



## Tips for the Trade: Comté POS Materials

The Comté Cheese Association offers distributors and retailers a variety of materials to assist with a successful selling program. For more information, or to request materials, please email us at [comte@carbonniercommunications.com](mailto:comte@carbonniercommunications.com).

- Apron: One-size-fits-all Comté apron for demos or general staff use.
- Aroma Wheel: 8 1/2 x 11-inch laminated handout illustrating the Comté "Wheel of Aromas," or the 83 terms or descriptors that correspond to the most frequently found smells and aromas in Comté.
- Lapel Pins: 1-inch pins for customers or staff.
- Recipe booklet: 4 1/2 x 7-inch booklet featuring 5 recipes that use Comté and including general information about Comté production.
- Taste Comté Cheese: 8 1/2 x 8 1/2-inch book guiding readers through a Comté tasting using colorful illustrations and fun visuals. Limited availability.
- Toothpick Flags: 2 1/2-inch toothpicks with Comté flag for cheese demos, identification or tasting events.
- Newsletters: 8 1/2 x 11-inch newsletter published bi-yearly and running 4 pages in length, featuring news about Comté, general industry trends, interviews with Chefs and Cheese Experts, Comté recipes and information about production.
- Staff Training and Demos: Comté Cheese Association assists with staff training classes and demos on a case by case basis.



**Comté Cheese Association** provides you with everything you need for a successful selling program, including: recipe cards, counter-top displays, brochures, aprons, towels and more.

For free POP and In-store demonstration material, please contact Claudine Fox: [cauguie@aol.com](mailto:cauguie@aol.com)  
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# COMTÉ NEWS



Fall/Winter 2007

## New AOC Regulations for Comté

The Comté dairy farmers, cheesemakers and affineurs have recently obtained new modifications from the INAO (*Institut National de l'Origine et de la Qualité*—the organization that oversees all controlled appellations of origin in France). The series of modifications will reinforce the rules of the Comté appellation and further preserve the traditions, terroir and artisanal nature of this unique cheese. The objectives of the new decrees are to:

- strengthen the connection to the terroir and preserve quality and authenticity,
- strengthen the extensive and artisanal nature of Comté production,
- encourage the existence of the greatest number of dairy farmers, *fruitières* (cheesemaking houses, or fromageries) and affineurs, whose diversity is integral to the success of the AOC.

### Modifications

- 1- The use of GMO's is regarded as contrary to the Comté AOC and completely banned from all aspects of production.
- 2- The size of cheese production facilities is limited to avoid concentration and to avoid the development of very large units contrary to local traditions and custom.
- 3- The artisanal nature and the traditions of Comté must be preserved in cheese-making.
- 4- The area of milk supply for each *fruitière* cannot exceed 238 sq. miles (500 km<sup>2</sup>). In other words, a circle with a 17-mile diameter.
- 5- Other modifications aimed at supporting the pursuit of quality concern the feed of the cattle, the grazing pastures and the holding temperature of milk after milking.

Comté was one of the first cheeses to be granted AOC status in 1958. The AOC status of Comté recognizes the intimate connection between Comté and its terroir, a connection that has been established by local people over centuries through a specific set of skills. Every AOC product has its own set of regulations based on the product's unique history, area of production and locally recognized practices. By definition, their production is limited. It can thus be said that Comté represents the culture, the landscapes, the history and the traditions of the people of the Jura Mountains.

The AOC system originated in 1935 with the creation of the Institut National des Appellations d'Origine (INAO), a government branch developed to administer and manage the AOC process for wines. The INAO's responsibilities were later broadened to protect other artisanal and traditional products, such as cheese, poultry, etc. Since 1996, the European Union Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) system has also protected regional foods, wines and spirits on a European Level.

There are currently 44 AOC cheeses in France – Gruyère has recently joined the AOC ranks – representing approximately 15% of total cheese production. Although they make up only a small percentage of the over 600 cheeses produced in France, AOC cheeses are the most sought after. A complete list of the 44 AOC cheeses can be found on the INAO's website, <http://www.inao.gouv.fr>



### Comté ("con – TAY") cheese ID

#### General information:

**Origin:** Jura Mountains (Massif du Jura), France

**Milk Type:** Raw cow's milk

**Cheese Style:** Artisanal. Pressed, cooked, with natural brushed rind.

**French AOC (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée) since 1958:**

- Delimited area of production: Doubs, Jura, Ain, elevation 1500-4500 ft.
- Milk must be produced by local cows of the Montbéliarde (95%) and Simmental (5%) breeds. There are approximately 112,000 Comté cows.
- Minimum of 2.5 acres of natural pasture for each animal.
- Cattle feed must be natural and free of fermented products and GMOs.
- Each *fruitière* must collect milk from dairy farms within a 17-mile diameter maximum.
- Milk must be made into cheese within 24 hours maximum of the earliest milking.
- Only natural ferments must be used to transform the milk into curds.
- Wheels must be aged on spruce boards. Minimum aging is 4 months, generally 6-18 months and sometimes even longer.

