INTRODUCTION
Cheesemaking techniques vary depending on the intended final use or consumption of the cheese. Cheese has widely varying characteristics. Cheese can be defined as a curd formed by concentrating the protein and fat in milk or a milk product. The curd can be dried, aged, and packaged and served as a cheese product. This guide focuses on the production of dairy milk products to make dairy cheese. The increase in consumption of non-dairy fluid milks, such as almond, oat, or hemp milk, has also seen an increase in consumption of non-dairy cheese products.

Italian mozzarella-type cheese, used in pizza and pasta dishes, must have good melting quality and mild flavor. Hard cheeses, such as Romano and Parmesan, must be dry with distinct flavor. Mexican cheese, often used in fried foods, must be stable at high temperatures. The variety among cheeses arises from differences in milk quality, diversity among native microflora (microorganisms that naturally occur in a given region), and differences in handling during processing. In North America, cheese is usually made from the milk of cows (Bos taurus) or domestic goats (Capra hircus). In India, cheese is often made from the milk of domestic water buffalo (Bubalus bubalis). Yak (Bos grunniens) cheese is made in the interior of Asia.

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Cow’s milk (whole milk) consists of 88% water, 3.25% fat, 3.25% protein, 4.8% sugar (lactose), and 0.7% minerals and vitamins (USDA, 2005). The cheese-making process involves forming a curd from milk solids, such as fats, protein, and minerals, that are separated from the liquid milk and concentrated (Hill, 2006). The discharged liquid, a yellowy liquid known as whey, contains most of the water, lactose, simple proteins, minerals, and vitamins (Hill, 2006). About 10 pounds (1.25 gallons) of milk are required to make one pound of cheese.

Making cheese is a dynamic process that is affected by time, temperature, and the bacterial culture (lactic acid bacteria) and coagulating enzyme (rennet) that are used to concentrate and separate the casein (milk protein) and fat from the whey. Exceptions to this include cheeses such as queso fresco or queso blanco (traditionally eaten in Latin American countries) and paneer (traditionally eaten in India), which are made without bacterial cultures or rennet. These cheeses are made by curdling hot milk by adding an acid such as vinegar or fruit juice (like lemon juice). This type of fresh cheese is simple to make and has a higher yield because all the whey proteins normally lost are included in the cheese.

The enzyme rennet causes casein to form chains and to develop a mesh-like network or gel, trapping water and fat (Figure 1A). This semisolid gel is the curd. When the gel is firm enough, it is cut into small pieces (Figures 1B and 1C) and, after cooking, the whey is removed (Figure 1D). The whey may be partially drained from the curd and the curd washed with water to increase its moisture content. The temperature during cooking and handling of the curd affects the texture of the curd and the type of final product. When the curd has reached the desired moisture and acidity, salt can be added. Salting may be achieved through brine, as with Gouda; surface salt, as with feta; or dry salt, as with cheddar. After salting, the curd may be partially drained and again washed with water to increase the moisture content. When the curds have reached the desired moisture and acidity (pH), the whey is separated from the curd.

The cheese curd formed is a result of bacteria converting lactose into lactic acid. The acid acts as a preservative, removes water from the cheese curd,
and develops cheese texture (Hill, 2006). Initially, the enzymes from native microflora produce the flavor components, which change during aging.

Commercial cultures have been developed to produce a particular cheese type. Cultures can be purchased by consumers to make specialized cheese products; a list of cheesemaking supply companies and other resources can be found at the end of this guide. However, cultured yogurt and buttermilk also contain live bacteria that can be used as a culture to make cheese.

Once the whey is removed, the curd is allowed to stick together, forming a mat. The mat is transferred to a hoop or mold lined with cheesecloth, which contributes to the final shape. The mold can be pressed to form a dense cheese (like cheddar) or can be left to settle under its own weight to have an open texture (like feta).

Soft cheeses can be made at home without specialized equipment. Because soft cheese contains over 45% water, it is highly perishable and has a refrigerated life of only five to seven days.

**FOOD SAFETY CONCERNS**

There are four major pathogens associated with fresh cheese, all of which can cause foodborne illness. They are *Salmonella* spp., *Escherichia coli*, *Listeria monocytogenes*, and *Staphylococcus aureus*. These pathogenic bacteria can be controlled by good sanitation of equipment and food contact surfaces, proper cooking, proper cooling and handling of cheese curds during processing, and proper hand washing.

**Sanitation**

1. Wash hands properly with soap and water, then dry completely with a disposable towel.
2. All equipment must be washed with detergent and water before and after use.
3. Rinse all equipment with clean, potable water to remove all soapy residue.
4. Boil all cheesemaking equipment between uses.
5. Soak all cheesemaking equipment in a bleach-water solution for 2 minutes before and after use. Maintain active chlorine in bleach-water (see below).
6. For the best-quality cheese, use new cheesecloth each time you make cheese. (Sterilize cheesecloth by first washing in dish soap, rinsing well to remove soap, then soaking in boiling water, or soaking for 2 minutes in bleach-water. See recipe for bleach-water below.)
7. Squeaky clean is clean. If you can feel a residue on the equipment, it is not clean.

