

A Cheese makers tale - Part 1

Written by Administrator

Thursday, 08 January 2009 13:56 - Last Updated Monday, 11 October 2010 20:00

Fenella Madison from Torteval, Guernsey has written the following:-

After about 2 years planning I am finally starting to make cheese. This diary/blog is intended to pass on my mistakes and successes. Perhaps even encourage others to do the same!

A briefest scene set :

My youth was spent never wondering what to do when I grew up. I always knew I wanted to be a nurse. Wish I had spent a little time thinking about other things but I didn't. The 25 yrs wasn't wasted. A lot of the time I felt very satisfied. But also very anxious. Not sleeping in case I'd missed anything or not been as sympathetic as I should have been etc. But picking mainly high stress nursing situations probably because I always wanted to prove myself but also had the nagging feeling that I was a square peg in a round hole whereas everyone else seemed to love hospitals.

Anyway, blah, blah, blah. About two years ago I started preparing to work again after spending 2 years out after adopting our third daughter (from China). She's 6 this week, Kitty is 10 and Holly is 24.

I knew I needed to do something other than nursing so chose not to renew my UKCC subscription as it is then a real effort to get back into nursing. I thought what I really liked doing was working with food so started thinking what I could do in that area and eventually came up with cheese making. It wasn't until I started investigating that I realised there was no official cheese maker on Guernsey. I suppose that begs the question why but when you want to do things you don't really want to know why! The last cheesemaker stopped about 5 or so years ago. People said I should meet him but I was afraid of being put off so I will meet him when I really get going.

Initially the plan was to keep goats and do solely goats' cheese. Thereby hangs another tale. After a few months I realised that without the land and with limited time, keeping goats wasn't an option at the moment. There is a family here who make goats' cheese with their Golden Guernsey goats and sell it locally but I decided to do a bit of both; goats' cheese and cows'. A

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family called the Tomlins sell me their milk from three of their Golden Guernsey goats and I am now making a very soft, paste-like cheese from that but the supply is limited so to do cows' cheese too is essential to be a commercial enterprise.

It was initially a blow to give up the dream (especially as I'd bought some pricey books!) but I think it is important to keep your brain a little realistic when you start a business. Perhaps learn the skills of cheese making before you keep the animals if you need to learn that too. Of course to have control over the milk supply is increasingly important but at the moment I haven't the choice.

Funnily enough, now I'm learning how brilliant Guernsey cows' milk is, I'm really thrilled to be working with it. I will have some adapting to do though as I have already found that the curd is so rich that to do a cheesecake you need to decrease the amount stated in the recipe. More of that when I've perfected a good tart!

This weekend has been a bit high stress and I needed to do goats' and curd to send to the lab, in Acton tomorrow. More about testing another time.

So Friday morning was early start to get the goats' milk to the dairy by 10.30 for them to do the Fluorophos test to see if pasteurisation has occurred. I had to do 24 litres in batches of 4 litres. Each batch takes about 20 mins to bring up to the right temperature so it all took about 3 hours. I heat the pan indirectly and stir! The test at the Dairy was good but had to dash back for Kitty's drum lesson. While she had that with a right old racket in the background I made the starter for the curd. It sits in the Thermos for a day and is ready when it looks like thick curdy yoghurt. Just before leaving for the Dairy I'd mixed the goats' starter and rennet into the vat with the goats' milk. All taking on and off hats and clothes all day it seemed but it's great to be in the cheese room.

Yesterday first thing: put the cheese into the moulds and let it drip happily etc and cover with big cloth.

Unfortunately a lot of water dripped happily over the floor and flooded a cupboard with my paper towels. Don't swear, just learn girl and other useful platitudes come to mind! I'll have to put some barrier in front of that door as the floor obviously slopes and I can't sort that out! So useful

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to actually do cheesemaking in the cheese room. Great to be out of the kitchen at last but positioning and planning is all and I learnt a lot. For instance the draining table (more about the equipment another time), was positioned over the small drain I have in the floor (essential by the way but foxes the builders!) but that meant I had to empty water out of the vat into a bowl and laboriously carry it over to the drain each time rather than emptying straight into the drain. Either I reposition the table and put a big flat basin (very useful, Lakeland Plastics one for cleaning oven trays) under it or do something clever with hosepipe and I seem to be very unlucky with hoses and attachments ...

Great to be in a room listening to Radio 4 and finally doing cheese. Kept saying to myself 'I'm doing it! I'm doing it!'.

Then last night emptied my first Dairy supplied milk into the vats. That was challenging. 13.6 L in a box which had been on the ground so I was trying to hold it away from the vat. It contains a plastic bag with spout attachment that you cut without getting it everywhere. I feel cack handed at the moment but it felt so good going to the Dairy, getting my chit from the window, going to the cold store and feeling that at last I have started. The staff there are very pleasant. Apparently my password is MAD !!!!

Anyway, starter had worked (I checked that and congratulated myself on how clever I was before putting the milk into the vat) and I put the milk in and started heating it up to the necessary temperature. Took ages but lid eventually replaced and light turned off. Feels like putting the babies to bed.

This morning I ladled the curd into sterilised muslin and hung it up to drain. All this is fun but everything takes absolutely ages. Then after lunch I put the weighed curd into containers for sale. Lovely pots but they cost 14p each. I'll talk about containers another time and labels...that will be interesting!