**European Union Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) Certification.**



### Comté Cheese Association

at the next Winter Fancy Food Show in San Diego, January 13-15, 2008

Booth #2441

For more information on Comté: [www.comte.com](http://www.comte.com)



## New Book by Laura Werlin



Cheese Expert and James Beard award winner Laura Werlin released her fourth book about cheese in September. Formatted like a guidebook, *Laura Werlin's Cheese Essentials: An Insider's Guide*

*to Buying and Storing Cheese* offers information about flavor, texture, region and production of American and foreign cheeses. The book assists consumers in navigating the ever expanding cheese counters at both specialty stores and super-markets. It also includes 50 recipes, including a Comté Pistachio Soufflé.

## Cheeses of France Campaign Kicked-Off



The Cheeses of France Campaign, a generic campaign designed to educate American consumers and promote French cheeses, kicked off last July at the Summer Fancy Food Show in New York City. The program includes an educational website, sampling programs in grocery stores and markets nationwide as well as media relations. For more information, visit: [www.cheesesoffrance.com](http://www.cheesesoffrance.com).

## What's A *Fruitière*?

The *fruitière* – aka fromagerie or cheesemaking house – is where the farmers take their milk to transform it into Comté. The *fruitière* is generally organized as a cooperative and is often situated at the heart of the village. These cooperatives have been the nexus of village organization for over eight centuries. There are 175 *fruitières* that make Comté. On average, each *fruitière* has 19 members, or local dairy farms, that are located within an eight-mile radius.

Each day the farmers deliver their milk to their local *fruitière*. It will be crafted into Comté within 24 hours maximum of milking. Early each morning, following partial skimming, the cheesemaker pours the milk into large copper vats to be warmed. Next, cultures then rennet are added to create curds. The curds are cut into tiny white pieces, which are stirred and heated to 54°C for thirty minutes. The contents are poured into Comté forms and the remaining liquid, or whey, is pressed out. The resulting young cheese is aged for a few weeks on spruce boards in the *fruitière*'s small cellar, before being sent to one of the region's affineur's cellars or caves for maturing. Legally, Comté wheels must be aged for at least 4 months, but they are often aged for 6-18 months. Altogether, the 175 *fruitières* crafted 1,248,179 Comté wheels in 2006. The average weight of these wheels was 88.46 lbs (40.2 kg).

Each *fruitière* has its own distinct profile related to the aromatic characteristics of the Comté that it produces. These aromatic characteristics reflect the terroir (or soil, climate, flora, etc.) of where the cheese is produced. There are generally 4-12 dominant aromas that characterize each *fruitière*. For example:



- The *fruitière* of Doye-Charbonny crafts Comté that is characterized by aromas of melted butter, milk chocolate, hazelnuts and fudge. When the cheeses are aged beyond 15 months, aromas of toast, plum compote, leather, pepper and dark chocolate are apparent.
- The *fruitière* of Villeneuve-d'Amont, on the other hand, produces Comté that is dominated by butterscotch aromas with a hint of toast, followed by fruity aromas such as hazelnut, roasted nuts, sweet orange juice and ripe apricot. With longer aging, the aromas of hazelnut and orange become more pronounced.

175 *fruitières* dot the Jura Mountains, each producing Comté unique to its terroir



## Cheese Expert and Acclaimed Cooking Instructor, Molly Stevens



Molly Stevens contributes regularly to publications such as *Fine Cooking* (where she is a Contributing Editor), *Bon Appétit*, *Saveur* and the *Oregonian*, and was awarded a James Beard award and an IACP award for her highly praised book, *All About Braising*. She was also awarded the IACP Cooking Teacher of the Year award in 2006.

