

All in a Day's Work

Edel Foley - Cheesemaker

Edel Foley works as a cheese maker in Stoneyford Co. Kilkenny. She makes award-winning cheese, using the best quality goat, sheep and cow's milk sourced from local farmers.

www.knockdrinna.com



Where do you work?

I work for Knockdrinna Farmhouse Cheese, which is owned by Helen Finnegan and I work with her to produce a range of goat, sheep, and cow cheeses, which have earned over 40 International and Irish awards.

What training did you do to get where you are today?

When I left school I trained as a chef at the Cork Institute of Technology, specialising as a pastry chef. The training I got for this job was firstly from my boss who showed me the ropes. As she herself was learning too, we both did some cheese-making courses in England and also went to France to see how they do it there. Some of their methods are different than in Ireland. We are constantly learning new things and ways to improve our cheeses.

Why is goat's cheese so popular?

That's a hard question for me to answer. I guess it's so different to a cow's cheddar cheese so people like a different flavour. Also

because goat's milk is made up differently to other milk it's easier to digest and people with food allergies / intolerances can have it without it causing problems for them.

What equipment do you use?

We don't use a huge amount of equipment. We have two vats which each hold 700 litres of milk. We use a metal cutter like a wide comb to cut the curd. We stir the cheese with a big plastic shovel! We put the curds in moulds to form the cheese and we use three different sizes. One is 10cm wide for our soft goat's cheese (about 150g). Another mould is about 24cm for our hard cheese (holds 3 or 4 kg depending on which cheese). Our third mould holds a cheese which weighs about 1kg and that mould is just like a plastic strainer used at home!! We have a hydraulic press for pressing the hard cheese, which helps it to drain more and forms a firmer wheel of cheese.

What would you do if you weren't doing what you do?

If I wasn't doing this job I'd love to bake. I sometimes make cakes and other treats to sell in the Farmshop which is part of Knockdrinna as well.

What is the best piece of advice you have ever had?

The best advice I ever got was from my father when I was starting college. He told me to get to know everybody first, and then choose my friends. And that's what I still do! That's how I have such good friends in my life today!

This is our cheese-making vat. We usually work with 600 or 700 litres of milk. Once the milk has been pasteurised we add a starter (culture) to get the acidity working in the milk. After half an hour we add rennet which sets the milk to a solid state. Once it has set we cut the curd (which is the solids) and this also produces whey (the liquid). This is what you see in the vat at this stage. Only the curd is then used for the cheese. The whey is drained off.



Above: Knockdrinna Snow, a soft goat's cheese. Below: Knockdrinna Kilree Goats Cheese.



We ripen some of the cheeses on shelves. We wash the rind (the outside) with a mix of salt and water twice a week until they are 3 weeks old. After that we just turn them so they develop a nice even golden colour.