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Cheeses from Switzerland

CHEESE is not so much an industry in Switzerland as a way of life. The large cheeses are not made by big factories, but by small village dairies throughout the country – some 1,600 in fact.

Most of these dairies are family concerns producing about three to four Emmental cheeses a day. Often the husband will have two or three helpers while his wife runs the dairy shop selling all kinds of milk products.

When Victor Hugo said “Le Suisse trait sa vache et vit paisiblement” he seemed to imply that romantic charm was the main characteristic of the Swiss milk industry. He could not have been more mistaken. Scientific research has played a big part, combining technical know-how with tradition.

About 1,000 years ago, a Swiss cow weighed no more than 650lbs. Today its weight is at least double, and the milk yield has gone up accordingly.

To produce one Emmental cheese weighing 120kg, about 1,500 litres of fresh milk is required, roughly the yield of 80 cows.

Since the average farmer has only 10 to 15 cows, it stands to reason that the milk must come from six to eight farms. The farmers, from necessity, have formed small cooperatives. There are about 150 village cooperative

dairies in the country.

It is reckoned that there are some 86,000 farmers in Switzerland. Between them, they own 850,000 cows. More than 8,000 people out of a population of six and a half million inhabitants have jobs in the dairy industry.

Nearly one-third of the country's annual milk production is used for cheese-making. And every year, roughly 80,000 tons of cheese are produced, more than half for export. Swiss cheese is sold in well over 100 countries, though most of it goes to Europe and North America.

Because of the significance of cheese production, the Swiss Cheese Union was founded in 1934 to coordinate the output of small dairies. It markets virtually all the cheese produced for sale abroad, while ensuring sufficient quantities for home needs.

The Cheese Union maintains high quality standards which have made Swiss cheese famous. The discipline governing dairy production has resulted in 90 per cent of the hard cheese delivered to the Swiss Cheese Union nowadays being accepted as first class, a very high proportion indeed.

In this country, the Swiss Cheese Union is represented by Cheeses from Switzerland at Banbury, Oxfordshire, who look

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after the marketing of the five main cheeses from Switzerland in the UK – Emmental, Gruyère, Sbrinz, Appenzell and Royalp, each name being followed by the word Switzerland.

In spite of the excellent cheeses produced in Britain, sales of Swiss cheese have gone up. Last year, 900 tons of cheese was imported from Switzerland, and the trend is still upwards.

The Cheese Union's symbol and logo is an alphorn player

standing on a cheese. It has been the mark of good quality for many years and in this connection the Cheese Union has always supported the instrument.

When the longest alphorn in the world was presented, the Cheese Union became its sponsor. The alphorn will testify throughout the world not only to the outstanding quality of Swiss cheese but also to the love of tradition and patriotic attachment of the Swiss.

The longest alphorn in the world on tour in Britain

IN May 1984, the Swiss Cheese Union brought to Britain the three-man team of alphorn players, Arthur Lamy, Adolf Dettinger and Ernst Zuberbuehler. They are professionals and recognised as the world's top players.

They had with them the longest alphorn ever made, and what a sight it was in the busy cities – all 22 metres of it!

Arthur Lamy from Lindau, Canton Zurich, a top-class player and folklore enthusiast, first had the idea of an outside instrument in 1975 and commissioned the longest alphorn to be constructed but the record was broken a year later with the Pilatus World Record Alphorn.

And so the three musicians arrived in Sheerness in Kent for their 12-day tour in the Cheeses from Switzerland Campaign.

They had with them the giant

alphorn and three “normal” instruments – two cowbells, trumpet, mouth-organ and bowl for “Talärschwingen” (a coin is spun round the inside of an earthenware basin by rhythmically rotating the vessel, thus producing a musical sound).

The trio wore the traditional costume of Central Switzerland: embroidered black smock, black trousers and porkpie hat. They travelled by minibus and were accompanied by Mrs Sally Pernet, wife of the Swiss Centre Restaurants' executive chef, André Pernet.

Their programme was a heavy one. The next day, they took part in the annual trade reception and Cookery Challenge presentation at the Grosvenor House Hotel in London's Park Lane, where

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