



Summer 2008

Cheese Update

Can genuine farmhouse cheese be made using modern machinery?

Can farmhouse cheese production utilise the best modern machinery, achieve economies of scale, maintain consistent product quality and still hold on to its genuine 'farmhouse' credentials?

It certainly can, according to West Country producer Parkham Farms. Parkham has completed a major programme of expansion and production-line

improvement while maintaining what are often considered the essentials of farmhouse cheese making, including sourcing local milk and hand cheddaring.

David Willes originally purchased Higher Alminstone Farm near Bideford in 1962. In 1984 he decided to add value to the milk from his 150-head dairy unit by creating Parkham Farms farmhouse cheese dairy.



William Beresford (right) with Peter Willes

The venture proved successful, David was joined by son Peter and the company now supplements the output of the farm's 1750-cow dairy herd with milk from 34 neighbouring farms.

In 1994 the company introduced its own milk contract, which rewards high fat and protein content. Twelve of the nearby farms provide organic milk, enabling Parkham to supply an organic range. All of the extra mature farmhouse cheddar is made using microbial rennet so that the cheese is suitable for vegetarians.

By 2006 the farm was making approximately 4000 tonnes of cheese per year, selling to North Downs Dairy Ltd for packing and distribution from Wincanton.

"We have been perfectly happy with our method of marketing. Parkham Farms is not in the right location for distribution and packaging would be a major undertaking. We have sufficient storage for the 12 month maturing stage and it then leaves us in blocks," Peter commented.

Production was, however, at full capacity and there was a variety of aging equipment. Central to the plant were four 12000-litre TP Damrow vats of slightly different type and vintage. Maintaining consistent output was therefore a challenge and the Willes's decided it was time for a major overhaul. In 2007 cheese production stopped, the old buildings were torn down and a new dairy created.

"We had visited other dairies and reviewed the options. Parts of the process including cheddaring, turning the cheese and making

the blocks are unchanged. These are done by hand in the traditional manner. For the other stages we wanted the right equipment for the job."

At the heart of the new system are four 17,500-litre Tetra Tebel OST V CH vats. Within each of these are groups of rotating cutting and stirring blades which are specially designed to give even curd size distribution. Rennet is fed into the vat at several points to ensure even distribution throughout the vessel and as the milk curdles and firms it is cut by the rotating knives. Reversing the knives provides a mixing action with the blunt side of the blades, avoiding sedimentation.

An optional addition on these vats is a partial draw down facility which allows some of the whey to be emptied before the process is finished. This is an essential feature when manually processing the cheese on working tables to minimise any hold ups in the process. Each of the vats is managed by a touch-screen control unit, which is programmed with the 'recipes' to help ensure a consistent product at this stage. When the recipe is complete, curds and whey are drained out of the OST vat onto long, shallow Tetra Damrow Open Finishing Vats (OFV) where the remaining whey is removed using a specially designed central drainage channel while the curds are stirred, before being formed into slabs. The slabs are then turned by hand and milled and salted. At the end of this labour intensive conditioning process the curds are ready to be formed into blocks, pressed and sent to the packing room to be wrapped ready for storage.



Tetra Tebel OST V CH vats



Hand turning the slabs



Parkham Farms new vats

With installation carried out by Sycamore Engineering and overseen by William Berrisford of Tetra Pak Processing UK, the dairy was soon back in production. The new vats have increased capacity by 50%, giving a potential output of 6000 tonnes per year, although the target for 2008 is 5000 tonnes. Around 36 staff were needed to run the old dairy and it is anticipated the number will need to increase to 50, making Parkham Farms an important employer in this quiet part of Devon.

"This is a major project for us and we see this as an investment for the next 20 years. Our main aim is to provide consistently high quality and from what we can see at this stage, that is what we will achieve with the new dairy. I think sometimes we need to look at the bigger picture and that is what we are trying to do here. We are confident there is a demand for our product and that helps us to be optimistic for the future," Peter stated.

Awards for cheese makers and journalists



Tetra Pak Processing UK sponsors one of the most popular classes at the Nantwich International Cheese Show, the Single Extra Mature Cheddar Class. Regularly attracting more than 40 entries, the class is one of the largest at the show.

Also presented at the event is the Tetra Pak Processing Solutions Award, an annual award for the best published or broadcast articles on the subject of liquid food processing. This includes cheese, milk

and ice cream. Sponsored in association with the Guild of Agricultural Journalists, there is also a category for liquid food processing in farm diversification.

Last year cheese was well represented, including an award to Mike Green for an article in British Dairying on award winning farmhouse cheese business "Mr Moyden's Handmade Cheese".

Tetra Pak Processing UK secures top safety accreditation

Tetra Pak Processing UK has secured accreditation from SAFEcontractor, a scheme which recognizes the very high standards of health and safety amongst UK contractors.

The company already has an exemplary record for health and safety in the UK and supports the concept of third party accreditation as a means of improving standards across the industry.

SAFEcontractor is operated by national safety, health and environmental risk management specialists the National Britannia Group. The system is applicable to most sectors although it is particularly relevant to food manufacture, property, facilities management, retail and leisure sectors.

Under the SAFEcontractor system, businesses undergo a vetting process which examines health and safety procedures and their track record for safe practice. Those companies meeting the high standard required are included on a database, which is accessible to registered users only via a website, www.safecontractor.com.

Client organisations that sign up to the scheme agree to contract only those companies that have received accreditation.

Alan Stack of Tetra Pak Processing said: "Health and Safety is paramount in all sectors, not just those traditionally seen as high risk. SAFEcontractor accreditation demonstrates our continued commitment

to safe working throughout the installation of clients' food processing systems."

James Ostler, managing director of information service at National Britannia said: "Major organisations can no longer run the risk of employing contractors who are not able to prove they have sound health and safety policies. More companies need to understand the importance of adopting good risk management in the way that Tetra Pak Processing has done. The company's high standard has set an example which hopefully will be followed by other businesses within the sector."

Tetra Pak buys Downer MBL



Tetra Pak has purchased Downer MBL, a major company in New Zealand's important milk powder market.

The organisation has a unique knowledge of the powder business gained as a result of selling and implementing some of the world's largest powder plants. Within the Tetra Pak group it will continue to be responsible for evaporation and powder solutions as part of the Cheese and Powder Systems business unit.

