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Switzerland's oldest brand

Switzerland's oldest brand dates back 550 years.

"How do you know a good cheese?" is a frequently asked question. Of course, its taste, smell and appearance play an important role, but so does its heritage. We may use the term "Swiss cheese" as a general designation for many different varieties, but Schabziger (known as Sapsago in English) is one of the most famous.

A soft cow's milk cheese, the Schabziger has a strong heritage... and smell. So much so that its producer Geska AG (located in Glarus, one of Switzerland's three original cantons) says that: "either you'll love it or hate it". The cheese gets its distinctive bitter taste and green colour from the dried and powdered aromatic fenugreek leaves that are added during fermentation.

But, beyond its recognisable appearance, the product has another peculiarity: Geska says that the Swiss Schabziger was the first 'branded product to be manufactured in Switzerland', making it potentially the country's first trademark.

Looking back into cheese history

The history of Swiss Schabziger stretches back over more than 1000 years. From the 8th century up until 1395 Glarnerland, the home of Swiss Schabziger, was owned by the Monastery of Saeckingen, Germany. The local population had to pay taxes to the monastery and this included parting with some of their low-fat white Glarner cheese. However, because the flavour of this cheese was too insipid for the good ladies of Saeckingen, they started to add blue fenugreek, a strongly flavoured herb from the monastery garden which had probably been brought back by crusaders from the Middle East. During the same period, Glarus traders were doing business all the way to the Dutch ports and with commerce in mind, on 24 April 1463 at the Glarner Landsgemeinde (an open-air local "parliament" where the inhabitants

came to vote on the pressing matters of the day), the citizens of Glarus passed a law obliging all cheese producers to conform to certain quality standards and to mark their products with a stamp of origin. And so the Schabziger cheese was born. Zigermannli, the people who sold Schabziger from baskets carried on their backs, helped to make the cheese well known all over Switzerland, if not all over the world. The resulting cheese is hard green with a strong flavor and aroma. It is usually conditioned as cones of 100 g with a height of 5cm. It contains less than 3% fat.

These days, of course, the Glarner Schabziger ® and Schabziger ® trademarks are recorded at national and international level by the cheese's producer Geska. The 'priority based on use' in the Swiss register of trademarks indicates the historical date of 1924; although, with the first federal trademark law dating back to 1880, it would be difficult, from more than a historical point of view, to give an even older legal value to the brand.

But, more importantly, how does it taste?

Grated, or used as a spread or a

sauce, the Schabziger cheese not only tastes good (to most), but is also said to have many health benefits: as an antidepressant, a diuretic and as an aphrodisiac. Whether you love or hate its distinctive flavour, the cheese has without doubt a valuable intellectual property heritage for its owner. Find out more at www.schabziger.ch

Editor: my friend Erika remembers the "Zigermandli" who used to come and sell the Schabziger door to door, carrying his product in a Zigerkraezen and she swears she could smell him before she saw him...does this bring back memories to some of you readers?

Kann sich noch jemand an das Zigermandli? erinnern?

Früher zogen hunderte Zigermandli von Haus zu Haus und verkauften den Glarner Schabziger aus ihren «Zigerkraezen» oder Wäggli und riefen:

«Held er oder weld er, alte guete herte Glarner Schabziger? Mä chanä usänli, mä chanä id Händ inänli, mä chanä a alli Wänd ufäkihiä, er tuät üs nüd verhiä»

«He, wer chaut es Zigerstöggl? Währli, er isch stei-bel-härt. Chänd, versueched nu es Möggli; was er choschiet, isch er wärt!»

Photo courtesy DGeska AG



Photo courtesy DGeska AG



Schabziger Chueche (Schabziger Pie)

Ingredients

- 1 pre-rolled puff pastry
- 1 egg
- 150 ml milk
- 200 ml cream
- 2 tbsp plain flour
- 100 g grated cheese (e.g. Gruyère)
- 50 g grated Schabziger
- salt, pepper, nutmeg, marjoram
- 1 – 2 tomatoes, cut in slices

more Schabziger recipes:
www.schabziger.ch

Instructions

Preheat oven to 230° C. Mix the egg, milk and cream for the filling, stir in the flour, cheese, schabziger and marjoram, season with salt, pepper and nutmeg. Put the puff pastry in the baking dish and pour in the filling. Spread the sliced tomatoes on top. Bake the pie in the lower half of the oven at 230° C for 15 to 20 minutes. Enjoy!

As Heidi's Schabziger article states: you either hate it or love it.. When I ate this, I hated it but my husband loved it!!!!

Compiled and tested by Brigitte Hofer.