**Wash hands** after touching dirty or soiled surfaces, after sneezing or coughing, after using the bathroom, after eating, or after handling raw milk.

**Bleach-water**

- Add 1 tablespoon of standard, unscented household bleach to 1 gallon of water.
- Make a new bleach-water solution each time you make cheese.
- Test the chlorine activity of bleach-water on a regular basis using litmus test paper (available at hardware stores).
- Remake bleach-water if it becomes cloudy with food particles.
- Bleach-water recipe can be doubled if necessary.

**Pasteurization of raw milk**

Raw milk is not necessary for the recipes presented in this document. However, if starting with raw milk, it must be pasteurized. The pasteurization of raw milk is a delicate procedure dependent on temperature and time. It is recommended that the raw milk be pasteurized by heating to 140–145°F (60–62.8°C) and stirred for 30 minutes of heating time. This heat treatment will destroy pathogenic bacteria that could cause foodborne illness. After pasteurization, the milk is cooled by removing from the heating element. Cool the milk to 89.6–98.6°F (32–37°C). Then the milk can be used for cheesemaking.

- Use a cooking thermometer in the milk to measure temperature. Temperature control is very important.
- Do not heat milk over 145°F (62.8°C). It may change the texture and flavor of the cheese. Temperatures under 140°F (60°C) will not kill harmful bacteria.

Note: Pasteurized milk available at the grocery store has been heat processed and homogenized for a ready-to-drink milk product. This affects milk protein and fat texture. Although homogenized milk can be used, the resulting cheese will have a different texture than the traditional cheese.
SELECTING MILK AND CULTURE PRODUCTS (FIGURE 2)
The quality of the cheese depends highly on the quality of the milk and cultures used to make the cheese. Quality is affected by freshness, or age and microbial status of the milk, and by the health of the dairy cow. Cultures, as already mentioned, can be obtained directly from a supplier or indirectly from yogurt or buttermilk. Regardless of the source of milk and cultures, care must be taken to handle the cultures properly to prevent microbial contamination that may affect the actions of the culturing agent.

The texture and flavor of cheese are determined initially by the culturing agents, by the fat content of the milk product used, and by the amount of moisture left in the product. The milk products used in cheesemaking contribute both fat and moisture. Therefore, when the goal is to make a low-fat cheese, it is important to consider that the flavor, texture, and moisture content of a cheese made from low-fat milk will be much different than a cheese product with a higher fat content. Table 1 provides information on the fat content of various milk products that can be used in making cheese.

Cultures
Cultures are added to fresh milk as a freeze-dried powder or cultured milk product. The freeze-dried powdered culture must be added directly to warm (90°F; 32.2°C) fresh milk, and time should be allowed for the powder to hydrate in the milk. Care must be taken to protect cultures from contamination.

Calcium chloride
Calcium chloride can be used to condition homogenized milk so that a heavier or more dense curd can be formed with longer protein chains. The process of homogenization is used to make dairy milk a smoother beverage to consume as a drink. Calcium chloride should not be used to make mozzarella cheese because it causes a loss of elasticity of the curd (Ismail, 2008). Calcium chloride liquid is diluted in distilled water and is added to cultured milk before rennet is added.

Cheese made with rennet
Rennet is available as a tablet or liquid. One teaspoon of liquid rennet is equivalent to one tablet. Either form must be completely dissolved in cool distilled or boiled water. Hard water must be neutralized by adding 1/4 cup milk to water before adding the rennet.

EQUIPMENT FOR MAKING SOFT CHEESE (FIGURE 3)
- Thermometer with a temperature range of 40–165°F (4.4–74°C).
- Large double boiler with about a 5-quart capacity for 1 gallon of milk. (Two large cooking pots of different sizes can be substituted for a double boiler.)
- Spatula long enough to reach the bottom of the double boiler.
- Long-handled spoon.
- Long-bladed knife.
- Digital timer or easy-to-read clock.
- Measuring cups and measuring spoons (1/8 and 1/4 teaspoons).
- Cheesecloth or muslin, tea towel.
- Quart strainer to support draining cloth.
- Forms or molds for shaping the cheese.
- A press or device to put pressure on the cheese. A homemade press can be made from a pan-shaped colander and a salad plate or a “follower.” A 1-pound coffee can (smooth-sided) can also be used. Cans or glass jars that fit snugly in the coffee can be used as a press. Punch holes in the bottom of the can from the inside out so a cloth liner will not catch on the metal edges. Make a follower out of the can lid in the same way.
- Brining container made of glass or heavy plastic.
- Plastic bucket (2-gallon capacity) for whey discharge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dairy product</th>
<th>Grams of fat/cup (g/~240 g)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whole milk</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2% milk</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1% milk</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skim milk</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condensed milk</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buttermilk, whole</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half and half</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy cream</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light cream</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yogurt, Greek, plain, non-fat</td>
<td>0.4 (g/100g)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yogurt, plain, low-fat</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yogurt, plain, whole</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Fat Content of Common Milk Products (USDA, 2019)
Figure 2. Cheese cultures, tablet and liquid rennets, and calcium chloride are available from online cheesemaking stores.

