

My Take on Milk – April 20, 2014

Clearly, milk is the most important ingredient in cheese! I started making cheese with store bought pasteurized milk. Then I moved on to my own goat milk, fresh & raw. In that one step I learned about the special taste of goat milk, sweet, well handled, clean milk. Then, because it was raw, I saw the increased yield and because it was unpasteurized (I did not even heat treat), I saw the difference in the curd development.

Now, I no longer have Blue, though I have goat friends who sometimes gift me their extra milk. I am lucky enough in that a licensed organic raw milk cow dairy moved to my town two years ago!

Okay, I understand the controversy over raw milk.

I grew up on raw Jersey milk from a farm "down the road" in Washington State. I have the old gallon milk can, with all the dings, we kids would put it over the handle bars on our bike and ride down to get it. The farmer or helpers would dip the milk out of the bulk tank for us. We had a family tally sheet on the cupboard in the milk room and my parents would pay for it once a month. The jug would go in the fridge, long enough for the cream to rise (especially after the bumpy, swaying up the hill pumping bike ride). Once the cream rose my father would ladle cream off the top to use in his coffee and for special desserts and whipped cream. As a child - do not get caught skimming cream! The rest would be stirred in - it was still very rich milk.

So, here is my take.

If you are absolutely opposed to the use of raw milk then use store bought milk for your cheese.

If you are open to using farm fresh milk and really understanding the meaning of "terror" here are the steps I recommend. First, know your farmer! It needs to be a person you are confident in that their animals are well cared for and their milk is handled and cooled properly. Even better if you can visit the farm and see the process and facilities they use. If you, or a person in your family is pregnant or immune compromised then heat treat* your milk, you will still get greater yield and better curd than pasteurized and homogenized milk. If you serve your cheese to family and friends - always tell them it is from raw milk (if you do not heat treat) and give them the warning about not eating if they are pregnant or immune compromised (I print up a card and put it next to the fresh cheeses). If you are creating cheeses aged 60 days or more you do not need to heat treat. In the US it is legal to make cheese for sale from raw milk if aged at least 60 days. Here is why - if there is bad bacteria in the milk it will grow and spoil the cheese during the aging process, it will be very clear that it should not be eaten!

***heat treating is the process of raising the milk to 145° and holding it at that temperature for 30 minutes, it does kill all the bacteria (good & bad) but it does not increase the shelf life nor alter the structure of the components that higher temperature pasteurization does**