

The Home Dairy News

Issue 1 - Special Sample Issue



Making the Most of Milk

December 2001 (updated Oct 2007)

Making Your Own Cheese

Everybody has to start somewhere. This first issue of The Home Dairy News contains some really basic information for those just beginning to venture into the world of cheesemaking. Future issues will be devoted to specific types of cheeses and other dairy products like butter, yogurt and ice cream. Animal care, grazing and related topics will also get attention. But for now, let's talk about cheesemaking basics.

What You Need and Where to Get It

High quality milk

I'm assuming that most readers of this publication have milk animals, and that getting milk is less of a problem than what you are going to do with all the milk you have. Briefly, however, we'll talk a bit about making cheese from purchased milk.

The biggest problem with store-bought milk is that it is very highly processed. It's been pasteurized, homogenized, clarified, had vitamins added and more. Don't even bother to try to make cheese from ultrapasteurized milk. The high temperatures used have likely destroyed the calcium structure needed for coagulation. If you can find it, use unhomogenized (creamline) milk, as fresh as possible.

In a few states it is legal to buy limited amounts of fresh milk direct from the farm; the usual rule is that the farmer cannot advertise and the consumer must bring his or her own container to the farm. In most states, though, raw milk sales are illegal. You and the farmer may be willing to ignore the law by mutual agreement, but be aware that if someone gets sick and has to have medical treatment, raw milk will automatically be high on the suspect list. If the illness involves an insurance claim, the insurance company can sue the farmer without your consent, and the courts are likely to look very unfavorably on an illegal sale.¹ The likelihood

of illness and subsequent lawsuit is small, but just be aware of the possible consequences.

If you are buying milk from a farmer, legally or not, be sure to observe the conditions on the farm, the animals and the farmer's habits. A general sloppiness around the place may be a warning that the farmer is either lazy or overworked, and that trend may extend to his or her milking routine. I'm not saying that the farm has to be picture-perfect – most farmers are consistently behind in their work – but notice whether the animals appear reasonably clean, particularly around the udder. Do they have clean bedding or pasture to spend most of their time in? Is mud a major problem? (Mud can be a major problem on *any* farm during extended periods of rain, but the animals should have some place to hang out that isn't a mud-manure pit.) Is there a strong smell of ammonia on the farm, indicating waste management problems? If at all possible, observe the farmer milking several times. Is the milking parlor reasonably clean? Is manure removed at least once a day, preferably after each milking? Does s/he clean and dry the animals' teats



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Welcome to The Home Dairy News!

Hello. As the editor of *CreamLine* quarterly newsletter, I've long sensed the need for a separate publication designed for folks who have ventured into the amazing and exciting world of home dairying, but who have no immediate desire to go commercial. Many of the requests I get for sample issues are from people who tell me they have "one Jersey cow" or "five goats," and they are disappointed to learn that *CreamLine* is a bit technical and definitely skewed toward the small commercial dairy. Several homesteading publications print occasional articles on dairying, and some goat specialty magazines contain excellent articles, but – to my knowledge – there is no longer a widely distributed publication devoted to home dairying and making dairy products on that scale. *The Cheesemakers' Journal*, published by Ricki Carroll et al. of New England Cheesemaking Supply, was probably the best U.S. home dairy newsletter around, but it hasn't been in print for several years now, and these days Ricki is venturing into new territory with cheese-oriented CD-ROMs and Web work.

Me, I'm of the old school. While I enjoy using the computer as a tool, I do not enjoy reading material on the computer. Even when I find some really good stuff on the Internet, I print it out and take it to my comfy sofa to read under a soft incandescent light, and perhaps to save for future reference. And I don't trust the trend toward committing important ideas and information solely to magnetic memory. When the computer is down at the local library there is no way to locate a book unless you have a good understanding of the complex cataloguing system. I also worry about magnetic media becoming unavailable or being controlled by a few people. The whole scenario is a little scary.

So here in your hands is the first issue of *The Home Dairy News*, printed on paper with post-consumer content, as all issues will be, out of consideration for our trees and landfills. Let me hear from you – I'd like to know what readers are interested in, and invite you to share what you've learned with others through this medium. My plan is to have many guest writers share their expertise in this monthly newsletter, which will vary from 4 to 8 pages.

