethard, using cows’ milk from their herd of pedigree Friesians in 1984. They use vegetarian rennet and pasteurized cows milk which they also buy from neighbours. The cheese is one of Ireland's most popular, and is also exported. It has made the jump into supermarkets, and mass markets, and is convenience packaged in a variety of sizes. It is a soft buttery blue, matured for around three months. The existing factory uses four cheese vats, from where curd is pumped onto a distributor conveyor, which moves it towards multi-moulds, stacked on trolleys, where a stack-turner inverts them. After brining and piercing, it undergoes maturation.

As a rindless style, and in meeting consumer expectation, it undergoes a washing stage to remove the outside rind before being wrapped in foil.

Crozier Blue was the next generation, first produced in 1999. It follows the Roquefort tradition of using sheep’s milk to make blue cheese, is made in the same 1.5 kg size as Cashel, and matures slowly, starting crumbly, but becoming creamy and nutty with age.
The Grubb family had visited Tasmania, and have dairy farming relatives on the North West coast. When I commented on the enormous open span factory being constructed in the bottom paddock, the modest response was “Aye, it’s only a big shed…” It appeared to me to be a very ambitious undertaking, and likely to see the growth of production of these cheeses in the near future to a point where they might become familiar world wide. I had visited this family at a very interesting stage, they were about to embark on a project which would see them leave their small producer tag behind, as they entered full scale industrialisation. Of interest as part of the new factory, was a waste disposal system of reed beds and settling ponds. The use of on-site disposal systems, utilising natural systems to break down by-products is a technology which is currently developing rapidly.
Silke Croppe operates Corleggy Cheeses at Belturbet, in County Caven, close to the border with Northern Ireland.

She makes cheese from Cows Milk, Goats Milk and Sheeps Milk, most of which is raw milk cheese. When pasteurising she uses batch pasteurisation. She uses PVC pipe moulds, and ingeniously uses disposable cheese cloth within them, which leaves the cheese with a rough, wrinkled surface, and hand-made appearance, which encourages natural rind development, and gives each cheese individuality. She uses a small hand-made press to make hard cheese, and uses vegetarian rennet and sea-salt.

Her raw-milk cow’s milk cheese is named Drumlin, it is matured for two months. This cheese features in the Slow Foods Irish Cows Milk Presidia. She flavours the cheese with additives, including Garlic and Red Pepper, Cumin, Green Peppercorns, Fenugreek, and by smoking with Beechwood. She makes two sizes, 500g and 1 kg.

Corleggy is the hard goat’s cheese variety, matured from 8 weeks to 4 months. Creeny is made from raw sheep’s milk, matured from 2 months up to 12 months, it is made only 4 months per year from milk sourced from a herd of East Friesians. I was present on a day this cheese was made, and got to meet her supplier, Victor as he delivered milk in a small tanker towed behind his 4WD. (Springwell Sheep Products, 0044 7711743178) He was a font of knowledge on the tricky subject of dairy sheep farming, and gave me some good advice about caring for the sometimes fragile East Friesians, and ensuring their ongoing health and productivity, he milks only once daily.

Silke has won many awards, including Eurotoques award 2005, Slow Food award 2005, Irish Food Writers Ballygowan Supreme Award 2003 and Annual Bridgestone Awards since 1997. Silke runs cheese-making courses, which are comfortable homey affairs involving plenty of Cheesecake and cups of tea in her cosy cottage kitchen, together with no-frills hands-on cheese making. She attracts participants from all over Ireland, particularly the bigger cities; she is well placed, between Dublin and Belfast. She has developed the cheese-
making classes into a very well structured and run business that supplements the cheese sales, is lots of fun, and contributes an experiential attraction to tourism in the local area. Silke has met Tasmanian Cheesemakers, and knows quite a bit about our local emerging small cheese industry. She said she would love to come to Tasmania, and it would certainly be good to have someone with her communication skills, and skills and experience in small cheese making visit, especially at one of the food festivals, such as Taste of Tasmania, or Festivale.

He has a herd of 60 of these large, mixed use cows on the family farm, from which he makes what he describes as Gruyere style cheese, and which I describe as the best Comte style cheese I have seen outside of the Jura. As Ireland is a member of the EU, AOC regulations would prohibit David from making this claim. He uses a copper lined vat. He makes two 45 kg wheels per day, matured on Spruce boards imported from France, for 6 – 18 months, carefully hand turned and dry salted to form a natural rind.

