

# 1,000 Years of Artisanal Cheesemaking





# Portrait of a great cheese

- Comté is an ancient cooked and pressed cheese made from raw milk. A wheel weighs about 80 lbs and measures 3 ft in diameter.
- Comté is made in the Jura Massif of France, a region of medium-range mountains stretching along the Swiss border north of Geneva. It includes the *départements* of the Jura, Doubs (both in the Franche-Comté region) and the Ain (Rhône-Alpes region).
- Montbéliarde and French Simmental cows are the only breeds authorized to produce the milk for Comté. The cows graze in vast pastures from spring to autumn, and eat local hay in the winter. All fermented feed is banned from their healthy diet.
- There are about 2,500 small dairy farms that produce Comté milk. Producing a high-quality milk is vital for the expression of flavors and aromas in Comté.
- Comté is handmade every day by artisans in about 140 small village cheesemaking facilities, known as *fruitières*.
- It takes time for Comté to develop its taste. It is aged in maturing cellars for at least 4 months by law, but generally for 6-18 months or even longer. Comté is characterized by its complex aromatic richness. It is not a cheese with a uniform taste. Each wheel of Comté reveals a distinct aromatic composition that varies according the micro-region where it was produced, the local microflora, the season in which the cheese was made, the distinctive style of the cheesemaker, the cellar where it was matured... In this respect, Comté is truly a unique cheese.
- Rich in phosphorous, calcium, minerals and protein, Comté is a valuable food whose nutritional contents are useful in maintaining a balanced diet. Made with no additives or artificial colorants, and controlled at each level of production, Comté is a pure, healthy and natural food.



### Comté's Appellation of Origin (AOC / PDO) – key figures

1 <sup>st</sup>	Comté is the highest consumed AOC/PDO cheese in France. (About 1,700,000 wheels are produced every year. Because it's an artisanal cheese, production can vary from year to year.)
1.3	Each cow that produces milk for Comté must have a minimum of 1.3 hectare (3.2 acres) of natural pastureland to graze.
3	The area designated by Comté's Appellation of Origin stretches across 3 départements in the Jura Massif—Doubs, Jura and a part of Ain—with an elevation of 1,500 and 4,500 feet.
4	The minimum maturing time is 4 months. As there isn't a maximum limit, aging can last up to 24 months or more!
16	Each fruitière, or cheesemaking facility, must collect milk from dairy farms located within a 16-mile (25 km) diameter maximum.
80	A wheel of Comté weighs 80 lbs on average, with a diameter of 3 ft and a "heel" (thickness) of 4 in.
100	It takes over 100 gallons of milk to make one wheel of Comté. Since one Montbéliarde cow produces about 5 gallons of milk in two milkings, it takes the milk of about 20 cows to produce one wheel of Comté.
1958	Comté was one of the first cheeses to obtain AOC designation, in 1958.
14,000	Altogether over 14,000 jobs are created by the Comté PDO.
150,000	There are approximately 150,000 cows that produce the milk for Comté (95% Montbéliarde breed and 5% Simmental breed).
280,000	Together the farms producing Comté milk sit on 280,000 acres (1,081 square miles) a bit more than twice the size of Hong Kong and less than the size of the state of Rhode Island in the USA.



THE INGREDIENTS  
FOR SUPERB MILK

## Life on the farm follows the seasons

- The milk for Comté is produced at over 2,500 family farms practicing non-intensive agriculture, a farming method that, rather than focusing on large yields, instead focuses on quality, taking into account soil characteristics and the diversity of plant species and microflora. The average annual **production of a farm producing Comté milk is about 327,000 liters (86,400 gallons).**
- The first artisan to have a hand in the making of Comté is a robust creature with a gentle gaze and tranquil gate. This is the Montbéliarde cow, a large animal with a wide girth, a broad muzzle and a reddish-brown and white hide. Only Montbéliarde cows (95% of herds) and French Simmental cows (5%) are authorized to produce the milk for Comté cheese.
- During the entire length of the warmer months, the cows graze in open pastures where they enjoy a minimum of 3.2 acres of land each. During the winter season, the cows eat locally harvested hay. GMO's, ensilage and all fermented feed are forbidden, as they adversely affect the quality of the milk.
- Every day the farmers deliver their milk to their local cheesemaking facilities, or fruitières. The milk must be crafted into Comté within 24 hours maximum of milking to preserve the lactic microflora in the milk and thus its aromatic potential. Each fruitière must collect milk from dairy farms located within a 16-mile diameter maximum.
- The soils and microflora in the Jura Massif are very diverse, and this is reflected in the milk and ultimately in the Comté. Each wheel of Comté is thus a reflection of a specific terroir located within the PDO.