Update, 2007: As of last year, Home Dairy News has been published six times per year instead of monthly. However, the size has doubled, so current issues are 16 pages instead of 8.

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before milking? In a hand-milking situation, is care taken to cover the milk after each animal is milked? What about handwashing? If the farmer uses machines, does s/he keep the claws up off the floor and dip them in sanitizer between animals? Is there any attempt to control flies and rodents? Is the milk filtered and refrigerated quickly? Do the animals seem generally content or are they agitated?

Once you have the milk, there are some simple things you can do to test its quality. From a farm supply store you can purchase an inexpensive kit (CMT, or California Mastitis Test kit) to test for high somatic cell count, which indicates mastitis in one or more animals. (NASCO is one source,² or try your local farm cooperative.) Mastitis may be caused by organisms that can cause disease in humans, and it can also affect your cheesemaking in various ways. In a later issue we will go into more detail on mastitis. If you see little specks that look like dust floating on top of the milk, the milk probably has a high somatic cell count (SCC).

You can also check for high levels of undesirable bacteria. Pour a cup of the milk (as fresh as possible) into a sterilized jar and cover with sterile lid. Allow to set at room temperature, about 65-80° F, until the milk thickens and curdles, between 12 and 48 hours. Dirty milk may be “gassy,” giving off lots of little bubbles, and may smell bad. Contaminated milk may also become ropy or stringy, or release a large amount of whey during this time. Clean milk will sour (become more acid) and form a pleasant-smelling yogurt-like curd. A cheese that swells in the cheese press (or when drying), and when cut open has lots of small round holes in it, has most likely been contaminated with *E. coli*.

If you are going to pasteurize the milk, minor contamination is usually not a big problem, but remember: **“You can’t make good cheese from bad milk.”** In future issues we’ll discuss ways to improve milk quality.

Equipment and Utensils

Large pot: Most home cheesemakers use a four-gallon stainless steel pot for making cheese. This size is about as large as you can get readily and reasonably inexpensively. Four gallons is heavy – each gallon of milk weighs 8.6 pounds – so for lifting and pouring

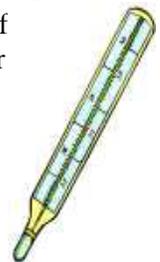
purposes you don’t want to get much bigger than that anyway. Invest in a good quality, heavy-duty pot with a lid. Thin-bottomed pots will result in easily scorched milk and much frustration. (I have one friend who burned a hole all the way through her cheap pot.) You can certainly make cheese in smaller quantities, but if you want to make hard cheeses you’ll appreciate the larger size. The yield for most hard cheeses is about one pound per gallon of milk, and it can take all day to make cheeses like Cheddar and real Mozzarella.

Water jacket pot: For best results, a pot larger than your cheese pot, which can be used as a water jacket, is very nice to have to keep temperatures steady. A large enamel canning pot works great and is inexpensive. If you are really serious, you might investigate the Weck canner. It is temperature-controlled, looks rather like a large stainless crockpot, and costs around \$200-\$250.³ The Weck can also be used in place of a home pasteurizer.

Home pasteurizer: This is not an absolute necessity, since you can pasteurize milk in any pot as long as you hold it at the right temperature for the right amount of time, but many home-scale cheesemakers purchase a home pasteurizer because it has a timer and thermostat, making the process easier. *This equipment will not give you a legal-for-sale product in most states.* The 2-gallon SafGard pasteurizer is available from most home dairy supply companies and different models cost between \$215 and \$335. The home pasteurizer comes with an aluminum pail for some reason, and you may need to purchase a stainless pail in addition, since aluminum reacts with milk.

Long-handled slotted spoon or skimmer: At the very least you need a long-handled slotted spoon for stirring, preferably all-stainless. This can be about a \$10 investment, but you’ll appreciate it in the long run. The Martha Stewart line at K-Mart has some nice choices. By the way, Martha is a tireless promoter of small-scale farms, fresh local food and artisanal cheese, so I support her even if she is a billionaire with nothing better to do than arrange things.

