

COMTÉ News



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Winter
2019



The farm of Jean-Louis Charbonnel (Photos Courtesy of Marcella Wright)



Comté Cheese
Association

Authentic Experiences & Noteworthy Personalities – Jean-Louis Charbonnel



Doubs, France, is the home of Jean-Louis Charbonnel, a Comté dairy farmer and the owner of *Ferme Château des Louisots* - Inn and Bed & Breakfast - in FOURNET BLANCHEROCHE, steps away from the Swiss border. It is also the home to 50 Simmental cows and heifers, which produce milk for Comté cheese.

The historic farmhouse dates back to the sixteenth century and has an inn with five unique guest rooms for visitors who enjoy a more authentic experience. Jean-Louis, who is also the chef, offers a simple but traditional cuisine using products from his own farm. One of his delicious dishes is Braised Chicken with Comté. The recipe for this wonderful specialty can be found on page 4.

Comté (“con – TAY”) cheese ID General information:

Origin: Jura Mountains
(Massif du Jura), France

Milk Type: Raw cow's milk

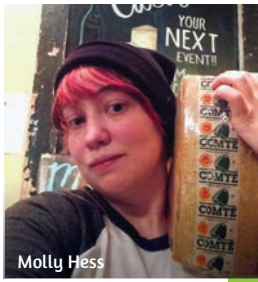
Cheese Style: Artisanal, pressed, cooked,
with natural brushed rind.

**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.

Cheesemonger's Corner "Best Practices"

With Molly Hess, a Cheesemonger recently at Pastoral Artisan Cheese, Bread & Wine in Chicago and 2019 Chicago champion of the Cheesemonger Invitational. Pastoral's owner Greg O'Neil, has been a big proponent of Comté over the years.



Molly Hess

> **How did you decide to work in cheese and what lead you to Pastoral?**

It's kind of a long answer, but you could almost call it a happy accident that led both to cheesemongering and Pastoral; I had left a deli job and was searching for the most part for a job outside of food. I had applied

to Pastoral during the job search, because I had relevant skills from working with slicers and using knives in the deli. Looking back, it was one of the best decisions I've ever made! I fell in love with the immersive education and artistry!

> **What do you think more cheesemongers need to understand and appreciate when it comes to PDO cheeses, like Comté?**

The stunning level of dedication and care that starts with

the cow, up until a wheel of cheese reaches its ripe age and passes final inspections. It takes several villages [to get the job done] and it has to; to preserve what is very much a delicious piece of history you can hold in your hand and be a staple in your kitchen!

> **What advice would you give to someone who wants to become a cheesemonger, like yourself?**

Read, listen and taste! If cheese is something you want to work with be open and eager to learn with all your senses.

> **When it comes to working behind a cheese counter, what skill do you believe is most important?**

Be in touch with the cheese before the customer gets into your shop; make sure your cheese is healthy and take a taste if it's new to you. Get some reading done too, get excited about the cheese. Excitement is a valuable ally!



John Hannon

John Hannon

Specialty team leader at Whole Foods Market in Atlanta, GA, and 2018 Comté Scholarship Winner, shares his thoughts on his trip to the Jura.

I gained a new perspective this summer as I spent Independence Day in the Jura region of France. I've seen dairy farms across the United States, visited cheesemakers,

been a merchant of cheese for over fifteen years and felt that I knew what to expect in France. I grew up in the Midwest among farmers and I thought that I'd be meeting people similar to them—practical thinkers almost to the point of shortsightedness and occasionally pessimistic about the future of their industry. My expectation fell so dramatically short of the reality that I'm left feeling pleasantly enlightened and humbled. I was privileged to meet some amazing men and women who are pursuing a cheese tradition that's a minimum of three or four times older than my country. I discovered the future was very much their focus with things like global warming and how to adapt to it being a regular topic of discussion. Speculation on how the traditions and culture surrounding Comté would continue and thrive in the current and continuing generations was spoken of in terms of optimism and hope. In America, a fourth-generation farmer can be a rarity, in the Jura that's just getting started. They aren't just thinking about the future of their way of life there, they're planning to win it.

As I visited producers that made as few as a dozen or so wheels of Comté per day (and affineurs that stored tens of thousands of wheels at a time!) I was impressed at each stop

with the level of pride and commitment the people who make it share freely with visitors like myself. Regardless if it was making or milking or aging, every single one of our hosts were eager to share what made this cheese special and was visibly proud. I met one farmer who was baling hay for winter, later he was milking the herd and that was before cooking a delicious dinner featuring Comté for a dozen people. People like this don't do this sort of thing as a casual venture, it's a way of life that lives in their hearts.

