



COMTÉ NEWS

Spring/Summer 2013

Comté Research to be featured at ACS Conference



The Comté Cheese Association (CIGC) will be presenting at the 30th Annual American Cheese Society Conference, taking place this year in Madison, WI (July 31 -August 3). For the first time ever in the U.S., the CIGC will share its decades-long research into the mechanisms behind flavor transmission in raw milk cheese in a seminar titled, "Terroir Taste in Cheese, Myth or Reality." The seminar will take place on Friday, August 2nd.

The CIGC began researching the link between the flavors in Comté and its area of production in the early 1990's. Comté is made in a co-op style, whereby dairy farmers pool their milk to be transformed into 80-pound wheels of Comté at village cheesemaking facilities, called *fruitières*. The farms must be located within a 16-mile diameter from the *fruitière*, meaning that the milk for any given wheel comes from the same micro-region. There are about 160 different *fruitières* scattered throughout the Comté production area (570,000 acres total).

In 1996, a thesis written in collaboration with the University of Besançon revealed that different *fruitières* produce Comté with distinctly different aromatic profiles according to where they're located. Comté produced in the same area share certain flavors, while Comté produced in different regions have markedly different flavors and aromas. The *terroir*—or soil, vegetation, climate and elevation of a specific region—proved to have an influence on the flavor profiles of different Comté.

The CIGC then began studying the mechanisms behind flavor transmission. They discovered that the lactic microflora, or the microscopic lactic bacteria in the raw milk, had a great influence on the flavor development and the biochemical aging processes in the resulting Comté. Microflora are naturally present in the environment—in the soils, on plants, in the

milking parlors—and enter the milk once it leaves the cow. The lactic microflora are responsible for the specific flavors and aromas in Comté, and the richer the native microflora in the raw milk (i.e. the higher the quality of the milk), the more expressive the cheese will be in terms of its diversity of flavors and aromas.

The ACS seminar will discuss the CIGC's microflora research and its impact for cheesemakers around the world, including best practices to preserve lactic microflora in milk and cheese (allowing for maximum flavor development) at the level of the farm and cheese dairy. The seminar will be led by Jean-Louis Carbonnier, representing the Comté Cheese Association; Florence Bérodié, researcher at the Centre Technique des Fromages Comtois (CTFC); and Jean-Francois Marmier, Comté dairy producer from Bouverans. Attendees will have the unique opportunity to taste several Comté of the same age that were produced in different micro-regions in the Massif du Jura. During the one-of-a-kind tasting and discussion, guests will explore first-hand the question of whether or not it's possible to taste "terroir" in pressed, aged cheeses and the mechanisms behind flavor transmission.

Comté's Region of Production



Comté ("con - TAY") cheese ID

General information:

Origin: Jura Mountains (Massif du Jura), France

Milk Type: Raw cow's milk

Cheese Style: Artisanal, pressed, cooked, with natural brushed rind.

French AOC (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée) since 1958 and European Union Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) Certification since 1996.

- Delimited area of production: Doubs, Jura, Ain, elevation 1000-4500 ft.
- Milk must be produced by local cows of the Montbéliarde and Simmental breeds. There are approximately 112,000 Comté cows.
- Minimum of 2.5 acres of natural pasture for each animal.
- Cattle feed must be natural and free of fermented products and GMOs.
- Each *fruitière* must collect milk from dairy farms within a 16-mile diameter maximum.
- Milk must be made into cheese within 24 hours maximum of the earliest milking.
- Only natural starters must be used to transform the milk into curds.
- Wheels must be aged on spruce boards. Minimum aging is 4 months, generally 6-18 months and sometimes even longer.

Comté Cheese Association

will be at the
2013 American Cheese Society Conference
in Madison, WI, August 1-3rd

Comté Scholarship Winner Announced



The Comté Cheese Association is delighted to announce that Lisa Futterman won the first-ever Comté

Scholarship for American Cheese Society Certified Cheese Professionals™ (ACS CCPs™). Futterman's essay (see right) won the highest points in the blind judging. The judges of the competition (who did not have access to the applicants' names or information) included cheese experts Greg O'Neill (Board President of the American Cheese Society; Owner of Pastoral Artisan Cheese, Bread & Wine); Cathy Strange (Global Cheese Buyer, Whole Foods Market, Inc.); and Max McCalman (Maître Fromager of Artisanal Premium Cheese Center, Author and Cheese Writer).