All the characteristics are there. Fruity, flowery, buttery, developing spicy, nutty flavours.
David studied in Poligny at Enilbio, and bought all his equipment there, including his beautiful copper lined vat, a French cheesemaker assisted him with the set-up.
His decision to stock Montbeliariades was initially met with derision he said, but when BSE devastated local herds of Frensi-Holsteins and they were forced to destroy them, they noticed the bigger more robust Montbeliariades were not succumbing, and when it came time to re-stock, many joined him in stocking this hardy Alpine breed.

Glebe Bretham won two gold medals at the International Cheese Awards 2005, and further gold at the British Cheese Awards.
This project was funded by the Louth LEADER scheme, through the Irish Government under the National Development Plan 2000/2006, and part funded by the European Union.
David has recreated a little piece of France in Ireland and has managed to produce cheese every bit as good as anything I saw in France. It has inspired me that this is possible. I am in no doubt that this has been difficult, and that David is an inspired, hard working individual, but he
has shown me what is possible, given an enormous capacity for hard work, and a passion for cheese-making.
Mossfield Organics: Ralph Heenan’s farm near Birr in County Offaly info@mossfield.ie has an ambitious newly built factory, designed to make Dutch style cheese.

Mossfield Organic Farm is located six miles from Birr in County Offaly at the foot of the Sleive Bloom Mountains. The farm pasture which produces lush grass interwoven with wild herbs and clover, provides ideal grazing for the herd of eighty cows. Ralph Haslam has been farming at Mossfield since 1970 and converted to organic farming in 1999. In 2005 Ralph began producing an organic gouda type cheese which has since gone on to win many awards. Now he is looking to expand into other dairy products such as yogurt and ice-cream. Awards to date include:

- Silver World Cheese Award 2005 for Garlic & Basil.
- Gold World Cheese Award 2005 for Plain Gouda.
- Silver IFEX international Cheese Awards for Cumin Seed.
- Gold Great Taste Award 2006 for Mature Gouda.
- Silver Great Taste Award 2006 for Smoked Gouda.
- Silver Listowel Cheese Awards for Plain Gouda.
- Gold World Cheese Award for Mature Plain.
- Supreme Champion at the Bord Bia International Food Forum 2006.

Their newly built factory was equipped and constructed with Dutch expertise, and has room for expansion, and a large viewing/tasting area at the front. The power is all generated on site from a diesel generator, but the plan is to develop alternate power sources, possibly using geothermal power. This is a rapidly expanding family company, with the production capacity to expand their markets across Europe and America. Ralph’s two sons are both involved in the business, and the family also runs a successful organic food shop in nearby Birr.
Developments in Small Scale Cheese-making 2009: Report by Lynton Foster
2008 Jack Green Memorial Churchill Fellowship

There seems little doubt that this investment will pay dividends, and the expansion of their range across many different dairy products gives the opportunity to flexibly exploit that segment which is the most profitable, with the security of other products to fall back on should sales drop in one segment; a case of not putting all your eggs in one basket.

This is another fine example of what can be achieved when families work together in agriculture, to value add to their raw products, and explores the possibilities of production and retailing.

On the subject of awards, there seems to be a large number of awards for cheese-makers out there, and while I am sure they are difficult to achieve, they are expensive and time consuming to compete for. Often they are presented by Magazines, Food writers or tourist boards, and I question the value of these ‘non-experts’ in applying their ‘I represent the average consumer’ skills. This is without doubt an effective way for small producers to compete against large advertising budgets, and they are often asked to take part in order to add a bit of variety and quality to a selection unlikely to impress the judges. In order to participate in cheese shows, usually there is a fee, the bigger the award, the higher the fee, plus large quantities of products are demanded for judging purposes. The publicity that competition and awards produces works both ways: the cheese-maker gains, but also the organisation is able to claim prestige and a level of expertise, which quite often is simply undeserved, as the judging criteria are often vague, or the system faulted beyond the ability to make an objective choice. A greater degree of scientific scrutiny would appear to be necessary; perhaps measuring the cheeses against some agreed parameters of moisture, fat, or other empirical measurements. The issue of judges selected from suppliers or retailers of the products being judged also needs to be addressed. There seems to be no shortage of people prepared to declare themselves experts, but who judges the judges?
I visited the final link in the chain, Sheridan’s Cheesemongers at two locations, firstly at Virginia Road Station, Carnacross, County Meath, and secondly at South Anne Street, Dublin. The first location is on a side road, roughly in the centre of Ireland, between Dublin and Galway, but there will soon be a major motorway built through the area, making this a central distribution point, as well as a destination itself. The depot is situated in a rustic old station building, next to a prominent restaurant on a tourist route. Therefore this was a combination of a wholesale and retail operation. The wholesale customers were restaurants, catering and Gourmet food shops, and some affinage was undertaken at this site, with young cheese imported and stored here. I was shown around by a French staff member who had worked in the cheese industry in Brittany. In addition to a large range of Irish and imported cheese, at comparative prices, but much lower than we would expect in Australia, there was a good range of gourmet food products, and associated cheese boards, knives, aprons, fondue and raclette sets, all packaged for a luxury market. Sheridan’s specialises in ‘Hamper Packs’ and they had a large range of cheese selections packaged in badged wooden boxes. These also contained matched wines, biscuits, preserves, knives, fondue sets etc. The high prices were justified by the quality of presentation, staff knowledge, and service.
I also visited Sheridan’s in South Anne Street, Dublin. This address is a prestige CBD shopping precinct, the shop is situated between two jewellery stores. The staff member who I spoke to again was French, with previous cheese-making experience. Business was brisk, a large range of local and imported cheeses were displayed on straw matting in categories, on shelving, which was possible as the entire premises was temperature and humidity controlled, to facilitate the display. Each cheese had a handwritten tent card, with explanatory notes and prices. Sheridan’s supports local cheese-makers through marketing and promotion, and customer education, and is active in the Slow Foods Movement, and other co-operative industry bodies. This involvement is facilitated through close co-operation and communication with producers, and they have built a relationship over the years where their input is used to improve products to meet (and exceed) customer expectations. These long term partnerships have been an important contribution to the growth of the Irish Specialty Cheese Industry.
Conclusions