Dairy Thermometer: Another \$10-ish item, a dairy thermometer, is a must for making cheese. Most cheeses are



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just a combination of milk and some form of acidifier (culture or direct acid), with perhaps a little rennet or other coagulant added for quicker curd formation. Time and temperature are the major factors that determine what kind of cheese you will end up with, so it is important to monitor the temperature carefully. Dairy thermometers are available from most dairy supply companies (see resource list). A floating glass thermometer is reasonably accurate but may break, and sometimes is hard to read because of milk on the outside. Digital thermometers are great when they work, but are notoriously unreliable. I made the mistake of using mine for making ricotta cheese, which has to be heated to 190°, and the temperature reading never came down below 150° again. Thirty-five bucks shot! A long-stemmed stainless thermometer with a clip to hold it on the side of the pan is probably the best way to go; be aware that these thermometers must be calibrated frequently, but it is not difficult to do.

Curd knife: You need a (preferably) stainless steel blade long enough to reach the bottom of a four-gallon pot. New England Cheesemaking carries a 12" curd knife, and Glengarry offers a plastic curd cutter and a large whisk for cutting curds. A cutlery store may have appropriate knives, but they can be expensive.

Cheesecloth: The stuff they sell as "cheesecloth" in most stores will not work for making cheese. The best cheesecloth is open-weaved plain cotton muslin, but it is very difficult to find, even in large fabric stores. If you can't locate a source, the cheesemaking supply companies may be your best bet.

Colander: A large stainless colander is a very good investment - not an absolute requirement but it makes life easier. Get one at a hardware or discount store; you don't have to go to the gourmet shop for this.

Measuring cups and spoons: Glass or stainless cups are best. If you don't already have them at home, they can be purchased most anywhere. Get a set of spoons that includes a 1/8 teaspoon measure if possible.

Molds: Once you get beyond chèvre spreads, you may need to purchase or make cheese molds. These, too,

are available from cheesemaking supply companies. They are generally quite expensive, but most will last for many years. Most are made of a special dairy plastic that is easy to clean. If you have plenty of time on your hands, consider making molds out of disposable food-grade plastic containers. They will work fine for homemade cheeses. Drill holes in the sides and then file down the pieces sticking into the mold on the inside around the holes. (You can also burn holes in them with a heated nail.) The number, size and placement of holes depends on the type of cheese you are making, so it's a good idea to copy a mold made for the specific kind of cheese you want to get appropriate drainage.

Cheese mats: These are used for draining and drying cheese. Most home cheesemakers use nylon needle-point canvas, either by the yard or in shapes (especially circles), for cheese mats. Reed mats (like sushi mats) also work for draining, and may add to the flavor of your cheeses.

Racks: Draining cheeses requires that you get them up off a solid surface so that moisture doesn't stay on the bottom of the cheese. There are many kinds of racks available in home improvement and restaurant supply stores. Chrome-plated ones tend to rust and stainless racks are quite costly, so many home cheesemakers use plastic-coated wire racks of a size that fits over whatever is used as a draining tub.

Draining tub: Many cheesemakers drain cheeses directly into a sink, but this is not really a good idea for several reasons: (1) it keeps the sink occupied for a long time; and (2) whey does not biodegrade easily. If you have a septic system you definitely don't want to drain a lot of whey into your sink, as a buildup of the fats, acids and solids in whey can result in failure of your septic system. If draining cheese in cheesecloth bags, it's simple to put a pot or bucket underneath, but when using molds, better use a tub (such as a Rubbermaid tub) with a rack laid across the top to hold the cheeses out of the whey. If you are using bottomless molds, such as for Camembert, you will need a drainage mat on top of the rack. Save the whey for making ricotta, feed it to animals or use it (sparingly) as a fertilizer on your lawn or garden.



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Cheese Press: Many, many cheeses can be made without a real cheese press, but if you want to make Cheddar and some of the other hard cheeses you will probably want to invest in one. Pre-made cheese presses, available from dairy supply companies, can be quite expensive, but you can make a simple press. There are instructions for homemade cheese presses on the web sites for Dave Fankhauser (<http://Biology.clc.uc.edu/Fankhauser/Cheese/Cheese.html>) and FiasCo Farm (www.fiasco-farm.com). These sites, by the way, both have excellent visual instructions for cheesemaking and more. New England Cheesemaking Supply sells plans for an “off-the-wall” press for \$2.95.