Futterman is a cheesemonger at Pastoral Artisan Cheese, Bread & Wine. She's a graduate of the Restaurant School in Philadelphia and the University of Pennsylvania. She cooked at fine dining restaurants and worked as a culinary instructor before beginning her cheese career in 2007. She has won an all-expenses-paid trip to the Comté region of France to learn first-hand about Comté's unique history, production and region.

“As a cheese seller or cheese steward, why would you choose to have Comté in your selection? Explain how Comté's style, usability, flavors and maintenance (caring for the cheese) would lend themselves well to your cheese selection.”

By Lisa Futterman, ACS CCP™, 2013 Comté Scholarship Winner

Why Comté?

A cheesemonger is often asked, “What is your favorite cheese?” I try to dodge this question as often as possible, because of the 200 cheeses I get to choose from everyday, each has lovely characteristics that I adore sharing with my customers.

When backed into a corner, however, the answer I most commonly give, and the answer so many of my colleagues turn to, is mountain cheeses. And the undisputed reigning champion of all mountain cheeses—an old world classic—is Comté.

Let's examine why.

History: Comté has been made for over 1,000 years. This cheese truly represents its style, one of the most intriguing and romantic styles on record. Students of food scientist Paul Kinstedt cherish his telling of mountain cheesemaking history in his 2005 book *American Farmstead Cheese*. The image of large herds of cows grazing together in mountain meadows; the cheesemaking facilities which required specific recipe variations (low salt, low moisture) due to the demands of texture and transport; the distinct environment of the region—all these paint a picture that gives a cheese enthusiast goosebumps.

Affinage: The story of the affineurs of Comté goes back to 1860, when the first affinage cellar for Comté was built. As the wheels mature, they are flipped, turned, and rubbed with brine and salt. They rest on boards made of native spruce and age for at least 4 months in accordance with the PDO (protected designation of origin) but as long as 18-20 months or more according to the affineur's individual process of sensory analysis. A comparative tasting of younger vs. older wheels, or of cheeses from different affineurs or fruitières can be eye-opening for mongers and customers alike.

Format: Comté comes to us in an eighty-pound wheel, a formidable presence in the cheese case. To split one's first wheel of Comté can be a rite of passage in many cheese shops, as customers view the monger pretending not to struggle with the elegant yet unwieldy disc. What an opportunity to share that aromatic “first sniff” with co-workers and guests!

Aroma and Flavor: Comté offers a deep, complex cheese tasting experience for mongers and customers to practice their skills. The cheese shows an incredible range of flavors from brightly herbal, to nutty and leathery, to burstingly creamy, to fruity and sweet, and hence acts as a palette for the palate, a springboard from which to compare so many other tastes and develop a vocabulary of flavors.

Versatility: Few cheeses fare as well as Comté in both the eating and cooking arenas. While the best way to experience Comté is in its pure form, as a well-tempered slab presented simply, the cheese melts beautifully because of how carefully it is made, and its aromas and deep flavors stand up and stand out when combined into sauces, fondues, gratins, and other culinary applications where melted cheese stars.

Comté represents the best a cheese can possibly be; an example of the depth and breadth of the learning experience that cheese provides us, and the incredible story one single cheese can tell.



Chef Jason Berthold, Executive Chef of RN74 in San Francisco

Chef Jason Berthold is the Executive Chef of RN74 restaurant and wine bar (part of the Mina Group) in San Francisco. Berthold helped open the restaurant in 2009 after working at the French Laundry, and he has gained critical acclaim for his modern, French-influenced cuisine and seasonal, fresh flavors that complement the restaurant's vast wine program.

How long have you been using Comté at the restaurant?