My privilege to bring home to America from this trip is not just the details of how this amazing cheese is made, instead it's to share who made it. I can share with people what it's like to walk the cows to and from the pastures high in the hills, I can tell them about how many generations of families have made this way of life a precious legacy to be appreciated. The cheese is now a lifelong reminder for me what it's like to drink the milk made by a Montbéliard cow, that's standing next to me. The grass and the flowers in the pastures, the cows and most of all the people who bring all of it together are now very real to me and a part of my daily conversation. I am very honored to be able to bring this experience to life as I share the cheese with both my customers and my family at home. Because of my good fortune in winning this trip, some of the pride of the Jura is now a little of my own. Because of the people of the Jura, I get to keep winning as I share what they have made to enjoy for years to come.



A conversation with Catherine Donnelly

Author and professor at University of Vermont, regarding the study of cheese.



> What originally made you decide to study food science?

*I decided to study food science because beneficial gut bacteria have always interested me. After finishing my undergraduate degree in animal science at the University of Vermont (UVM), with a specialization in dairy technology, I decided to pursue graduate work at North Carolina State University. There, I studied bacterial starter cultures including *Lactobacillus bulgaricus* and *Lactobacillus acidophilus* and ways to preserve them so that they could be used as dietary adjuncts (probiotics).*

> You hold a master's degree and PhD in food science, so why/how did you decide to focus on cheese?

*When I returned to UVM as a faculty member, I began studies on *Listeria monocytogenes*. Because outbreaks linked to this organism involved cheese, I decided to work to understand the microbial ecology of *Listeria* and ways to prevent cheese and dairy product contamination from this pathogen.*

> What led you to establish the Vermont Institute for Artisan Cheese?

The Vermont Institute for Artisan Cheese (VIAC) was formed to help cheesemakers understand and control the food safety risks presented during cheesemaking. We expanded our instruction beyond food safety to help the growing artisan cheese industry develop and appreciate traditional cheesemaking and cheese enjoyment.

> What do you think more Americans need to understand when it comes to cheese? And raw-milk cheese like Comté?

Americans need to understand that artisan cheese has always been part of our history and an important part of our rural working landscape. European cheesemakers have developed

time honored practices to produce some of the most glorious cheeses on the planet. American cheesemakers are learning from their European colleagues and are turning out some outstanding cheeses here at home. Unlike Europe where research centers have been established to help support traditional artisan cheese varieties by conducting research on everything from pasture management to sensory evaluation, VIAC was one of the few, if only such research centers providing this information specifically to U.S. artisan cheesemakers.

> You just recently penned "Ending the War on Artisan Cheese," tell us about it.

I recently penned "Ending the War on Artisan Cheese" because I am concerned about regulatory overreach aimed at the U.S. artisan cheese industry designed to take away our food choice under the false guise of food safety. It is critically important that regulations are based on credible science.

I will continue to work on food safety and public policy as most consumers have little understanding of the degree to which regulations impact their food choices. Food safety regulation in the U.S. needs reform, and I hope to be one of the voices shaping that reform.

> Is there anything else you would like to add?

The only other thing I would like to add is that Comté is one of my all-time favorite cheeses that reflects the landscape, animals, microflora and traditional production associated with its production. It is a glorious product and those unfamiliar with this cheese are missing one of the stars of our international cheese landscape!

Braised Chicken in Jura Wine with Comté & Cream

Chicken legs are braised in Jura wine with a hearty splash of cream and plenty of Comté. The surprisingly light cheese sauce is the perfect match for the ultra-tender chicken. Serve the dish with rice, mashed potatoes or plenty of crusty bread for soaking up the sauce.

Serves: 4

Ingredients:

- 4 bone-in chicken thighs and 4 chicken drumsticks
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 cup dry Jura wine (preferably Savagnin)
- 3/4 cup chicken broth
- 2 1/4 cups grated Comté, divided
- 1 cup heavy cream
- Chopped parsley, for serving (optional)

Instructions:

1. Season the chicken legs with salt and pepper. Melt the butter in a large straight-sided skillet with a lid (or a Dutch oven) over medium-high heat.
2. Add the chicken pieces, skin side down, and cook until browned, about 8-10 minutes. Turn the chicken over and pour in the wine. Bring to a boil, and cook until the wine is reduced by half, about 5 minutes.
3. Pour in the chicken broth and bring to a simmer. Cover and cook on low until the chicken is very tender (a knife should slide easily through the meat), about 25-30 minutes.
4. Transfer the chicken to a plate. Pour the heavy cream into the skillet with the pan juices and bring to a simmer. Cook until reduced by about half, about 10 minutes. Remove the skillet from the heat and slowly stir in 2 cups of the cheese. Season with salt and pepper.
5. Return the chicken to the skillet (or transfer it to a baking dish and add the sauce).
6. Sprinkle the remaining Comté over top. If you'd like, broil the chicken until the cheese is melted and the top is browned in spots, about 2 minutes. Sprinkle with parsley before serving, if you wish.



To find out more about travel to *Ferme Château des Louisots*, please visit:
<https://www.leslouisots.com/les-chambres/la-chambre-comtoise.html>

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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