### When were you first introduced to Comté?

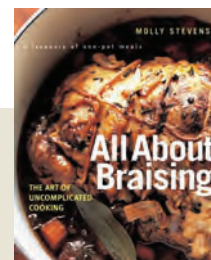
Growing up in Western New York, cheese meant either Cheddar or American slices. It wasn't until I lived in France for a few years in the mid 1980's that I discovered the wonders of true cheese. Comté was one of the many cheeses that I fell in love with during those years, and it remains a cheese I could eat every day. In 2005, some friends and I traveled to the Jura Mountains in the Franche-Comté region to learn more about Comté. We visited high-elevation dairy farms, saw the grazing Montbéliarde cows and visited a few *fruitières* where they make Comté. But the highlight of the trip was our tour of a 19th Century Fort, where some 65,000 enormous wheels of Comté are aging. This trip only increased my ardor for this excellent cheese.

### As a cookbook author, cooking instructor and chef, what are some of your favorite ways to serve Comté?

I tend to be a purist when it comes to good cheese, meaning I prefer to nibble it on its own in order to enjoy its buttery, complex flavor and dense, creamy texture. It also makes a great addition to a cheese plate, and I find that its slightly nutty, sweet character goes well with roasted nuts and/or fall fruit, such as apples and pears. Having said this, Comté also makes a fine cooking cheese. It melts extremely well and makes the quintessential fondue. I like to use it for gratins [see Molly's delicious potato gratin recipe below] and baked dishes where I want a melty cheese component with a savory, almost nutty flavor. I also like to make some croutons with Comté melted on top to float on a bowl of winter soup.

### This year you were one of the judges for the Chefs' Cheese Cook-Off at the annual conference of the American Cheese Society. Are there any trends that you have noticed in cheese consumption in America over the years?

People seem to be using a wider range of cheeses in the kitchen. As the variety and general quality of cheese improves, so do the ways we use it. For example, think of two iconic American comfort foods -- the grilled cheese sandwich and macaroni and cheese. Once upon a time, these standards were made primarily with yellow American cheese. Today, chefs and cooks everywhere are rethinking these dishes (and many more like them) to feature high-quality artisan cheeses. As for the future, I think we'll see people choosing to spend more time in their kitchens. In my experience, it's simply not true that Americans aren't cooking anymore. I meet great home cooks everywhere I go.



## Creamy Potato Gratin with Comté

### From Molly Stevens

For a gratin that's less rich, use less cream and more milk.  
Serves 6 to 8

1 large garlic clove, halved  
Butter for the baking dish  
3/4 cup shredded Comté (about 3 ounces)  
1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese  
2 pounds Yukon gold or russet potatoes, peeled and sliced very thin

Coarse salt and freshly ground white pepper  
1 1/2 cups heavy cream or half-and-half  
1 cup whole milk  
Pinch freshly grated nutmeg

Heat the oven to 350 degrees. Line a baking sheet with foil. Rub the inside of a 3-quart flameproof casserole dish with the garlic, pressing hard so it releases its juices. When the garlic juice dries, generously butter the dish. Combine the cheeses in a small bowl, and set aside.

Layer the potatoes in the dish, seasoning with salt and pepper as you go. About halfway through, sprinkle with half the cheese. Once all the potatoes are layered in the dish, combine the milk and cream in a large measuring cup and add the nutmeg. Pour it over the potatoes. Place the casserole over medium-high heat, and watch carefully until the cream just begins to simmer. Don't let it boil over.

Turn off the heat, and sprinkle the remaining cheese on top. Set the casserole on the foil-lined baking sheet, and bake until the potatoes are completely tender when poked with a knife, about 1 hour. The top will be very brown and bubbly and may look as if the cream has broken. Let the gratin sit for 10 to 15 minutes before serving.

## Comté Wine Pairings from Janet Fletcher



Wondering what to drink with Comté? Jura wines are a classic pairing with Comté, but other wines also enhance Comté's

unique flavor characteristics. We asked cheese and wine expert Janet Fletcher for her favorite wine pairings with Comté.

"Comté is a cheese of concentrated flavor, with brown-butter and roasted-nut aromas and a sweet finish. It needs a wine with some texture and of comparable intensity. My favorite choices are a dry Palo Cortado or off-dry Amontillado sherry from Spain, wines that have some viscosity from their high alcohol and a nuttiness that echoes aromas in the cheese. Another good choice is a Rhône or Rhône-style white wine such as Viognier, as these wines tend to have a lush body and restrained oak."

Janet Fletcher is a journalist and the author of several books about cheese and wine, including *Cheese & Wine: A Guide to Selecting, Pairing and Enjoying* and *The Cheese Course*.

## The 24th Annual American Cheese Society Conference



Opening reception of the American Cheese Society Conference at Shelburn Farm

The 24th annual American Cheese Society Conference in Vermont brought together the "crème de la crème" of the cheese community in the U.S. The conference provides a wonderful forum for tastings, meetings and networking for cheese professionals.