



COMTÉ NEWS

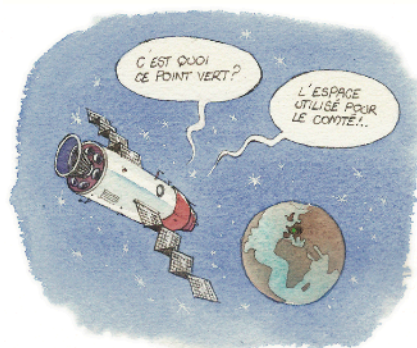


Spring/Summer 2011

Comté & the Environment

One of the core missions of the Comté Cheese Association (CIGC) has been “to meet consumers’ expectations in terms of [Comté’s] preservation of the environment, its non-industrial and artisanal production process, and its authentic and natural character.” For over a thousand years, Comté has been crafted by artisanal methods that have respected the land and the environment. While modern times have brought with them new challenges and commercial pressures, Comté has remained committed to this tradition, which is upheld today by Comté’s PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) classification. This commitment not only has implications for the health of the region’s environment, but also for its economy and culture.

Due to a large set of stringent rules and requirements that govern every aspect of Comté production—from mandating the region where the cheese can be made, to how the milk is produced, to how and where the cheese is crafted and aged—Comté’s PDO status represents a contract between producers and consumers, guaranteeing the cheese’s specificity, its unique taste and its natural character. Comté can only be produced within a delimited area of the Jura Massif with the milk



“Hey, what’s that green dot?”
“That’s where they make Comté!”

of local Montbéliarde or Simmental cows, and each cow must have at least 2.5 acres of pastureland to roam. The cows feed on natural pasture in the warmer months and are fed locally harvested hay in the winter. Fermented feed and GMO’s are prohibited.

In 1996, a study done in collaboration between the University of Besançon and the CIGC demonstrated for the first time that *terroir* has an influence on the flavors of an aromatic cheese. Because of the natural diet of the Comté cows, the specificities of the region’s soils, grasses and microflora are reflected in the taste of the

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For more information on Comté: www.comte.com, www.comte-usa.com

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.

- Delimited area of production: Doubs, Jura, Ain, elevation 1500-4500 ft.
- Milk must be produced by local cows of the Montbéliarde (95%) and Simmental (5%) 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 17-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 next

Summer Fancy Food Show in Washington DC

July 10-12, 2011 Booth #1817

resulting cheese. Thus, protecting the land and soil is actually also essential for preserving the flavors of Comté.

Comté farmers therefore practice non-intensive agriculture, which focuses on quality and soil characteristics as opposed to yields. The PDO law limits the amount of production per hectare of land and also limits the use of fertilizers. As a result, the biodiversity and the open landscapes of the region have been maintained. Over 500 species of wildflowers have been categorized in the fields surrounding just 60 *fruitières* (the facilities where Comté is made), and the size of the region's permanent grazing area is big enough to completely cover Paris and its suburbs.

The PDO law also prevents cheesemakers from industrializing the Comté production process. While there have been modern innovations such as temperature controls and automatic presses, Comté is still made by hand using copper vats. Some Comté cheesemakers are also adopting additional "green" initiatives, such as in converting from oil or gas heat to wood heating and in collecting rainwater for re-use.

These measures not only support biodiversity and sustainability in the region, but they also support its economic system. In addition to representing a contract between producers and consumers, the PDO classification also represents a contract between producers and the state.

The government provides protection over the Comté name (no other cheeses can use the name Comté), and, in return, the Comté professionals maximize employment in the region. Comté provides about 7,600 jobs in a region of just 2,300 square kilometers. Producers pool their resources to grow and promote the cheese, and growth remains rooted in the local economy as opposed to being obtained in other regions. Higher prices paid to the dairy farmers preserve the farmland, and thus agriculture in the Jura has remained alive and vibrant. The "Routes of Comté" program also promotes tourism to the region, which has seen over a million visitors to farms, dairies and cheese cellars since 2002.

Additionally, the PDO helps to preserve the culture of the Jura Massif, which has been rooted in a cheesemaking tradition for over a thousand years. Comté *fruitières* are often still located at the heart of village life, and Comté is an important part of the regional patrimony as well as a source of local pride. Even though the Jura has modernized, its values and traditions remain intact.

Comté remains devoted to tradition, a commitment that is safeguarded by its PDO classification. Consumers buy Comté not just for its flavors, but also because it's an authentic and natural product, made without additives, and made with respect for the environment. In that regard, it's win-win-win for the region, the environment and for consumers.



Claude Vermot-Desroches: President of the CIGC

Claude Vermot-Desroches, 57, has been involved in farming activities in the Jura for over 25 years and has been the president of the Comité Interprofessionnel du Comté (CIGC) for 8 ½ years. Aside from overseeing the activities of the CIGC and managing his farm, he also has a penchant for rock music and motorcycles.

