

(M. Scott)

"What would you tell a monger to convince him/her/them to add Comté to their cheese selection?" (Please include details about the PDO and your own experiences, as well as about the presentation and service of Comté.)"

Tire Wrenches to Cheese Wheels: A Journey from Cars to Comté

I spent years as an (ASE*) National Institute of Automotive Service Excellence Certified Automotive Technician diagnosing and repairing vehicles. But beneath my grease-stained overalls lay a hidden passion for cheese. Yes, you read that right—cheese. This passion would eventually lead me on a journey from the world of engines and transmissions to the delicate art of cheese retailing, culminating in becoming an (ACS*CCP) American Cheese Society Certified Cheese Professional. I give kudos to my Aunt Esther from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. During my childhood, she introduced me to Colby Cheddar and Blue Cheese. I still remember cracking up when she ordered “blue cheese salad dressing” at a family restaurant. As a fourth grader, I laughed aloud at the thought of eating something that sounded so strange. Little did I know that moment would spark a lifelong infatuation with cheese.

Despite my ripening interest in cheese, I pursued a career in automotive technology. However, the allure of cheese never faded. I eventually transitioned careers and began working at Whole Foods Market. I began learning about cheese and cheese retailing from some of the best cheese professionals in the country. My mechanical background proved to be an asset, as I quickly grasped the technical aspects of cheese production. Who knew that fixing cars and selling cheese had so much in common?

In 2013, I earned my ACS*CCP certification. With my new credentials, I continued to deepen my knowledge, passion, and expertise with cheese. One rewarding aspect of my food career has been educating team members and customers. If I was tasked with convincing a fellow cheesemonger to diversify their cheese offerings, I would take the opportunity to introduce them to one of my all-time favorite cheeses, Comté.

This French cheese, made from unpasteurized cow’s milk, is known for its complex flavors and smooth texture. Visually appealing with a natural rind and a pale, yellow interior, it's like the Swiss Army knife of cheeses—versatile and always reliable. Comté is aged anywhere from 4 to 24 months, resulting in a wide range of flavors. Young wheels have a mild, nutty taste, while older rounds boast a more intense, fruity flavor. This versatility widens its applications.

Maintaining Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) status, this prestigious appellation ensures authenticity. Comté is produced in specific regions following strictly enforced methods. Animals graze the Jura Mountains, an area known for its unique climate and terrain. To further persuade my colleague, I would share information about the Montbéliarde breed of cows. This ancient herd is known for its rich and creamy milk, which is essential in creating the distinct flavor profile of Comté. It is like having the secret ingredient that makes everything better. The PDO status guarantees that every wheel of Comté is true to its origins. Think of it as the “VIP pass” of the cheese world—only “the best” get in.

I would highlight the historical significance of Comté. It is one of the oldest cheeses in France. By adding Comté to their selection, they would offer their customers a taste of French history and tradition. Imagine telling a customer that they're biting into a piece of history—how cool is that?

I would emphasize the economic benefits of stocking Comté. A high-quality, artisanal cheese, Comté commands a premium price, potentially increasing their shop's revenue and attracting the discerning customer who appreciates fine foods. Who doesn't want to be the cheese shop that everyone talks about?

My advice when merchandising Comté... spotlight unique characteristics. Create informative displays that showcase its PDO status, the breed, and its rich history. Offer samples to customers while describing the range of flavors. Build a loyal customer base encouraging repeat purchases. After all, who can resist a cheese sample?

My journey from ASE Automotive Technician to ACS Certified Cheese Professional is a testament to the power of following one's passion. I would encourage my colleagues to follow their obsession. By embracing my love for cheese, I have experienced personal fulfillment. I love mentoring fellow turophiles, demonstrating knowledge, modeling dedication, and inspiring others to appreciate the art of all things cheese! In the end, my story is a reminder that it is never too late to pursue one's dreams and make a meaningful impact in the world.

It is our duty to pay it forward.

Peace, Love, and Cheese.