### GMO'S PROHIBITED

The Comité Interprofessionnel du Comté (CIGC—the organization which represents all the persons involved in Comté's production and trade) has forbidden the use of GMO's in the making of Comté and ensures that the Comté PDO represents all guarantees in this respect.



# The fruitière, at the heart of each village

COOPERATION  
AND CRAFTSMANSHIP  
MAKE COMTE A GREAT  
CHEESE.

- Comté dairy farmers deliver their milk to the cheesemaking facility, or fruitière, where it is transformed into Comté cheese. Usually it is owned by the farmers and organized as a cooperative. It is often situated at the heart of the village. These cooperatives have been the nexus of village organization for over eight centuries. Their values of solidarity and sharing have been preserved, as have the small-scale production techniques and artisanal traditions which make Comté a great cheese.

- There are about 140 fruitières distributed across the Jura Massif. On average, each fruitière has 17 members, or local farms with a maximum milk collection area limited to a circle with a 25 km (16 mile) diameter. The fruitières receive milk every day from the farms. An unchanging ritual then takes place. The milk is partly skimmed then poured into large copper vats to be warmed. The cheesemaker adds a few centiliters of natural starter and rennet, which create curds. With the aid of a curd-slicer, the curds are cut into tiny white grains, which are then stirred and heated to 130°F. The contents are poured into Comté molds, and the remaining liquid, or whey, is pressed out.

- A few hours later, the mold is opened to reveal a new wheel of cheese that is white and elastic. This young cheese will be aged for a few weeks in the fruitière's small cellar, before being sent to one of the region's affineurs, who are in charge of aging and marketing the wheels.







## The affinage cellar... bringing a cheese to perfection

- Comté takes time to acquire its flavor. It is in the silence and shadowy darkness of the affinage cellars that Comté will undergo its second transformation. Each wheel is turned regularly and rubbed with salt. With meticulous care, the aromatic development of the cheese is encouraged over a period of several months.
- At the end of its time in the affinage cellar (ranging from a minimum of 4 months, to 18 or 24 months, or longer depending on the wheel), each wheel of Comté has developed a “personality,” with a unique texture, color and distinctive range of flavors.
- Comté wheels are aged on locally harvested spruce boards. Not only are the boards part of the traditional methods of production, but scientific studies have shown that they also protect specific microflora that are indispensable to the taste and sanitary qualities of Comté.
- Depending on the characteristics of the cheese, the affineur (cellar master) may use a series of different types of cellars: “warm cellars” (57 to 66°F) and “cold cellars” (less than 57°F). Warm cellars encourage a faster ripening of the cheese and the development of certain flavors, while cold cellars support a slower evolution of the cheese and different flavors. The lactic microflora in raw milk, still present in the cheese, also affect the way that it matures. The resulting cheeses will therefore vary, even if they have been aged in exactly the same way.
- The Jura Massif has 15 Comté affineurs (aging facilities), each with unique aging techniques depending on the location, the atmosphere in the cellars and the particular style of the affineur.

WHEN IT COMES  
TO ACQUIRING  
FLAVOR,  
COMTÉ CANNOT  
BE HURRIED



- After aging in the cellars, each wheel of Comté is tested and given a rating out of 20. The rating covers the taste as well as the physical appearance of the wheel. Wheels that score over 14 points are given a green band: Comté Extra. Wheels that score 12-14 points are given a brown band (this may be due to only a small fault in the appearance of an otherwise excellent cheese). Wheels that score less than 12 points are excluded from carrying the official Comté label.

- “Green” or “brown” bands are both authentic and have been aged for at least 4 months. The color of the band has no bearing upon the age of the cheese or the typology of the taste.