Ingredients (other than milk)

Starter cultures: These are the friendly bacteria that acidify milk so that it will properly coagulate (gel) to make cheese curd, turning milk sugar (lactose) into lactic acid. Most beginning home cheesemakers purchase cultures from a cheesemaking supply company because they are simple to use and reliable. There are a number of different kinds of starters, and recipes are often confusing because they don't specify one type or another.

DVI (direct vat inoculant) cultures come in powder form, which are simply added to the cheese milk. These are very convenient. They may take awhile to get “started” after being in the freezer until time of use, so the usual practice is to add the culture to the milk, allow it to ripen for at least half an hour, and then later add rennet. DVI cultures are used in very small quantities, ¼ to ½ tsp to a four-gallon pot of milk.

If the recipe calls for 4 ounces, or 2 tablespoons or a similar amount, it is asking for a prepared culture. Powdered cultures are available from which to make your own starter using a process similar to making yogurt. The culture must be made a day or two in advance, or it can be frozen until you need it. When you are ready

to make cheese, you simply add the starter culture to your cheese and it will start to work right away. There is a somewhat complicated procedure for making a mother culture and daughter cultures, used to carry on your cultures indefinitely, which will be the subject of an upcoming article. It is also possible to make “native” cultures using organisms that come from your own dairy environment, also to be discussed in the future.

You can use buttermilk as a mesophilic (medium-temperature) starter and plain yogurt as a thermophilic (warm-temperature) starter, but you must be sure that the products you use contain active cultures.



Some dairy supply companies sell special cultures that also contain rennet and other ingredients. They are okay as long as you use them for the very specific purpose for which they are intended, but it's nearly impossible to figure out what exactly these cultures are and how to adapt them to other recipes.

Rennet: Rennet is the substance that is usually used to make cheese coagulate, or turn into a curd. Traditionally, rennet was made from an extract from the fourth stomachs of young milk-fed animals. This is sold as “calf rennet” or “natural rennet,” but it is getting harder to find and more expensive, largely as the result of the actions of animal rights activists and a decrease in the demand for veal. Rennet can be made from the stomachs of other kinds of animals, but in the U.S. kid and lamb rennet are virtually unavailable. Many cheesemakers feel that calf rennet works best of all rennets, but most commercial cheesemakers are experimenting with non-animal-derived types because their vegetarian and vegan customers find the use of calf rennet offensive. Animal rights issues notwithstanding, there is something to be said for the preservation of methods that do not require high-tech laboratories and corresponding dependency on multinational corporations for the production of a food as basic as cheese.

You may see references to rennet paste. This is often used for flavor development in traditional ripened Italian cheeses, but is virtually unavailable in the U.S.

There are several new types of rennets available now. A so-called “vegetable rennet” has nothing to do with

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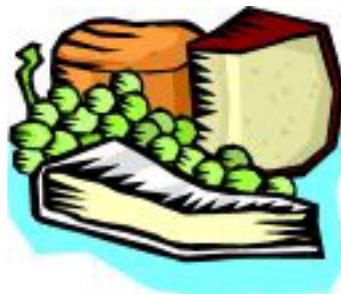
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vegetables, but is actually produced in laboratories as enzyme by-products generated by microorganisms (fungi or bacteria). The most commonly available is derived from the fungus *Mucor miehei*. One brand name of this type is Marzyme.

Genetic manipulation has been used to transfer pro-chymosin genes (those responsible for the production of chymosin, the active ingredient in rennet) from young calves into microbes. These microbial cells are fermented and then the cells are destroyed; the pro-chymosin is activated to produce chymosin, then pure chymosin is harvested.⁴ Some of the rennet preparations made in this way are Chy-Max, Chymogen, and Chymostar. You may also see these referred to as fermented or “cloned” chymosin.

“Junket” rennet tablets can sometimes be found in grocery stores and are still used by some for making cheese. However, many cheesemakers find these tablets are difficult to work with, mainly because most recipes call for liquid rennet and it’s hard to determine the right amount.

Finally, there are some plants that produce coagulating enzymes, and certain cheeses specifically require these plant coagulants. Many plants have coagulation properties but produce unsatisfactory, bitter cheeses. Cardoon (*Cynara cardu-naculus*) flowers are known to produce one satisfactory coagulant, and in a future issue we will explore the preparation of cardoon “rennet” and other plant-derived coagulants.