What's your favorite part about your job?

My tasks as president are fascinating—my exchanges with all the makers of Comté, my meetings with colleagues and other associates... It's also satisfying to measure how much the organization is committed to agriculture and to producing a quality product.

If you were to start all over, would you take the same path?

If I were to start over I would gladly take the same path, whether as farmer or as a manager.

Do you think the production of Comté is likely to increase?

Because producing Comté milk is more profitable [the price of Comté milk is pegged to the price of Comté and thus higher than the price of milk in the open market], there has been an increased demand to enter the field on the part of local farmers, but unfortunately the market can't absorb an increase in production right away. The French market is well developed—about 50% of households buy Comté—so now is the time to make an effort in international promotion.

What's your favorite way of eating or cooking with Comté?

Comté on a cheese board after a meal is always special. It's also great at breakfast with a piece of bread. Skewers with fresh fruit and cubes of Comté as an appetizer are also excellent. And, of course, in gratins! I prefer a 10- to 18-month old Comté, but what I find to be more important than age [when selecting Comté] is the expression of aromas.

Besides cheese and farming, what are some of your other interest and hobbies?

Aside from my job, I enjoy going out with friends, traveling, riding my motorcycle and rock music.

How long have you been a dairy farmer for Comté?

I've been continuously involved in agricultural activities since the age of 20, and I've been part of the CIGC for 20 years. I've always lived in Cademène, a little village bordering the Loue just steps away from Gustave Courbet's native village. My farm has 60 Montbéliarde cows and 80 young ones that are being raised for the production of Comté milk. I have 3 daughters, one of which is going to move onto my farm with her partner to replace my brother and his wife, who are retiring.

When did you become president of the CIGC?

I've been president for 8 ½ years. I was elected by general consensus after my predecessor's term ended.

Why was the CIGC created, and what are its goals?

The CIGC was created in 1963 as an association of all those who are involved in Comté production (the dairy farmers, cheesemakers, cooperatives, affineurs) in order to better master techniques, improve the product, conduct research and defend the AOC's interests. This reciprocal recognition of all of the stakeholders involved—this sense of shared values—allows for collective responsibility and a shared vitality in the industry. Our objectives are to continue the promotion of Comté as an authentic and artisanal product, to grow and develop international markets, and to uphold social expectations [such as] environmental preservation and employment in the region.



Comté “Quick Hits” from Marie Simmons

Marie Simmons is a food writer, cooking school instructor and cookbook author (her newest book is *Fresh & Fast Vegetarian: Recipes that Make a Meal*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2011, see recipe excerpt below). She's a huge Comté fan and keeps a wedge in her cheese drawer with a cheese plane or paring knife handy for some fun “quick hits” with Comté. Here are her favorites:

1. Lay a couple of curls of Comté on top of a hot scrambled egg. Watch it melt into seduction. Delicious folded into a warm white corn tortilla.
2. Stuff a little cube of Comté into a soft medjool date or a moist dried Black Mission or Calimyrna fig for a quick treat with a hot cup of afternoon tea.
3. In fig season place halved figs, cut side down in a warm skillet brushed with a little olive oil, and heat just until the fig is soft and caramelized. Then carefully push a cube of Comté into the warm fig flesh. Tuck a torn basil leaf in there, too. Yum.
5. Cut ½-inch thick slices from a head of cauliflower; brush with olive oil, and roast in a 400°F oven until golden, turning once (about 30 minutes). Lay curls of Comté on surface of cauliflower and watch it melt. This is also great with wedges of butternut squash. Save time: don't peel the squash. The skin of butternut squash softens and becomes edible when roasted.
6. Stir cubes of Comté into a pot of hot white bean soup just before serving. The cubes soften in the hot soup. Good way to use the dry edges of a wedge. I especially like a mixture of beans (any color) and farro or barley for my winter bean soups.
7. Mac and Cheese made with Comté only. Too good for words.
8. Top roasted Russet potato wedges, drizzled with olive oil, with curls of Comté. Also great: stuff Comté mashed potatoes (seasoned with a bit of mustard) into scooped out baked potato skins for re-stuffed potatoes.
9. Comté is delicious with mustard. I make an olive oil, lemon juice and garlic dressing (3 to 1 ratio of olive oil to lemon juice) and whisk in about ½ teaspoon of Dijon or other super flavorful mustard. Toss the dressing with Romaine, apple or pear wedges (cut thin or cut into wedges and sautéed in olive oil just to warm them up and soften a bit), and a sprinkling of warmed nuts (almonds, walnuts or pecans). Cover with a “halo” of Comté cheese curls.
10. Stir a handful of shredded Comté into a batch of soft polenta. A favorite is to top the Comté polenta with a thick flavorful dried porcini and tomato sauce. Serve braised greens on the side for a delicious vegetarian meal.