In all countries visited I witnessed a mature developed cheese industry, with businesses of different scales, developed over many years to most effectively fill all the niches in the market, from bulk commodity producers, to better quality supermarket products, to speciality gourmet products.

The small producers have held onto traditions, but also represent some of the most innovative changes, “new cheeses, old traditions”. The importance of scale was seen to be important, both in lowering production costs, as we are familiar with in Australia, but more so, the importance of small scale operations, in raising quality, ensuring distinctive and high quality products in Europe. This is where I believe there is increasing demand in this country, and where Tasmania’s reputation for high quality food, produced in a clean environment provides a competitive advantage for small scale producers in this market.

The involvement of this size and style of operation in Agri-tourism, small family businesses which use location, ‘terroir’, ‘food trails’, ‘slow food’ etc. as value adding opportunities is an important component, and as these businesses developed, the growth through vertical integration appears effective. A few family names that spring to mind in a Tasmanian context are Mures, Bignells, Bennetts, “…it’s not just about the cheese.”

If Tasmania is to become the home of the best quality Farmhouse cheese in Australia, and the Asia-Pacific region, there must be strong commitment from producers to co-operation, networking, cross promotion and involvement in establishing and building these communities of producers.

Input into these organisations is also essential from legislators and authorities, consumers, retailers, and the importance of these links cannot be emphasised enough. Support from government for small cheese producers is essential for growth in this sector.

For producers this should not be seen as an ‘add-on’ or a luxury, but as essential to the survival of their business, and to the growth of their industry.

Some of the issues which are likely to cause problems are; the establishment of AOC branding, while the protection of Tasmania’s good reputation is essential, I feel controls on methods of production are counter-productive, and should be approached with due caution.

Raw milk cheese is a highly desirable and sought after product, and is made in many European countries, and imported into Australia. Local producers must be given the right to compete with these premium products on a level playing field. There will be changes to legislation regarding this soon I believe. Those who decide to make raw milk cheese must be prepared to work closely with authorities to help frame these changes, and must be consulted. I have witnessed the suitability of raw milk production to small operations, and would recommend that a pre-requisite to raw milk cheese-making be the ability to adapt methods to pasteurise, as a safety precaution.
Small cheese production is ideally suited to the family business model. As dairy farmers have taken on this challenge to value add and branch into agri-tourism, many have later expanded vertically, and in so doing have found niches for children, spouses and others to exploit, in retailing, marketing, and producing complimentary products.

These foundations have sometimes led to full-scale industrialisation, and sometimes remained small independent family businesses, who are managing to make a living in conditions regarded as marginal for farming alone. Often the dairy farmer later decides to become a full-time cheese-maker, and new industries are formed in areas where previously they didn’t exist.

The future for milk processing could lie in alternatives to pasteurisation, which after all, is very old technology, and more work needs to be done on methods of improving milk treatment, such as filtration.

