

## Cheese Harps/Curd Cutters

I always wonder why they are called “harps”. Regardless of the name, there is no question they are a handy tool for cutting curd, especially for the horizontal cuts. Cheese making on a commercial scale in large square vats the harps are a pretty straight forward construction. Cutting curd is a bit trickier for home/artisan cheese makers working in a round pot or vat.

Over the years I have seen a few available for sale, all the same size and rather pricey (\$80 - \$90) in my book. So I have been on the hunt for a long time for a DIY project. I use two different sized pots, one 8½ inch diameter for my chevre and feta and a second that is 10 inches for my aged cheeses. I don't mind making two if I can get them to work.

The earliest one I found was here - <https://www.littlegreencheese.com/2013/02/making-your-own-curd-cutter.html>. It looks great. But....I tried a number of times to find the wood for the sides. It needed to be a thin hardwood (that is not easy to find). My workshop includes just the most basic of tools – chop saw, hand saws, sander, and drills. The biggest challenge is to make sure everything is food grade and able to be sanitized either with boiling water, bleach, or dairy sanitizer when doing these projects.

Then a new idea appeared when I read my Moos-letter from New England Cheesemaking Supply one month. A very simple way to cut the curd horizontally - <http://blog.cheesemaking.com/making-horizontal-curd-cutter/> - now – this I could do easily! Instead of marking the ½ inch increments and needing to do cuts the whole depth I drilled holes every ½ inch for the depth of my 1 ½ gallon feta batches. No, they are not straight (no drill press), but that is okay. I used a hardwood dowel and for my wires I bought a cheap stainless steel wire whisk at a discount store. The wires are in with a “medium fit”, I can remove every other one if I am going for a 1 inch curd. Once the dowel is soaked in water the wires stay in well enough for my cut. I have used this for about 4 years. This was about a ½ hour project once I gathered the materials. (If you have read my earlier posts I was not making any aged cheeses then).



Okay, fast forward and now I am making some aged cheese and using a larger pot. Since I need a bigger harp I'll take a look and see what else is out there – Bingo!

I must have missed it earlier but, in the archives I found this gem -

<http://blog.cheesemaking.com/bobs-homemade-curd-cutter-part-2/> - it's a beauty and seems to be doable. I have a vise I can use for bending a small stainless rod, I can use a large dowel for the handle. The local hardware store has stainless screws, washers, fishing line, and glue. I just have to find the stainless rod.

In the meantime, I have been using my 8 ½ inch harp in my big pot to do my curd cutting; not ideal but it does work better than just the knife and ladle. I rarely have insomnia, but a few weeks ago I awoke about 3 AM and could not get back to sleep. Yes, I was thinking about cheese and what a great job my "cheese-sitter" did while we were away for 12 days – then in a flash it came to me – a perfectly simple, fast and cheap cheese harp – easily adaptable to any size pot with a few simple tools. Here it is:

Well that's a baking cooling rack you say – that would be correct! But in my eyes that is a



horizontal cut cheese harp! The next morning I checked out and measured what we had in the cupboard. We have two that are grids (I really only need horizontal) and were my mother's so am not willing to sacrifice, a round one (useless in the pot) and one from an old, long gone toaster oven that is the wrong size.

Off to the computer for research...it appears that 10 inch wide cooling racks are very common so on a number of them I counted the number of horizontals and calculated the spacing – it was from .58 inch to .67 inch. The .58 inch is close enough in my book; better for consistency than hand cut. My big pot is 10 inch diameter – perfect. I priced them and it would be \$6 to \$8 on Amazon. I put the best one on my wish list for the next time we needed to make an order.

As bad luck would have it here on the farm – yesterday we had to make a trip to the urgent care clinic in Augusta. I was the driver, not the wounded one (that's another story – bad rabbit scratch requiring 15 stitches). I dropped Marcia off knowing she would be in professional hands and headed out to do some cruising/shopping (I am not a shopper). The first stop was Goodwill, just a few blocks away, to check out what there might be to add to my growing cheesemaking stash and constant need for better storage solutions for everything around the house and farm. I always have a small tape measure in the truck so I stuck that in my pocket. I headed to housewares first. Yes! There were a whole bunch of cooling racks! I chose an older 10x10 stainless rack, the spacing is ½ inch – perfect for the larger pot - \$2. Then there were 2 10x14 inch racks for \$2. (The bonus was I also found an 8 quart stainless pot for \$6). They are chrome plated (not my first choice) but since they are cooling racks they are food safe I will cut one down for my 8 ½ inch pot and save the other for the next project – I have a small bolt cutter, a hack saw, and linesman pliers, it shouldn't be a problem.

I think I need to make a new batch of aged cheese to see how the new harp works! Just a matter of deciding which cheese I want to make next.