

COMTÉ News



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Winter
2017



Simmental cows



Montbéliarde cows



Comté Cheese Association
will be at the Winter Fancy Food Show
in San Francisco at Booth #4910
(Jan 22-24)

The First Cheesemakers

Who has the first hand in the making of Comté? The cow! According to Comté PDO regulations, only two local breeds can produce Comté milk: Montbéliarde, which represents ninety-five percent of the 150,000 Comté cows in the region, and Simmental, which represents the remaining five percent. The two breeds are distant cousins, crossbred from the same stock in the 1800s. They share traits of hardiness and resistance and have been bred to thrive in the mountainous conditions of the Jura Massif.

The Comté PDO area extends over the Jura mountain range, varying in elevation from 650-foot plains to 5,000-foot subalpine slopes. It's a region of pastures and woodlands, marked by a wide diversity of soil types, plants, grasses and flowers. The region is known for its long, cold winters and mild summers. Through careful breeding, Montbéliarde and Simmental cows have evolved tremendously over time to thrive in these mountainous conditions, where they are outdoors for most of the year. Montbéliardes are naturally resistant to infection, have excellent endurance and are very fertile. They also have very good longevity and can give milk for 6-7 years, or even longer. However, according to farmers they have a very stubborn nature! "But

this is perhaps why they are so hardy, able to endure long walks and withstand large temperature variations on the rough grasslands of the Franche-Comté," suggests Romain Gadiolet, a Comté milk producer at La Chaumusse, in the Haut-Jura.

The success of these breeds in the region is linked to their producing milk of good quality for cheesemaking. Nourished by the diverse flora in the Jura's pastures and meadows, Montbéliarde and Simmental cows produce milk with high fat and protein contents, which are essential for the making of Comté. Simmental cows provide higher butterfat and protein levels, with 39.9 percent butterfat and 33.7 percent protein contents in their milk, compared with 38.7 percent butterfat and 32.9 percent protein for Montbéliardes (Holsteins have 39 and 31.8 percent respectively). In terms of the quantity of milk per cow, however, Montbéliardes are the larger producers, with about 7,079 kg of milk per year compared to 6,159 kg of milk per year for Simmental (or 9,352 kg for Holsteins).

In a diverse forage system such as for Comté's—including plains and high elevation grasslands as well as pastures in wooded

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

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 650-5000 ft.
- Milk must be produced by local cows of the Montbéliarde (95%) and Simmental (5%) breeds. There are approximately 150,000 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.

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



Exploring Comté with Edward Behr

*In his new book, *The Food & Wine of France* (Penguin, Press 2016), Edward Behr explores traditional French cuisine, investigating artisanal foods and their producers. He devotes a chapter to the production of Comté, which he describes as one of the world's great cheeses. Below you'll find an excerpt from Behr's book, describing Comté's region and history, along with an interview with Behr about his experiences in the Jura.*

The Jura Mountains aren't high and dramatic; rather than being jagged, they're rounded. Yet in a number of places the highlands as well as the plateau are broken by tall, white limestone cliffs.

The stone comes from the Jurassic era, which is named for the mountains, created millions of years ago at the same time as the Alps. Huge underground pressure not only caused the mountains to pile up but in many areas of the Jura the layers were shuffled, contributing to the region's enormously varied terroir, for both wine and cheese.

For centuries, the only economic activity open to the mountain farmers was making cheese. But travel in winter was often difficult, sometimes impossible, and even in summer it wasn't easy to send a product regularly to market. So the farmers made big, dry, durable cheeses, suitable for long-distance trade when travel made sense. Dry cheeses are less biologically active, slower to evolve, slower to dry out—easier to keep—and of course the mature wheels can be very delicious. For the farm families themselves, the cheeses preserved the excess milk from summer for consumption in winter, when cows used to give little or no milk.

The long-ago herds were small, and the yield of milk from a cow was much less than today. Neighbors had to combine their milk in order to have enough to make a large cheese. By the fifteenth century, and maybe long before that, the villages of the Jura had begun to establish fruitières, groups of farmers who united their milk, each farmer taking his turn as cheesemaker. All the wide Franche-Comté is dairy country, and the approved zone for the cheese embraces most of the province, including a portion of the plain. But the Franche-Comté is more than 40 percent forest. Sawmills and stacks of firewood are common. As in other

mountain places, the region's hams and sausages are smoked. Cheesemakers used to heat their milk and curd over a fire.

-From *The Food and Wine of France* by Edward Behr. Reprinted by arrangement with Penguin Press, a member of Penguin Group (USA) LLC, A Penguin Random House Company. Copyright © Edward Behr, 2016.

> Of all the cheeses in France, why did you decide to devote a chapter to Comté?

Comté is emblematic of French cheese. It's also perhaps the best French cheese for cooking, and it exists in a range of forms — from younger cheese to very special, aged wheels. That *vieux* Comté may appeal especially to tyrophiles, but anyone can appreciate how good it is.