We have been using Comté at RN74 since day one. We've used it to finish lettuce salads, as the base for cheese fondues, as a key ingredient in various gratins, and now in the Comté Soufflé. Wine is at the core of what we do at the restaurant, and the food has to be in an arena that won't dominate wine. I therefore focus on natural, clean and pure flavors. Comté is our go-to cheese for both red and white pairings.

The Comté soufflé is currently a highlight of your menu. Why use Comté in the soufflé instead of another cheese?

Comté was our clear choice in terms of versatility with wine. It works beautifully with whites wines just as much as it does red wines. It is rewarding to be able to create a dish that works so well with both white and reds, sweet and fortified wines too. The development of the recipe was pretty straightforward, the only thing that was really up to be determined was how much/if any of a stronger cheese would need to be added to bolster the flavor and heighten the impact as the smell of the soufflé wafted through the dining room. We ended up using about 10% Epoisses for that added impact.

Are there any other dishes that you like to cook at home or in the restaurant using Comté?

Any sort of gratinéed item such as sunchokes or potatoes is great with Comté. I love it on burgers with good Dijon mustard, or shaved into a salad with celery root, green apple and a light aioli with lots of fresh cut herbs.

What wines do you like to drink with Comté?

I love white Burgundy with Comté, and any decadent, rich whites that have a bit of oak. An aged red Burgundy is also beautiful with Comté.

What are your tips for cooking with Comté?

I like to use Comté for the complex savory flavor that it can contribute, but the amount needs to be gauged carefully. It is a cheese that can add subtlety in the right amounts but can also overpower certain ingredients if too much is used.

Comté Soufflé by Chef Jason Berthold Makes 4 8-oz ramekins



Softened butter and flour for coating
ramekins

1 1/2 cups whole milk
2 ounces butter
3 ounces all-purpose flour
6 eggs, yolks and whites separated
4 ounces Comté cheese, shredded
1/2 ounce Epoisses cheese
2 teaspoons salt

1. Butter and flour the ramekins by smearing the inside of the ramekins with softened butter then coating them with a thin layer of flour. Shake off excess flour.
2. In a small saucepan, bring the milk and butter to a boil. Whisk in flour thoroughly and continue to cook over low heat, whisking, for two minutes.
3. Add the mixture to a food processor and blend until smooth. With the blade running, add the egg yolks, cheeses and salt. Transfer mixture to a large bowl and let cool slightly.
4. In the meantime, whip the egg whites to medium peaks. Fold the egg whites into the cheese base. Fill the ramekins with the soufflé batter almost to the top.
5. Bake in a 375°F convection oven for 15-17 minutes, or if using a conventional oven, bake at 425°F for 15-17 minutes until fully risen and golden brown around the edges. Serve immediately.

Advice from the Sommelier:

Rajat Parr, Wine Director, MINA Group (including RN74) recommends Pierre Yves Colin St Aubin "en Remilly" 2009 with the Comté soufflé.

Special thanks to Soyoung Scanlan, Andante Dairy

Comté & Vin Jaune - A Wine and Cheese Pairing that Works

Pairing wine with cheese isn't as easy as it might seem. As Eric Pfanner explains in an article for the *International Herald Tribune* and *New York Times* (February 15, 2013), "In the popular imagination, wine and cheese were meant for each other. The reality is more frictionous, and the cheese usually wins. Its waxy texture coats your palate and its powerful flavors saturate your senses, making it impossible to taste the wine." According to Pfanner, one of the few wines that can stand up well to cheese is Vin Jaune, "the vinous pride of the Jura region of France" (where Comté is produced). Vin Jaune is made from savagnin grapes and is aged for six years in partially filled wooden barrels, during which time a layer of yeast forms on the wine's surface, protecting it from oxidation. The resulting wine has concentrated flavors of "pine resin, curry, citrus, nuts, salt and anis" which are powerful enough to complement the flavors and textures of

cheese, especially Comté. Pfanner describes:

"After a few glasses of Vin Jaune, nothing tastes as good as a morsel of cheese. Fortunately, the Jura is also home to Comté, one of the greatest cheeses of France..."

