Here is Fenella's next part of her Cheesemaker's tale. As she explains it's been a while since her last article but it has been all for very good reasons and worth the wait.

Ages since I last wrote which, I suppose, may be good as it shows I have been busy!

I was going into the new fridges last time and they have been brilliant, great temperature control and easy to clean. I have four and need more really but have no more room.
I am now making cheese twice a week using around 136L per batch. I have bought smaller moulds and the cheese is now selling well in the smaller size although it is very hard to get the size that I am after (250g) but am getting there!

I have had a fair amount of stress due to my poor stock control. Ran out of blue mould just after Christmas and the supplier was on holiday. Lesson learnt! Have just had to wait over six weeks for crucial labels which the supplier initially promised would come in a week! So all cheeses sold either unlabelled from the deli or labelled with my Dymo printer which is OK but not good. Another lesson learnt! Ran out of cheese wrap too (doing well aren't I!) and that was complicated but will now order and fetch from the UK as the carriage is more than the VAT exemption.

The goats' crottin is going very well. It is a very rich, dense cheese which I sell per piece. To sell by weight is a bad idea as it gets lighter as it ages and the price per kilo would be too scary. One goat died so I only have two goats supplying me now so it is a rare commodity! I have asked the local, newly formed Smallholders' Group to consider keeping goats to supply me. We shall see.

The blue suddenly stopped being internally blue. I thought that maybe this was due to winter milk being different to that produced from the grass but sought advice from Randolph Hodgson at Neal's Yard. I had an hour with him which was fantastic and taught me a lot. He advised that the rind had got too thick leading to the pricking holes closing too soon. I now keep the cheese out at a fairly high temperature for two days before ripening at 12-13 degrees. This should enable another mould to counteract that which is making the rind too crusty. Haven't yet tasted the new regime yet but have a good feeling about it. Should make the cheese more interesting too with a flavour that lingers rather than vanishes.

The main thing that I have learnt is that the cheese changes and throws up challenges which, somehow, you have to deal with. I remember a cheesemaker saying that his current cheese had changed a huge amount in a year and that you can hardly recognise the original cheese anymore. I like my cheese but want it to be much better. Most comments are good but you remember the negative comments more than the good. One woman at the market said she loved all cheese but hated mine!! A local cheesemonger said I should have asked her where she'd had it and give her another bit to see if the reaction was better. Unfortunately I wasn't on the stall at the time (off chatting I expect) and my daughter got the brunt of the opinion. Ah well.

The latest news is that I'm off to The School of Artisan Food next week to try to learn how to make a washed rind cheese as that, I hope, is my next cheese. I would dearly love to produce a pungent cheese like Epoisses. They are notoriously hard to get right and there are no recipes as far as I can see so off I go to learn from Ivan Larcher for three days. I am really apprehensive as it is going to be really technical but I could waste loads of milk trying to work out how to do it without being taught. I have thrown out one batch already.

Apparently some washed rind cheeses are banned on French public transport! What an aspiration!

To finish; still no regrets about cheesemaking. It is exhausting, the house is untidy. Everything is ' fitted in' but it really gives me an enormous sense of achievement and I really enjoy the whole process.

I have to re-write my HACCPS as my processes have changed. I have a meeting with the EHO in a couple of weeks to talk about being allowed to export to the UK. I talk to groups occasionally about my set-up and a day in the life of an infant Fort Grey cheese. Amazing how nerves vanish when I talk about cheese!
Perhaps in a few months I will let you know if I have managed to produce a new cheese.