

# Production of Farmhouse Cheese

## Introduction

The production of quality Irish farmhouse cheese has expanded over the last number of years to the extent that we now have over thirty members of Cais, the umbrella group for Irish farmhouse cheese producers. As a country we import over 18,000 tonnes of cheese per annum much of which is in the specialist sector and yet our farmhouse production accounts for only 1,000 tonnes. There would seem to be considerable room for expansion should we be able to substitute native cheeses for some of our imports. Consumption of cheese in Ireland has increased by more than 40% in the last decade to a per capita figure of slightly less than 6 kgs. Yet this is only 30% of that consumed in Germany and France.

## Irish Cheese Consumption and Imports (tonnes)

Year	Natural	Processed	Farmhouse	Imports
1996	9,535	5,850	500	17,402
1997	9,700	5,750	600	17,923

Source: NDC

## Market

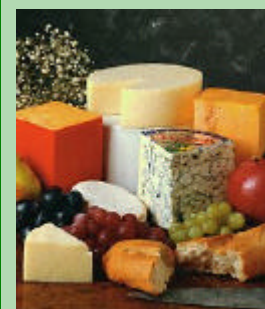
The market for farmhouse cheese is essentially at home, although producers such as Ardrahan and Cooleeny are exporting abroad. It is essential to conduct market research in advance to check on what particular cheese type is suited to the consumer and processor. Traditionally cheeses have been sold in specialist shops, deli's etc., but almost all the larger supermarkets now have cheese counters. Horgan's in Mitchelstown are possibly the largest countrywide distributor of specialist cheeses and meats. Distribution comes at a cost and can play a significant part in the decision to manufacture or not. Some producers feel that it is an economic proposition to cover the distribution themselves.

## Production Method

The manufacture of farmhouse cheese is basically the concentration of the solids in the milk by removal of the whey or liquid portion and shaping the solids particles or curd by placing them into moulds. The cheese depending on the variety is then left to mature.

Regardless of the size of the manufacturing facility, they should provide;

- A suitable premises, which conforms to the health regulations.
- A stainless steel vessel where milk can be converted into cheese.
- A moulding/pressing area where the curds are formed into their final shape.
- A brine tank (most cheeses) to salt the cheese.
- A ripening room where the cheese is held under defined conditions of temperature and humidity.



## Fact Sheet No. 8 January 2000

*This is one of a series of fact sheets on income generating activities.*

### Edited by:

John Whiriskey  
Liam Connolly

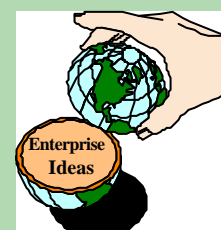
Teagasc  
Rural Development  
Centre  
Athenry, Co. Galway.

☎ +353 (0) 91

845200

email:

[jwhiriskey@athenvy.teagasc.ie](mailto:jwhiriskey@athenvy.teagasc.ie)



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- A packaging area where the cheese is weighed and packed prior to distribution.
  - A cold room to store the packaged product.

Adherence to hygiene principles are critical during the manufacturing process, to ensure a safe product for consumption. It is recommended that anyone considering cheese making should have attended a food training course run by Teagasc and a food hygiene course run by the Health Boards. In addition it is necessary to be registered with the Department of Agriculture and Food – Milk Policy Division. Existing milk producers, can convert some of their quota into ‘direct sellers quota’ whilst non milk producers must make arrangements with the department to acquire quota.

### Establishment Costs

The capital costs of building and equipping a medium sized cheese manufacturing facility (1,000 sq. ft.) would be in the order of £65,000 not including the site. This would give a potential capacity of over 10 tonnes per annum.

Production costs and margins – 5 tonne

Milk required 50,000 litres @ £0.255/lit

Receipts 5,000 kgs. @ £7/kg

Gross Margin = £22,250\*\*

\* *Includes cost of milk, rennet, salt and heating*

\*\* *Does not include labour and distribution costs.*

5 tonnes of cheese can be produced using a 750 litre vat for two days each week over a 34 week lactation. In addition to this other varieties can be manufactured using the same equipment.

The figures above are given for the construction of a new premises on a green field site. Many individuals throughout the country may have existing buildings on their properties, which can be converted into food processing units. It is extremely difficult to give accurate costings where the conversion of existing buildings is required, without having first seen the premises. Advice on conversion and costings can be given on an individual basis by Teagasc personnel.