# An incomparable flavor...

- Fruity, flowery, mild, spicy...? Sometimes there doesn't seem to be enough words to describe the infinite variety of flavors and aromas in Comté. Each wheel of Comté is telling us of its past. Its flavors speak of the pastures where the cows grazed, the season in which it was made, the particular craftsmanship of the cheesemaker, the time it spent in the aging cellar... Every wheel has a story, and every story is different.
- Because of all of these variables, Comté is the opposite of a “standardized” cheese and is in fact characterized by a great diversity of flavor: no two wheels ever taste the same! The main sources of these variations include:



- **The geographical origin** – Agricultural practices that respect the land allow Comté to reflect the local soil, flora, microflora and climate where it was made. In 1996, a study was released showing that different fruitières produce Comté with distinctly different aromatic profiles according to where they're located. Comté wheels produced in the same region share certain flavors and aromas while wheels made in different regions have markedly different flavor profiles.

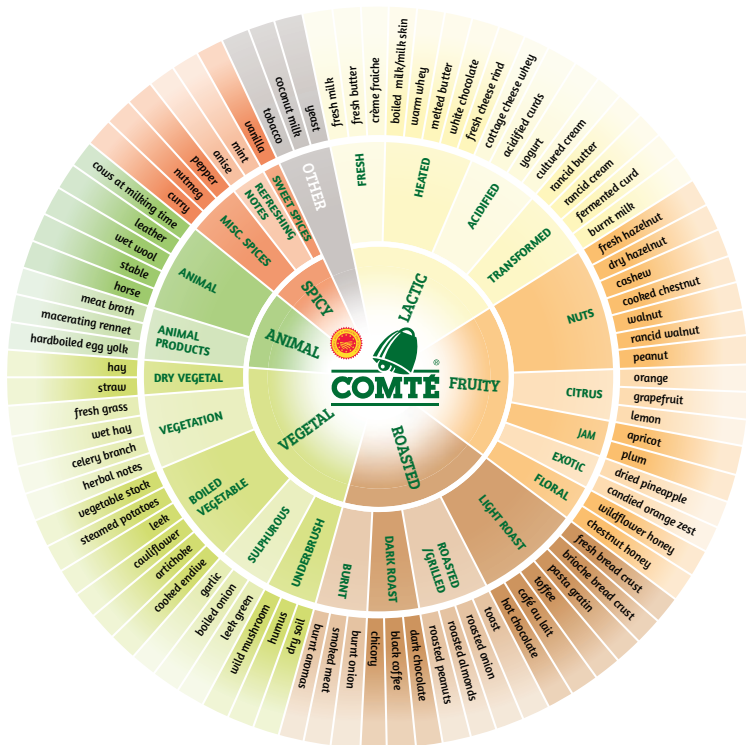
- **The time of year** – The cows' diet changes with the seasons. Comté produced in winter, when the cows are fed locally harvested hay, will be paler in color than the Comté produced in spring, summer and autumn, when the cows graze on fresh plants that are high in carotene. Also, in the same pasture, the varieties of plants change from one month to the next. The cows' diet is thus constantly changing, and this diversity has an effect on the color and taste of the cheese throughout the year.

- **The stages of production** – The quality of the milk is directly correlated to the character of the cheese, and thus dairy farmers must handle the milk in such a way as to preserve quality and foster the rich lactic microflora, which give Comté its specific flavors. Cheesemakers and affineurs also influence the transformation of the milk and the way that the Comté wheels ripen. Cheesemakers adapt their techniques to the milk that they receive, and the affineur chooses the cellars and directs the aging process for each wheel to maximize its potential.

- **The length of time spent aging** – The taste and texture of Comté changes as it ages. A young Comté generally has aromas of fresh butter, dried apricots and soft caramel, whereas a long-matured Comté will be more fruity, spicy and nutty.

- Comté is a living cheese that is likely to surprise you every time you taste it. If your taste buds are curious, if you appreciate subtlety and authenticity, you will love Comté. Whenever possible, we advise that you ask to taste the Comté that is offered before buying it. Cheesemongers take pleasure in sharing their love of flavor and will be happy to give you a taste.





## THE WHEEL OF AROMAS

83 terms or descriptors have been identified that correspond to the most frequently found flavors and aromas in Comté. They are grouped into 6 families: lactic, fruity, roasted, vegetal, animal and spicy.

