How Traditional French Camembert Is Made

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1. What is the name of the farm?

○ a.) Bermonville

○ b.) Le 5 Frères

2. To be called Camembert, the cheese must have _____.

○ a.) 42% fat content

○ b.) 22% fat content

3. Legend has it that Camembert was first made in 1791 by Marie Harel, a _____ in Normandy.

○ a.) priest

○ b.) farmer

4. Le 5 Frères is a family-run farm that makes _____ wheels of Camembert every day.

○ a.) 500

○ b.) 400

5. How many liters of milk does it take to make one wheel of Camembert?

○ a.) 3

○ b.) 2

6. Camembert ages for _____ then it is packaged in paraffin paper and placed in a wooden box.

○ a.) two to three weeks

○ b.) four to five weeks

7. When Claudia tries the cheese, she says _____ she's ever had.

○ a.) it's the creamiest Camembert

○ b.) it's the best Camembert

8. France makes _____ wheels of Camembert each year.

○ a.) 630 million

○ b.) 360 million

9. Traditional Camembert is made _____.

○ a.) using raw milk

○ b.) all over the world

Transcript

Claudia Romeo: Sweet and creamy, Camembert holds a special place in the heart of cheese lovers.

Today we're in Normandy, France, and we are in the village of Bermonville. We are visiting Le 5 FrÃ¨res, which is a local farm, to see how traditional farmhouse Camembert cheese is made.

To be called Camembert, a cheese has to weight at least 250 grams, be 10 centimeters in diameter, and have about 22% fat content. And it has to come from Normandy. This region in Northern France is, in fact, where the cheese was born.

Legend has it that it was first made in 1791 in the village of Camembert by Marie Harel, a farmer from Normandy, after a priest from Brie shared cheesemaking tips with her. Although Marie really existed, it's probable that the cheese originated a few centuries earlier, in the 12th century. But thanks to Marie and her family after her, Camembert started to be produced on a larger scale and gained popularity.

Fast forward a few hundred years. The Normands still take great pride in it.

Claudia: Le 5 FrÃ¨res is a family-run farm that grows wheat, rapeseed, barley, and other cereals. It makes 400 wheels of Camembert every day.

Claudia: It takes 2 liters of milk to make one wheel of Camembert. Before being transformed into cheese, the milk has to mature for a day. This allows microorganisms to flourish and to acidify the milk, so when rennet is added, the curd develops faster. Then the milk is ladled by hand five times every hour.

Claudia: After ladling, the cheese is salted and left to dry for one day.

Claudia: Camembert ages for four to five weeks. This allows a fungus to grow all around the cheese and age it.

Claudia: Traditionally, Camembert is packaged in paraffin paper and placed in a wooden box.

Claudia: You may associate Camembert with a strong, stinky cheese smell. It's actually because of the milk used.

Claudia: So, this is the Camembert that Charles just cut for us. Let's give it a try. Oh, it's nice. It's nice. I mean, to be honest, I'm not sure how you could wait two more weeks. It's really good. Biting into the outside part of the cheese, you start to get those typical flavors of Camembert. You get the gooeyness, you get a bit of a sour aftertaste. You can taste more of the milk in here, and you can taste that it's raw milk. Maybe it's not as, like, creamy as, you know, the one that I'm used to, that is, like, just the standard one I buy at the supermarket, but, again, the flavors here are stronger. Like, the flavors here are more robust, and actually, if you can see, there is some creaminess going on in here. Just by far, by far, the best one I've ever had, regardless of how much time it has been on the shelves.

The popularity of the soft, creamy cheese has led Camembert-style cheeses to be made all over the world. France alone makes 360 million wheels of Camembert each year, and the cheese has become a symbol of French culture. It was used to feed French soldiers during World War I and even gave its name to the pie chart, which in French is called "un diagramme en Camembert."

More and more dairies have started to pasteurize their milk for health and safety reasons, leaving only a few farmers in France still making it the traditional way, using raw milk, which is permitted in Europe but forbidden in the US.