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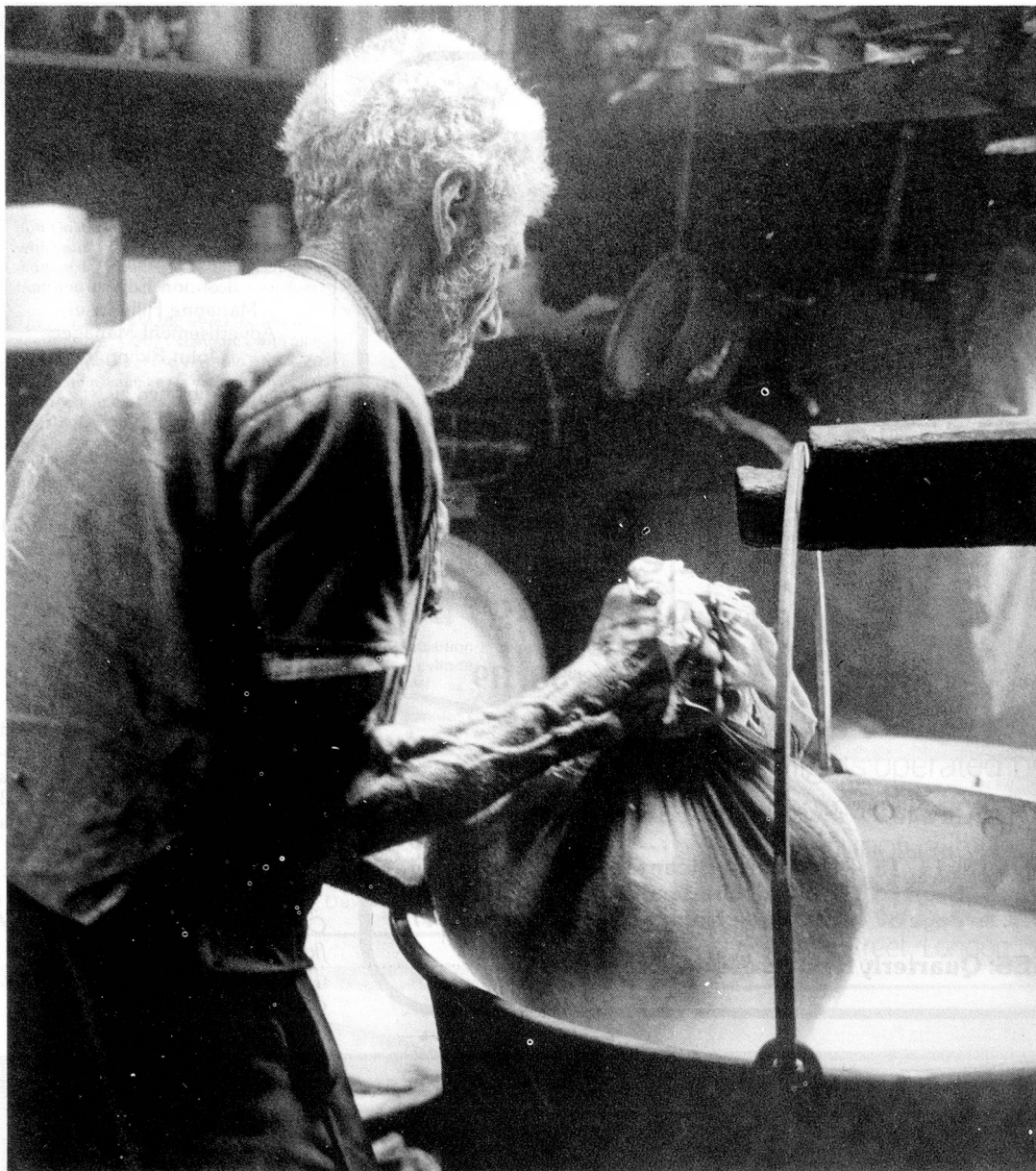
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Cheese-making ancient and modern . . . a dairy farmer in the Toggenburg contrasts sharply with the Swiss cheese dairy below

ANY tourist in Switzerland who asks simply for "Swiss cheese" is simply asking for trouble. The problem is that most foreign visitors to this country know only one type of Swiss cheese – the famous Emmental – "the cheese with the big holes in it."