Mold cultures: If you are making mold-ripened cheeses like Brie or bleu cheese, you will want to purchase the specific *Penicillium* molds for inoculation of those cheeses from a cheesemaking supply house or supplier of cultures, such as Dairy Connection.

Salt: Most cheesemakers agree that Kosher salt is the best readily-available salt for cheese. It comes in three-pound boxes in the salt section of the grocery store. If you can’t find it, ask the manager to order it for you.

Coloring: If you are making cow milk cheese, particularly from a grass-fed Guernsey or Jersey, you will not likely need any coloring except in the dead of winter. You will get nice, naturally yellow cheeses and butter as long as they are on pasture. However, goats, sheep and Holsteins are not as generous with the secretion of beta-carotene into their milk, and if you want color you have to add it. The most common colorant for cheese and butter is annatto, made from the seed of the annatto tree, available from cheese supply companies. You can also make your own coloring by whizzing very clean carrots in a blender and adding a little of the filtered juice to your cheese milk.

Other: Cheese comes in so many varieties and interesting forms that this list could go on indefinitely, but I will just list here a few other ingredients that you may need, depending on what type of cheese you are making. Cheeses with eyes require special gas-producing bacteria that are responsible for eye formation; the coating on a cheese like Muenster is made up of a special red bacterial growth; brine or cheeses made from store-bought milk may require the addition of calcium chloride; you might want to spice up your feta with lipase; if you can’t wait all day for Mozzarella you can add citric acid for quick results. All of these ingredients and many other supplies are available from the cheesemaking supply companies listed on page 7. &

¹ Hamilton, Neil D., *The Legal Guide for Direct Farm Marketing*. Des Moines, IA: Drake University Agricultural Law Center, 1999. Available from the Center at Drake University, Des Moines 50311; (515) 271-2947. \$20, spiral bound paperback.

² NASCO, 901 Janesville Ave, Fort Atkinson WI 53538. (920) 563-2446. www.enasco.com.

³ Available from Khimaira Farm, 2974 Stonyman Road, Luray VA 22835. Phone: (540) 743-4628. Web site: www.khimairafarm.com.

⁴ Kosikowski, Frank V. and Vikram V. Mistry, *Cheese and Fermented Milk Foods, vol. 1: Origins & Principles*. 3rd Edition. Westport, CT: F. V. Kosikowski, L.L.C., 1997. pp. 391-395.

Suggested Books for Beginners

There is no such thing as a perfect cheesemaking book. All have their strengths and weaknesses. You will probably need more than one.

The Cheesemaker's Manual by Margaret Morris, 2003. Suitable for cheesemakers with some experience. Available from Glengarry Cheesemaking & Dairy Supply, \$49.95 Canadian). See suppliers below.

The Fabrication of Farmstead Goat Cheese by Jean-Claude Le Jaouen; 1987. Available from The CreamLine Bookshelf and other sources. Approximately \$24.

Goat Cheese: Small Scale Production (*Fromages de Chèvre: fabrication artisanale*) by the Mont-Laurier Benedictine Nuns (translation by Eveline Inksetter), 1983. Available from New England Cheesemaking Supply Co. and Hoegger Supply Company. \$8.95-\$9.95, paperback.

Goats Produce Too!: The Udder Real Thing, Volume II, by Mary Jane Toth. Coleman, MI: Mary Jane Toth, 1989. Sixth edition, July 1998. Available from the author at 2833 N. Lewis Road, Coleman, MI 48618. (517) 465-1982. \$12.95 + \$2 shipping. Also from cheesemaking supply companies. Spiral bound paperback.

Home Cheese Making by Ricki Carroll, 2003. Available from the CreamLine Bookshelf and other sources. Approximately \$17.

Making Great Cheese by Barbara Ciletti. Asheville, NC: Lark Books, 1999. Available from New England Cheesemaking Supply Co.; also may be special-ordered through local bookstores or on-line. \$24.95, hardcover.

Practical Cheesemaking by Kathy Biss. Revised and updated 2002. Available on the CreamLine Bookshelf.