While the production of Vin Jaune is tiny, Comté is the most widely made of all the French cheeses that bear the name of their place of origin. Like Vin Jaune, Comté must come from specifically delimited production zones. It, too, must be aged for a long time in humid cellars — not quite six years, but one or two years is normal. In general, the older versions have the most character.

Most important, thanks to the distinctive flavor of Vin Jaune, this is one wine and cheese pairing that actually works. The rich flavor of Comté — by turns fruity, nutty, yeasty or spicy — complements the wine, and vice versa." — (NYTimes.com, February 15, 2013)



New Comté Cooking School Videos!

Be sure to check out the first-ever series of “Comté Cooking School” videos! The five short videos showcase delicious but easy-to-prepare recipes using Comté cheese, with step-by-step instructions, tips about cooking with Comté and information about the cheese and the region. The videos are available to view and stream on the **Comté USA YouTube Channel:** <http://www.youtube.com/comtecheese>

This series features: Comté Fondue; Comté Tuiles; Comté & Currant Scones; Comté & Ham Crêpes; and Salade au Comté with Apples & Beets. The videos are a great tool to teach consumers about the diverse ways to cook with and enjoy Comté. Each of the recipes corresponds to one of the Comté Recipe Cards.



New Comté Recipe Cards

Brand new Comté Recipe Cards are now available for spring and summer promotions, classes, tastings and events. The new recipes, sharing the theme, “Recipes to Impress,” include: **Comté Biscotti**, **Chilled Sweet Pea Soup with Comté Cream** and **Comté Risotto with Asparagus**. These elegant but simple dishes, which highlight the flavors and aromas of Comté, are sure to impress family and friends.

The new recipes can be viewed at www.comte-usa.com or <http://Facebook.com/ComteUSA>. Hard copies of the 4x6-inch cards—perfect for promotions and displays—are also available for retailers, distributors and educators. Convenient Recipe Card Holders are also available.

For more information about the Comté Recipe Cards and/or Cooking School Videos, or to request free copies of the Recipe Cards and/or Card Holders, email us at trade@comte-usa.com.

Comté Risotto with Asparagus

Risotto has never tasted so good! In this recipe, cubes of Comté get stirred into a classic asparagus risotto, creating an unbelievably creamy texture and nuanced flavor. Before serving, more Comté is shaved over top, slowly melting into the hot rice. This dish is proof that it takes only a few high-quality ingredients to create a four-star dish.

Serves: 6

- 4 cups chicken or vegetable broth
- 1 bunch (1 lb) asparagus (woody ends discarded), cut into 1-inch pieces
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 large shallot, finely diced (1/3 cup diced)
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 ½ cup Arborio or Carnaroli rice
- ¾ cup dry white wine
- 4 ounces Comté, cut into ¼-inch dice, plus additional Comté for shaving as garnish

1. Place broth and 2 cups water in a saucepan; bring to a boil. Prepare an ice bath. Add the asparagus to the boiling broth and cook until crisp-tender, 1-3 minutes. Using a slotted spoon or spider, transfer asparagus to the ice bath to stop the cooking (reserve broth). Drain asparagus and line on a towel to dry. Reduce broth to a simmer.

2. Melt butter in a medium, heavy-bottomed saucepan over medium heat. Add the shallots and garlic with a pinch of salt and pepper. Cook, stirring, until softened, 2-3 minutes. Add the rice and cook, stirring, 1-2 minutes. Pour in wine and stir until most of liquid is absorbed. Add 1-2 ladlefuls of broth. Simmer, stirring often, until most of the liquid is absorbed. Keep adding broth by the ladleful, stirring often, until the rice is creamy and tender (it should still have a bite). If you run out of broth before the rice is cooked, add more water as needed.
3. Pull the pan off the heat and add the diced Comté. Stir until the Comté starts to melt. Fold in the asparagus. Taste and season with salt as needed. Spoon the risotto into shallow bowls. Using a vegetable peeler, shave Comté over the top of each bowl. Serve immediately.

The Comté Cheese Association

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contactusa@comte-usa.com
www.comte-usa.com
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