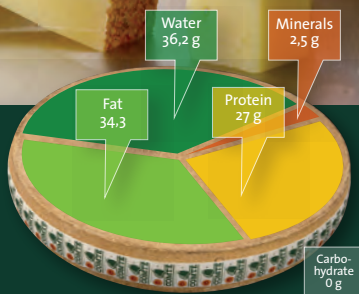


FRUITY, SWEET, SPICY ?  
EACH WHEEL OF COMTÉ TELLS A STORY...  
AND EACH STORY IS DIFFERENT






## Delicious and healthy



Nutrition Information

- Comté not only delights the palates of gourmands. It is also a healthy, natural food whose nutritional contents are useful in maintaining a balanced diet.
- Comté is rich in protein and has a wide variety of amino acids. In fact, it contains all of the “essential” amino acids, which are not produced by humans in sufficient quantities but which are vital for cell construction, for proper functioning of the immune system and for proper healing of body tissue. Scientists have discovered that the quantity of amino acids in cheese increases during the maturing process. Comté is a long-matured cheese, and, in fact, this concentration of amino acids is directly related to its rich flavor. In older Comté, you can sometimes see small white crystals which look like salt, but which are actually the crystallization of the amino acid Tyrosine. Other amino acids, including Proline, Alanine, Glycine, Serine and Threonine, give the sensation of sweetness, while some others emphasize salty flavors.
- Comté is also rich in vitamins A, B2, B12 and D.



A HEALTHY, NATURAL  
FOOD THAT CAN PLAY AN  
IMPORTANT ROLE IN A  
BALANCED DIET.

## Rich in protein, calcium ... and low in salt

- Comté is rich in proteins, especially the easily absorbed kinds (27%) that contribute to the upkeep of muscle mass. Because Comté is a cooked pressed cheese, it is especially rich in calcium and phosphorus, two minerals that contribute to building the skeleton and maintaining bone mass during the entire life. Comté is also rich in two indispensable trace elements: zinc (beneficial to hair, nails and skin) and copper (indispensable to the quality of the bones, the cartilage, the skin and good heart function). For this reason, Comté is often recommended in France for children, pregnant women and the elderly, for whom this high ratio of calcium/phosphorous helps to prevent osteoporosis.
- Despite the impression of saltiness when tasted, Comté is actually a cheese with very little salt. While most cheeses contain between 1.5 to 2 g of salt per 100 g of cheese, Comté has only .8 g of salt per 100 g of cheese (i.e. 0.8%), making it one of the least salty cheeses. This is somewhat paradoxical, as salt is necessary for Comté production. During its long maturing period, Comté is continuously rubbed with salt to assist in the formation of the rind. However, very little of this salt is absorbed into the cheese. (The salt flavor is emphasized by certain amino acids.)

IN A CHEESE SOUFFLÉ



BAKED INTO CUSTARDS



## Delicious combinations



WITH CHUTNEY AND PEPPERS



WITH THE SWEETNESS  
OF VANILLA



LAYERED IN TARTS



BAKED INTO PASTRIES AND BISCUITS



## A few tips for tasting and serving

- From breakfast to an aperitif or cheese platter, to mouthwatering gratins, soufflés and sauces, Comté brings a delicate savory note to all culinary moments of the day! Enjoy it on its own, or use it in recipes such as frittatas, quiches, macaroni and cheese, paninis, polenta, biscuits, salads and much more. Comté also helps to bind sauces and give them body.
- A young Comté has more subtle aromas of fresh hazelnuts, soft caramel and cooked milk, and melts beautifully in pastas and sandwiches. An older Comté has more intense aromas of nuts, melted butter, citrus fruits and toasted bread, and adds rich flavor to dishes ranging from gratins to salads.
- Comté is a great match for wines, particularly the white wines of the Jura which have aromas of dried fruit and spices. It also goes strikingly well with a variety of other dry white wines, young reds and Champagne.