Videos

Cheesemaking 101 with Ricki Carroll. 45 minutes. Cheeses covered include farmhouse cheddar, fromage blanc, crème fraîche, queso blanco, ricotta, mascarpone and microwave mozzarella. There are also "cheese stories." Available from New England Cheesemaking Supply Co., \$24.95.

Home Cheesemaking with Margaret Morris. 125 minutes. Margaret shows you, in detail, how to make feta, camembert, gouda and cheddar. From Glengarry Cheesemaking & Dairy Supply. \$39.95 Canadian (\$25.27 USD – but ask for current exchange rate). Also from Hoegger Supply (price unknown).

Simple Cheesemaking at Home with Lynette Croskey. 90 min. Cheeses include queso blanco, whole milk ricotta, herb cheese, Muenster, cheddar and instant mozzarella. Available from Lehman's Non-Electric Catalog, \$24.95.

Favorite Suppliers' Contact Information

Dairy Connection (cultures)
8616 Fairway Place, #101
Middleton, WI 53562
(608) 836-0464; 836-7791 FAX
www.dairyconnection.com

Glengarry Cheesemaking & Dairy Supply
RR #2
Alexandria, Ontario
K0C 1A0. Canada
(613) 525-3133; 525-3394 FAX
www.glengarrycheesemaking.on.ca

Hoegger Supply Company
160 Providence Road
Fayetteville GA 30215
(800) 221-4628 (orders only)
(770) 461-6926; 461-7334 FAX
www.hoeggergoatsupply.com

Leener's Brew Works
142 East Aurora Rd
Northfield OH 44067
(800) 543-3697
www.leeners.com

Lehman's Non-Electric Catalog
One Lehman's Circle
P.O. Box 321
Kidron, OH 44636
(330) 857-5757
www.lehmans.com

New England Cheesemaking Supply
PO Box 85
Ashfield, MA 01330
(413) 628-3808; 628-4061 FAX
www.cheesemaking.com

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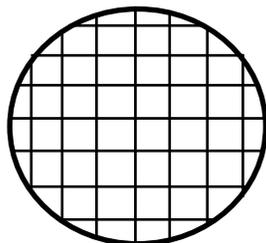
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Fromage Frais ("Fresh Cheese," often called "Chèvre" when made with goat milk)

(For cow or sheep milk cheese you may need to adjust the amount of rennet downwards slightly if the cheese comes out crumbly.)

Warm 2 gallons pasteurized goat milk to 72° F. Add ¼ tsp DVI mesophilic culture. Allow the powder to sit on top of the milk for a couple of minutes to hydrate, then stir in well, at least 20 strokes. (Alternatively, add 4 ounces prepared starter culture or buttermilk containing active cultures.) Cover and allow the mixture to ripen at approximately 72° F. for 5-6 hours. Add 12-15 drops liquid rennet to ¼ cup cool water, then stir this into the milk. Within 1½ hours you should have a firm, yogurt-like curd. Scoop the curd gently into molds or into a large piece of cheesecloth from which you can form a bag. Some folks cut the curd vertically before scooping, about 1" in both directions, but not horizontally. This facilitates drainage.

*Curd Cutting Pattern
(looking down on pot)*



If using a bag, hang and allow to drain for around 12 hours or overnight. It may be helpful to take the bag down at least once and stir the curd gently to promote drainage. When the curd is at the desired level of dryness, dump the cheese into a bowl and stir in ¾ tsp to 1 tsp salt per pound of cheese. Add herbs and/or other ingredients if desired. Pack in tubs and chill.

Molded cheeses should be allowed to drain for about two days. They will have shrunken substantially. Just before unmolding, salt the bottoms lightly, then unmold and salt the tops. I use a stainless shaker purchased from a gourmet supply store, and shake about 10 times on each side for small (2-3") shapes. I prefer Kosher salt, which is fairly coarse and doesn't come out too fast. Adjust for finer grades of salt. If the cheese is fairly wet, it's a good idea to dry it for another day on a rack with a mat on it, preferably in a cool room with good airflow. In summer it is better to dry the cheese in a refrigerator, reducing the possibility of premature blue and black mold contamination. These cheeses store well in a Tupperware type container with deli paper or wax paper between layers, or can be individually wrapped. They should be eaten within a week, but will freeze well if you can't get through them all. ♦