But there are in fact more than 100 mouthwatering varieties, ranging from appetizing Appenzell to velvety Vacherin.

Should one select a Sbrinz, try a Tilsit or go for a Gruyère? So vast is the selection that the cheese trolley at some restaurants in Switzerland almost resembles the entire cheese counter at food stores in Britain.

Not surprisingly, the insatiable appetite of the Swiss for cheese – not to mention the many other fine foods produced by this country – has led to the inevitable problems of overweight.

As humourist George Mikes observed when he wrote in his best-selling *Switzerland for Beginners*: "Quite a few Swiss are worried about their obesity and devote much ingenuity to finding reasons for it. They will give you a great many scientific answers, but only a few of them will hit on the unscientific explanation – that they eat too much."

Emmental, undisputed King



... the small country with great cheeses

From velvety Vacherin to Cold Dog . .

of the Cheeses, is Switzerland's most important agricultural export. More than half the Emmental production is sent abroad — mainly to North America and Europe — and is sold in more than 100 countries. Emmental cheese comes from the beautiful Emme Valley, nestled amid rolling hills and lush green pastures not far from the Swiss capital, Berne.

When the industry was established there some 200 years ago, local cheesemakers would compete with each other to produce the largest cheese. Some, it is said, even weighed up to 300 pounds.

These days the emphasis is on quality rather than quantity, and the weight per wheel of cheese is down to a mere 170 pounds or so.

Even so, a single Emmental still requires the average daily milk yield of some 80 cows, spread over four or five medium-sized farms.

The secret of Switzerland's internationally-acclaimed success in producing superior quality cheeses lies largely in its traditional methods of manufacture.

Instead of mass production the industry relies on a nationwide network of some 1,500 village dairies where — despite the progress of science and technology — cheesemaking still remains a proud and painstaking centuries-old skill, passed down from generation to generation.

It takes no less than eight years of intensive apprenticeship and professional training for a young man to become a master cheesemaker. The apprenticeship alone, with one day

of school attendance per week, lasts three years.

A further four years of practical experience in a dairy as an assistant must then be followed by another year in a dairy school before a cheesemaker can get his master diploma.

Cheesemaking reduces 12 volumes of milk to about one volume of cheese. Every year this country's dairies process 1.5 million tons of quality Swiss milk — a third of the entire national production — churning and turning it into some 110,000 tons of the choicest cheese.

Of this total about 75 per cent is Emmental, Gruyère and

Sbrinz, the "big three" of the Swiss cheese industry. Emmental is easily the top-selling cheese, but by no means the one that has been established and eaten the longest.

Whereas Emmental has been exported for only a mere 200 years or so, Gruyère has been sold abroad for at least 500 years while Sbrinz has been going steady in one form or other for up to 2,000 years.

When the Roman writer Columella, an eminent authority on agriculture, wrote of the "Caseus helvetica" he is believed to have been referring to an early type of Sbrinz.

Quality cheese has been a

highly-prized product for centuries, not only because of its taste but also for its high nutritional value.

For example, 100 grammes or 3.5 ounces of Emmental (shop price about Sfr 1.50) provides the following percentages of an adult's daily requirements:

Calcium 100 per cent, phosphorous (ideal combination for teeth and bone structure) 50 per cent, protein 40 per cent, vitamin A 33 per cent, vitamin D 30 per cent, milk fat (for energy) 30 per cent.

If you'd like to know more the Swiss Cheese Union, 3001 Berne, Switzerland, will send you free a colourful kit of English-language documentation on how Swiss cheese is manufactured, how to distinguish it from inferior imitations and even how to tell one Swiss cheese from another.

The literature also includes recommended recipes for famous cheese dishes such as Fondue and Raclette and reveals the secrets of lesser-known specialties like Sbrinz Super Sauce and Swiss Cold Dog.

Perhaps next time you visit Switzerland you'll even know Appenzell from Emmental.

Colin Farmer



Cheese-makers make their daily rounds in the storage cellars to check the loaves