PAIRED WITH CHAMPAGNE



MELTED IN FONDUE

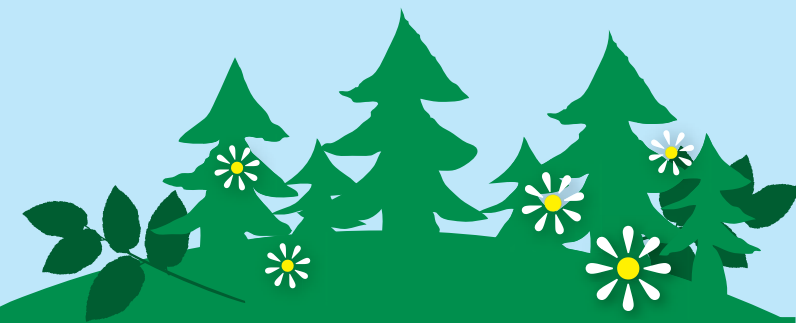


PAIRED WITH THE WINES  
OF THE JURA



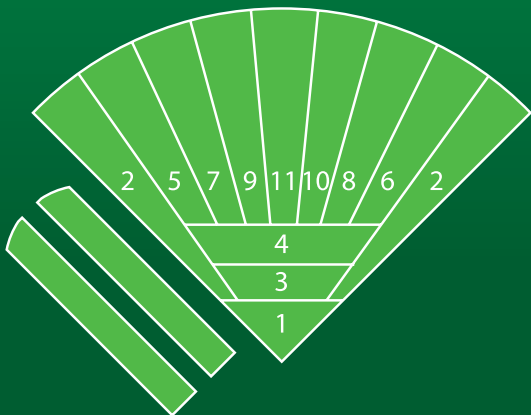
IN APPETIZERS AND HORS  
D'ŒUVRES





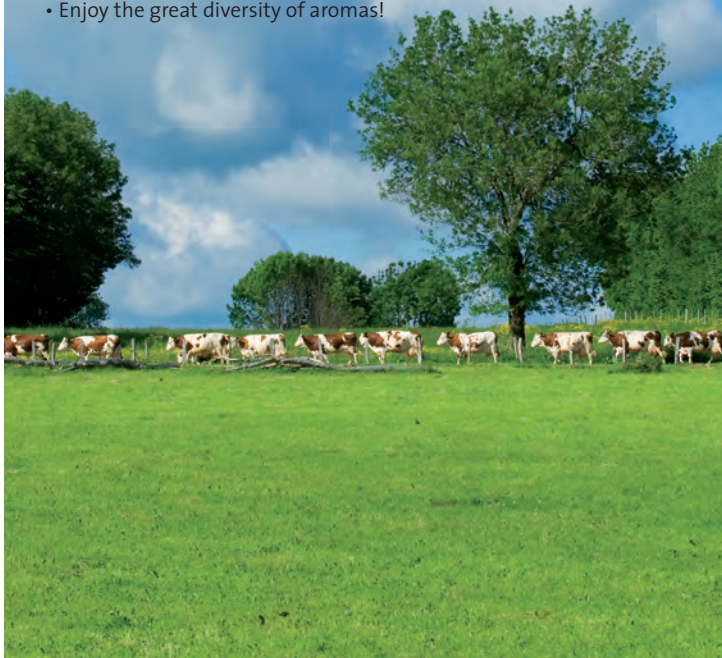
## Cutting Comté

1. For full wheels or for large pieces, use a cheese wire or a double-handled knife to cut the cheese in quarters.
2. Cut the quarter following the illustration below.
3. After cut #4, alternate the cuts so that one side does not dry out
4. Wrap each piece soon after cutting.



# Tips for Buying and Storing Comté

- Comté is either sold pre-cut and wrapped, or is cut-to-order. If possible, it is ideal to buy Comté cut-to-order. In that case, don't hesitate to ask for a taste before you buy.
- Pre-cut Comté is often found in refrigerated bins. It can either be vacuum packed by the producer in France, or cut and wrapped in plastic by the store. If wrapped by the store, favor pieces that are tightly sealed.
- Before buying, examine the color and texture. The color should have a matte appearance and even tone, going from ivory to straw yellow. Avoid pieces that look grey, or have visible moisture on the surface, as this shows that the piece was not properly refrigerated. The texture should appear smooth and uniform.
- If the cheese is in plastic wrap, rewrap it in parchment or butcher paper when you get home. This will help the cheese last longer. Also, cheese that is wrapped in plastic for too long may taste like plastic or may be rancid.
- Store the wrapped cheese in a covered container in the refrigerator. The best temperature to enjoy Comté is between 15°C and 18°C (59-65°F).
- If you're serving Comté as part of a cheese course or on a cheese plate, let it sit at room temperature for one hour before serving for optimal flavor.
- Enjoy the great diversity of aromas!





## Learn more about Comté on the Web!

To learn more about Comté's history and production, as well as to discover recipe ideas and serving tips, watch videos, and download point-of-sale and background materials including Newsletters, Aroma Wheels, Recipe Cards and more, visit:  
[www.comte-usa.com](http://www.comte-usa.com)

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