

It's been sometime since the last entry and things have changed a little. Unchanged though, remains my excitement about making cheese although occasionally the moments are bleak especially when it is late at night and things haven't gone right. Or when I very vaguely work out how much I may be making per hour in money terms! Not much is the answer and the answer to this lies in expanding production and finding other markets.

The story so far; I set out to make goats' cheese but now Guernsey Cows' milk is the main ingredient for the curd and the blue. The goats cheese has had problems; namely the amount of milk has decreased to about 15-20 Litres per month as one of the three girls has stopped lactating. After years of faithfully producing the stuff she's had enough! The other problems are that, making a fresh, soft cheese is difficult when you have to send it away to be tested. This takes around 8 days and means that the shelf life is short. The other problem is that the blue mould from the blue cheese is in the atmosphere and gets into the goats' cheese. Not a problem for home consumption but the customers think it has gone bad which it hasn't. So, after much thought, I have decided to try to make a crottin type goats' cheese which you find in French markets. They have a lovely wrinkled rind and a stronger taste and also have a bluish tinge. I'll let you know if problem sorted! Two restaurants want as much goats' cheese as I can produce which is great. Local food is really taking off here and to say my food miles are around 12 is great fun!

Back to Guernsey milk. The curds do well if people know they are in the shop but otherwise people are non-plussed about them. Come back Delia! Only one place in England seems to sell curds (in Herefordshire ) so I thought this would be a winner but perhaps not. We shall see.

The blue is doing very well. Each batch of 60L makes about 25 cheeses and they all sell. It is embarrassingly expensive so does better when sold cut up on the deli counter. I sold only two at the farmers' Market last Saturday although the halves I'd spent hours packaging, sold out. So next idea; make them smaller and more affordable. It is very awkward cutting it at the market, although I do. One day I'll have a French type refridgerated trolley and ceremoniously wrap with paper. Maybe tie with raffia...

The Market has been somewhat nerve wracking as I had too little cheese at first so did some

cooking. This is exhausting and one week the food goes and the next it doesn't and you are left with cruelty to children; inflicting my goats cheese tartlets, pizzas and savoury curd pies on them yet again! Also hard to gauge is what the public want. One week it's all requests for goats' cheese and the next just the blue. I suppose it is all a learning process where eventually I'll get the balance right and also, I hope, have regular customers who come back for more of the same. It is great, though, to be in such close touch with your consumer although you do have to take criticism on the chin too. I think, at the moment, that once a month will be the pattern at the market. This is due as well to needing time with the family.

The blue, so far has been a great success and I am really thrilled about that. Initial teething problems were largely due to the salting. The cheeses sit overnight in the moulds and then are removed and dry salted. The hours stated in the recipe were 7-8 but Guernsey milk reacts very differently to Holstein/Friesian and takes up the salt far more quickly. So I salt now for 4 hours. Thanks to Chris Ashby for both the recipe and the salting advice. Honestly, what she doesn't know...

The recipe states what to do at certain times e.g. pricking and turning and gets to Day 19 when another turn happens and then weekly after that. However my blue is already wrapped by Day 19 and in a cold fridge, so whether Guernsey milk turns blue more quickly or whether it is a temperature thing, I don't know. Another observation has been the lack of internal blue so now I prick everywhere with big and small spikes/needles. I think everyone has to adapt the recipes that they've got as the environments differ so much. Comforting to know that every batch of cheese should be slightly different if handmade.

The crude way in which I ripen the cheese is also about to change. Up until now the cheese sat in turned off fridges with the temperature 'controlled' by using ice packs. The fridge without them would have a temperature of 16 and with them it varies between 10 and 14. I find that I spend ages each day checking the temperatures of four fridges, moving cheese about as they ripen more quickly at the top and changing ice packs. Enough! I have ordered two big fridges made by Liebherr and paid for extra shelving. The temperature display will be digital, the energy consumption low and they can be set to be cold or up to 16 degrees. Really exciting! Now all I need is the big vat to be sorted out (yes, still not done ) and a bigger room!!!

At the moment I am resting as we go away for a couple of weeks which means I had to make my last cheese three weeks ago as no one else can look after it and take fridge temperatures etc. This will mean that when I return it will be a month before the cheese is in the shops again. A real shame and a business gaff no doubt but the family need a holiday...

Plans on return; loads of cheese making plus I hope to try to make a blue brie. One day a hard cheese too maybe and I need to explore the possibility of being able to export the blue to England.

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