Grilled Comté Sandwich with Apple and Mango Chutney

From Fresh & Fast Vegetarian: Recipes That Make a Meal by Marie Simmons (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2011)

In my cheese drawer, snuggled next to a wedge of Parmigiano Reggiano is a slab of Comté, the luscious buttery cow's milk cheese of France. It melts like a dream making it my first choice for the quintessential grilled cheese sandwich. Its rich nutty taste pairs perfectly with the crisp acidity of the apple and the tangy heat of the mango chutney.

Cook Time: 8 to 10 minutes
Serves: 2

1 slab (¾ inch x 3 x 3 inches) Comté, rind trimmed
4 slices from a pre-sliced loaf of multi grain bread
¼ cup mango or ginger chutney
16 thin (1/8 inch) slices, cored Fuji, Granny Smith, Gala, or other juicy apple
6 to 8 leaves crinkly spinach
1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil

1. Cut the cheese into enough 1/8- inch-thick rectangles to make a single layer on two slices of bread, completely covering the surface. Top with a slightly overlapping layer of the apple slices. Add the spinach leaves.
2. Spread the chutney on the remaining two bread slices. Sandwich the bread together and press down lightly.
3. Heat a skillet large enough to hold both sandwiches. When the skillet is hot enough to sizzle a drop of water, brush it with a thin film of oil.
4. Use a wide spatula to transfer the sandwiches to the skillet positioning them cheese side down. Place a lid, slightly smaller than the skillet on the surface of the sandwiches (this is a good place to use a panini press if you have one) to weight the sandwiches. Cook over medium low heat until the bottoms are a dark golden brown, 4 to 5 minutes.
5. Remove the cover and turn the sandwiches over. Return the lid to the surface of the sandwiches. Cook the other side until golden brown and the cheese is melted, 3 to 4 minutes.
6. Transfer to a cutting surface, cut each sandwich in half with a serrated knife and serve.

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can share them on Twitter and Facebook.

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Comté at the Fancy Food Show

The Comté Association has participated in the Fancy Food Show since the mid-Eighties. At first we had a booth in the French pavilion, but after a few years we moved to the general show area, feeling that the French pavilion might intimidate visitors. Today, our booth has become a hub for cheesemongers, importers, retailers and the

press, who come to learn more about the cheese and the region, taste Comté and/or simply talk about cheese. We've appreciated the growing interest that we've received throughout the years, and we invite you to visit our booth at the summer show in Washington DC, booth #1817!



Rise & Shine: New Comté Recipes to Wake up with!

Our new recipe cards are here! Start the day off on the right foot with these 3 mouthwatering new breakfast recipes, including Comté & Currant Scones; Comté & Herb Omelet; and Breakfast Spread with Comté, Fig & Walnut Jam, Bread & Fruit. Download the recipes at www.comte-usa.com or email us at trade@comte-usa.com to request packs of the 4x6-inch cards for your displays, demos and promotions. Recipe card holders are also available upon request.



Comté & Currant Scones

Irresistibly sweet and salty, these tender scones are perfect for a special breakfast or brunch, or as a snack with afternoon tea. Sweet currants and nutty, aromatic Comté are an unexpected combination, producing scones that are addictively delicious!

Makes: 8 scones

- 6 tablespoons cold, unsalted butter
- 2 ½ cups all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon Kosher salt
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 3 tablespoons currants
- 1 ¼ cups packed grated Comté (about 3 ½ ounces), divided
- 1 egg
- ¾ cup cold half-and-half, plus additional for brushing

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F. Line a baking sheet and a plate with parchment paper.
2. Using the large holes on a cheese grater, grate the butter onto the parchment-lined plate. Put it in the refrigerator while assembling the dry ingredients.
3. In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, salt and sugar. Stir in the currants and 1 cup of the grated Comté. Add the butter; stir to combine (break up any lumps of butter to evenly incorporate).
4. Whisk the egg with the half-and-half. Add the wet mixture to the dry mixture, stirring gently just until the dough holds together

when pinched (the less you work the dough, the better). If the dough is too dry, add a bit more half-and-half until it comes together.

5. Transfer the dough to a lightly floured surface. Gently press the dough into a ¾-inch thick disc (about 8 inches in diameter); cut into 8 wedges. Transfer the scones to the prepared baking sheet. Brush the top of each with a bit of half-and-half and sprinkle with the remaining Comté. Bake 16-18 minutes, or until golden brown. Transfer to a wire rack to cool.

The Comté Cheese Association

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