Cheese making is an interesting combination of craft, and science. It is fascinating to learn about the transformation of Raw Milk into such diverse, interesting and delicious delicacies. There is a lot of interest in this from experiential tourists, not only does France have an enormous cheese industry, but the biggest Tourism Industry in the world, cheese makes an interesting attraction, and addition to the tourist potential of a wine and food area. There is also a supplementary income stream possible through training courses, and increased cellar door sales, if this is done properly. Careful planning and development is necessary to accommodate this, as there are very real hygiene concerns with allowing people into a food production facility.

In conclusion, conditions for small Cheese-makers in Europe are tough right now, they pay more for their inputs, and get less for their products than in Australia, and the current Global Economic Crisis will no doubt prove the end for some. On the other hand, due to low debt, modest expectations and self-sufficiency, some expect to survive much worse conditions than Australia is experiencing. This is cause for optimism, with growing markets, lower costs and higher prices, small cheese-makers in Australia have more favourable conditions than many I have seen. There are undoubtedly easier ways to make a living, a deep and abiding passion for the whole craft of cheese-making is necessary to sustain small specialty cheese-makers, and the pay-off is definitely in the long term, probably for the next generation.
**Recommendations**

It is quite possible to operate a small cheese business, following the “keep it simple” principle, or to expand it to full industrialisation. Typically this occurs during the second generation in a family business. I was fortunate to see some of these businesses under the stress of a major international financial crisis, and those that were handling it best were naturally the smaller, simpler long established businesses, with less staff, debt and overheads.

There is no right or wrong way to grow a small business, and the small family business must be prepared to be adaptable, and find the right niche to survive. Involvement in industry bodies, and co-operation between small food producers is essential. By working together, small producers can negate some of the disadvantages of scale, and examples of this were seen in co-operative marketing and lobbying. This could be extended to co-operative employment of services, such as milk supply, purchasing packaging and chemicals in bulk etc., or labour utilisation, given an attitude of collective trust, for mutual benefit. Perhaps this could be facilitated through government instrumentalities or industry bodies.

Communication needs to be sophisticated, and efficient, the use of email, and web-sites by small and remote producers is very useful in facilitating this. I found that these producers were well versed in this technology as I researched my tour, before leaving Tasmania, and use the internet as a major sales tool, on-line sales being an important market for them.

The lack of variety and development of cheeses in Australia leaves plenty of scope to both introduce traditional styles which have not yet been explored, and to use these styles as inspiration for the development of unique variations, and innovations, this is the advantage small cheese-makers have over large companies, they can afford to experiment, and quickly adapt and change their recipes, depending on demand and popularity of their products. Australasia produces some of the cheapest bulk commodity cheese in the world, cheddar and mozzarella in 20 kg blocks, which is industrial, and is currently being dumped on markets world wide. At the other end of the spectrum, higher prices are being paid for high quality cheese in Australia than anywhere I visited, and there is growing demand. There is also good quality middle of the range cheeses available through supermarkets. The market in Australia therefore has a broader range of pricing, with growing appreciation for quality, despite cheap alternatives. Consumer education is essential to support this growing demand.

While the dumping of low quality cheese is a concern, this situation is unsustainable and unlikely to continue. The target market niche for high quality cheese produced in Tasmania must therefore be for the very top end of the market. While there is scope to market directly through cellar door and local markets, the major source of sales for these
products is affluent urban dwellers in larger capital cities. Direct postal sales are possible, but the use of distributors in these centres is inevitable. The growing wealth and demand for “European” foods in the middle classes of Asia is potentially the most important market. Supplying this market poses challenges such as supply-chain, and international trade issues, and requires sophisticated planning and organisation, but this is a long term goal, which again could benefit from a co-operative effort by Tasmanian small Cheese-makers.

Many dairy farmers who commence cheese-making in order to value add to their product, eventually decide to give up farming and become full time cheese makers. This would indicate that specialisation is preferable to running a farm and processing your product on your own, however I believe the successful business model for a small family business is to gradually identify opportunities in processing, distributing and retailing, and exploit them (eg: vertical integration) rather than trying to become a bigger cheese processor. The opportunity to employ family members, as this business expands is the major motivation for this, and the input they provide sometimes takes the business in quite unexpected directions.

It is superficial to generalise about these businesses, they are many things to many people, all individual. Some are seeking a lifestyle business, some are hard-nosed business people, expanding rapidly, and there is evidence that cheese-making can be successfully adapted to many such roles. It has high potential as an agri-tourism business and as such can develop and support sustainable industry in marginal and depressed rural areas. As a family farming business, Cheese-making can be approached as a ‘one product’ business, or can be used to develop an entire range of cheeses and complimentary gourmet foods. In taking the entrepreneurial risk involved in setting up a small business, the cheese-maker contributes greatly to his local community, in providing employment, value adding, attracting tourism, and developing a better range of food.
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