> What did you aim to learn during your travels to the region?

By the time I travelled to the Jura, I'd been visiting farms and cheesemakers for years. I was expanding my personal map of cheese to a key mountainous area — gaining insight into the people and the origins of the cheese, seeing the subtle ways the cheesemakers work with the great copper vats of milk and curd, and understanding the mountainous terroir.

> How does cheese consumption differ in the Jura compared to the US?

People in the Jura tend to eat Comté every day, as an essential part of lunch, for instance, or as a snack. And for that they prefer young cheese, which they sometimes call "sweet," in contrast with the more intense, concentrated taste of older cheese. We who live in other countries tend to look for older Comté, but the young cheese has its own realm of flavor and pleasure, and you can eat more of it.

> Did anything else surprise you about the region?

I was least prepared for the wide, large traditional farmhouses of the Upper Jura. The lower walls are stone. The gables above are often wooden, and that's where hay used to be stored, which acted as insulation in winter. Once upon a time, half or more of the ground floor was occupied by animals, which helped to provide warmth. The heart of the house was the *tuyé*, a room completely surrounded by other rooms and in some cases still intact. A fireplace fills one wall, but there's no ceiling; instead, from the tops of the walls the room tapers inward to form a chimney. The *tuyé* is where the region's wonderful cured meats were smoked.

> What's your favorite way to eat Comté?

My favorite way is plain with freshly baked dark bread. I like the young cheese, but I prefer a very good, well-aged older wheel. In cooked form, I especially like a Comté soufflé with a very simple tomato sauce: a bit of shallot cooked in butter until translucent, then peeled ripe tomatoes added to the pan, and salt, that's all, with the liquid reduced a little. But the sauce should be thin and fresh to contrast with the more earthy dairy flavors of the soufflé.

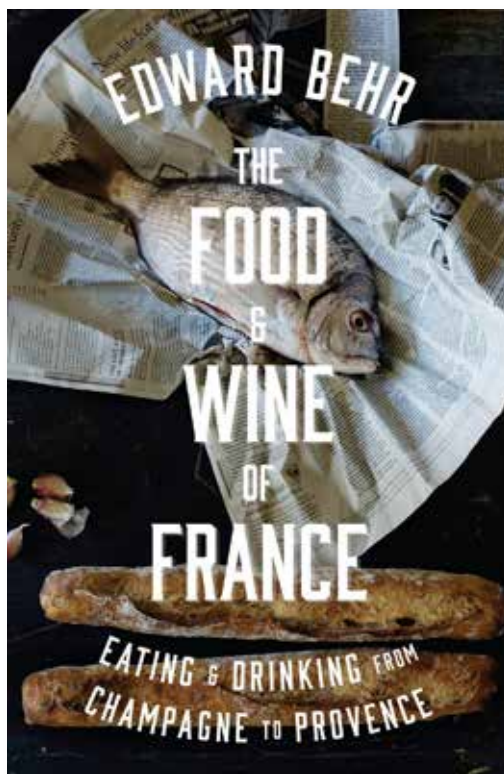




Photo by Katie Burton

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS, Chef Daniel Eddy

Chef Daniel Eddy is a native New Yorker who worked at Restaurant Spring in Paris before returning home to open Rebelle in 2015. One of the most striking items on Chef Eddy's menu is also one of the simplest: Comté is shaved into wide ribbons and piled onto a plate. It's paired simply with miche bread (with an option to pair it with a Jura wine). We asked Chef Eddy about his inspiration for the dish and his background with cheese.

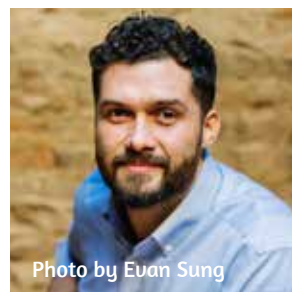


Photo by Evan Sung

> When did you develop a love for cheese?

My love for cheese began in Nicaragua, where I lived from ages one to six. There was always fresh cheese being made in the house, and a lot of conversation and debate revolved around who made the best local cheeses. My love for cheese resurged in my teens in New York City, and especially when I started cooking professionally. My education increased drastically when I moved to France. The shops are specialized, and the people who work behind the cheese counters are incredibly knowledgeable. More often than not my meals would consist of a baguette, a piece of good cheese and maybe some sausage. That's where I discovered Comté.

> Why did you decide to include Comté on your menu at Rebelle?

Comté happens to be one of my favorite cheeses. It's striking how sublime it can be: it's the balance, the texture, the smell. There's a lot of care that goes into making one of the large wheels, and you can taste it. I haven't found a point where I don't want to eat any more.

> Why did you decide to serve the Comté shaved into ribbons as opposed to a more traditional cheese course?

