

Bel Paese Cheese

Characteristics:

Bel Paese, which means "beautiful country," is the trade name of one of the best known and most popular of a group of uncooked, soft, sweet, mild, fast-ripened, Italian table cheeses. Bel Paese was first made about 1920 in Melzo, upper Lombardy, Italy, although cheese of this general type has been made in Italy for approximately 60 years. A similar cheese called Konigskase is made in Robbio, near Pavia, Italy. Others in the group are Bella Alpina, Bella Milano, Bel Piano Lombardo, Bel Piemonte Fior d'Alpe, Savoia, and Vittoria. Similar cheese is marketed in other European countries under such names as Schonland and Fleur des Alpes, and the group is also referred to as Butter cheese, especially in Germany; a similar so-called Butter cheese is made in Canada.

The Method of Making:

A small percentage of an active lactic starter (usually 0.25 percent or slightly more) is added to cow's whole milk (which should be strictly fresh and pasteurized 3.5% fat), at a temperature of 40-43°C 104-110°F. Enough rennet is added so that the curd will be firm enough for cutting in 15 to 20 minutes - usually from 10 to 20 milliliters of rennet (diluted with water) per 45 kg 100 pounds of milk is sufficient.

The curd is cut into 1 cm 3/8-inch cubes and is stirred carefully, at first by hand and then with a rake, to prevent matting and to insure rapid expulsion of the whey. During this period the setting temperature is maintained.

When the curd particles have firmed sufficiently, the whey is drawn off and the curd is dipped into forms placed on reed mats on a draining table.

The forms are preferably square or round perforated metal forms but square wooden forms are also used. A follower, or cover, is placed on the curd in each form. In Italy the curd may be transferred to the forms within 30 minutes after the rennet is added. The cheeses are drained in the forms for 5 to 7 hours and are turned frequently during this period. The room temperature should be about 27°C 80°F. A box cover may be placed over the forms to aid in maintaining the temperature of the cheese.

The cheeses are salted by placing them in a 16- to 18 % salt solution at 13°C 55°F for 14 to 18 hours. Then they are dried and placed on shelves in the curing room in which the temperature is 3-6°C 38-42°F. and the relative humidity is 80 to 90% . Some fine salt may be sprinkled on the surface of the cheeses.

Soon after curing is begun a nearly colorless or slightly gray or brownish slime appears on the surface, and this is desirable for characteristic ripening.

The cheeses are washed with dilute salt brine and are turned 2 or 3 times each week, to keep the slime coating thin and the rind firm and clean.

After 3 or 4 days the outer surface of the cheeses may be colored with dilute cheese color. After 3 weeks in the curing room the cheeses are cleaned thoroughly, dried and wrapped in tinfoil. They may be paraffined before wrapping. The wrapped cheeses are placed in individual cartons and are cured for 2 or 3 weeks or even 6 weeks longer, at the same

temperature, after which they are ready for market.

In some sections of Italy, the cheeses weigh about 2 kg 4 1/2 pounds and are 13-15 cm 5 1/4 to 6 inches in diameter.

The yield is 11-15 kg 11-15 pounds of cheese per 100 kg 100 pounds of milk.