There's a tradition of cheese courses consisting of small pieces of cheese with accoutrements. I wanted the cheese course at Rebelle to be more of a ceremony for the entire table to partake in. It's a way for [the guests] to share their thoughts and elongate their experience. It was important

for me to make the plate abundant and to give them the time to enjoy it, just like how I enjoyed cheese in France with my friends.

> There has been a lot of attention in the press about the Comté course, which is the only cheese course on the menu.

A large part of our restaurant is about simplicity, and I think that's what has resonated with people. There's only one question asked, "Do you want cheese, or no?" In other words, "Are you enjoying yourself, and do you want to continue to do so?" I think it struck that unconscious cord where people can sit and enjoy their experience, to enjoy the mountain of cheese, and to take their time with it. It also stripped everything down, so the only thing people have to judge is the cheese itself.

How often do you eat Comté?

My favorite way to eat Comté is when I'm packing the cheese station everyday at the restaurant. I inevitably always eat a piece. It's my daily vitamin. I love continuously revisiting it to see where it's at and where it's going.

Winter Fancy Food Show

The Comté Cheese Association will be at the Winter Fancy Food Show in San Francisco from January 22-24th. We hope you'll stop by our booth #4910 for a taste of Comté and to meet with members of the Comté Cheese Association.





Craveworthy & Cozy Comté Potatoes

We can't get enough of these crispy Comté potatoes by Josh Cohen, featured on Food52. Smashed fingerling potatoes are cooked until browned and crisp, and then showered with fresh thyme and shredded Comté. The cheese melts into a gorgeous golden topping. Serve the potatoes as a cozy main course or side dish, and watch them disappear fast!

Elena's Crispy Potatoes with Comté

By Josh Cohen, *Food52*
Serves 2-3 people

- 1 pound fingerling potatoes (the smaller the better)
- Salt
- 3 tablespoons butter (plus extra for if/when your skillet looks dry)
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 2 teaspoons chopped fresh thyme leaves
- 1 to 2 ounces Comté cheese, finely grated on a microplane

1. Fill a large pot with cold water and add the fingerling potatoes. Set the pot over high heat and bring the water to a boil. Reduce the heat so that the water is simmering. Lightly salt the water. Cook the potatoes until a fork can easily prick the skin (approximately 10 – 15 minutes).
2. When the potatoes are cooked through, remove them from the simmering water and hold them at room temperature. Set a large cast iron skillet over medium heat and add the butter. When the butter is melted, shut off the heat. Add a potato to the skillet and smash it with the back of a spatula or any flat object that works for you. Keep adding potatoes and smashing them until the skillet is filled with a single even layer of

3. When your skillet is filled with smashed potatoes, turn the heat to medium. When the potatoes start to sizzle, you should lower the heat slightly. Don't move the potatoes around in the skillet, just let them cook. You want to cook the potatoes slowly, for approximately 20 minutes, until the bottoms of the potatoes are nicely browned and crispy. Use a spatula to peek underneath the potatoes and see how they are doing. Whenever the skillet looks too dry, add an extra tablespoon of butter. The potatoes will absorb a lot of butter, so expect to add another couple of tablespoons throughout the cooking process.
4. When the bottoms of the potatoes look brown and crispy, season the potatoes lightly with salt and pepper, and then flip them. Cook the potatoes for an additional 10 - 15 minutes, until both sides now look brown and crispy. When the potatoes look beautiful and ready to eat, sprinkle them with the fresh thyme, and add 1 ounce of the grated Comté cheese. If you like your potatoes to be extra cheesy, add the other ounce of grated Comté. Shut off the heat, and cover the skillet for 3 minutes. Remove the cover and eat the potatoes. Make sure to eat them right away, while the cheese is warm and perfectly melty.

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areas—the emphasis is on the quality of the milk as opposed to quantity. The PDO regulations reinforce this through requiring extensive grazing (with a minimum of 2.5 acres of pasture per cow), limiting the use of fertilizers (thereby protecting biodiversity and microflora in the soils) and capping yields.

In addition to breeding for milk quality, farmers also consider other criteria such as fertility and reproduction, udder health, speed of milking, longevity of the cow, and health of the hoofs (which must withstand a lot of walking!). Since Montbéliardes and especially Simmentals are prized for their meat, breeders are also very careful to maintain the butcher potential in the selection process.

Montbéliarde and Simmental cows have adapted not only to the rough terrain of the Jura Mountains, but also to the making of an incredible cheese. They are the first—and undoubtedly the most important—producers in the Comté cheese chain.

At a Glance

- 1 Montbéliarde cow weighs 1,430-1,760 lbs and can produce milk for 6 to 7 years, or longer
- A herd consists on average of 50 dairy cows, and there are approximately 150,000 total Comté cows in the region
- For a herd of 50 dairy cows, a farm typically operates 225 acres of land

The Comté Cheese Association

provides you with everything you need for a successful selling program, including: recipe booklets, brochures, aprons, demo toothpicks, training tools and more. Visit www.comte-usa.com for POS materials and free downloads.



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