Figure 3. Common household supplies for cheesemaking at home (see list in text).
No-rennet Queso Blanco (Latin American White Cheese)
Recipe adapted from Hill (2006)

Heat-acid or no-rennet queso blanco is a white, semi-hard cheese made without culture or rennet. It is eaten fresh and may be flavored with peppers, herbs, and spices. It is considered a “frying cheese,” meaning it does not melt and can be deep fried or grilled. Queso blanco can also be made by renneting whole milk with little or no bacterial culture.

Ingredients (Figure 4):
• 1.0 gallon (3.76 L; 8 lb; 3.63 kg) heat-treated or pasteurized milk
• 4.6 fl oz (137 mL) vinegar (5% acidity)
• 9.2 fl oz (274 mL) distilled water
• 1 teaspoon (4.6 g) salt
• Spices to taste

Procedure:
1. Heat milk to 176°F (80°C) for 20 minutes.
2. Add the vinegar (5% acidity) to the distilled water, then slowly add the vinegar/water mixture to the hot milk until the whey is semi-clear and the curd particles begin to mat together and become slightly stretchy. You should be able to stretch a piece of curd about 0.39 inches (1 cm) before it breaks. It may not be necessary to add all of the vinegar mixture.
3. Separate the curd by filtering through a cloth bag until free whey is removed.
4. Open cheese bag and add in salt and spices to taste by gently kneading curds.
5. Close cheese bag and gently press out any remaining whey.
6. Remove cheese curds and place into boilable bags.
7. Package curd in sealed bags (vacuum package if possible) and place in boiling water for 5 minutes to sterilize the surface and prevent mold growth.
8. Queso blanco may keep for several weeks if properly packed and stored in a refrigerator, but should be eaten as fresh as possible.
SAFE Queso Fresco  
(Fresh Cheese)  
*Recipe adapted from “Abuela project,” Washington State University (2002)*

This recipe was designed to replace queso fresco made with raw milk after an increase in Salmonella outbreaks in Yakima County, Washington. Queso fresco has a grainy, soft, crumbly texture and a mild, fresh flavor. This cheese can be eaten in crumbly pieces in salads, but holds up well to heating, both baking and broiling.

**Ingredients (Figure 5):**
- 1 quart (0.95 L; 2.15 lb; 911 g) cultured buttermilk for culture
- 2 quarts (1.89 L; 4.3 lb; 1.9 kg) heat-treated or pasteurized milk
- 7 teaspoons (35 mL) white vinegar (5% acidity)
- 1 tablet rennet or 1 teaspoon liquid rennet, dissolved in 1/2 cup water
- 2 teaspoons (9.3 g) salt

**Procedure:**
1. Mix 1 quart cultured buttermilk with 2 quarts heat-treated or pasteurized milk.
2. Add 7 teaspoons white vinegar (5% acidity) to the milk mixture and mix well.
3. Heat milk to 90°F (32.2°C). Remove pan from heat.
4. Add dissolved rennet and mix for about 2 minutes.
5. Let stand for 30–40 minutes until curd is firm.
6. Cut curd into 1-inch (2.5-cm) cubes and let stand for about 5 minutes.
7. Heat curds and whey to 115°F (46.1°C) without stirring.
8. Remove pan from heat, then let stand for 5 minutes.
9. Pour curds/whey mixture through cheesecloth and allow whey to drain for 5 minutes.
10. Form curd into a ball and twist the cheesecloth gently to squeeze out the whey.
11. Break up curds into a bowl and add 2 teaspoons salt.
12. Mix in salt and let stand for 5 minutes, then squeeze again as before.
13. Place curd in a mold to form the cheese, and allow to stand overnight in the refrigerator.
14. Remove cheese from mold and package in an airtight container.
15. Keep cheese refrigerated during storage.
Cream Cheese
Recipe adapted from McDaniel and Kendall (2004)

Cream cheese has a mild, smooth texture and a slight citrus flavor balanced with buttery cream. Cream cheese can be blended with fruit and seasonings, used as a dip or spread, or used in desserts such as cheesecake.

Ingredients:
- 3 1/2 quarts (3.3 L; 6.45 lb; 2.92 kg) pasteurized whole milk
- 1 pint (473.2 mL; 238.4 g) pasteurized whipping cream
- 3/4 to 1 cup (6–8 fl oz; 177 mL; 242 g) fresh buttermilk for culture
- 1 tablet rennet or 1 teaspoon liquid rennet, dissolved in 1/2 cup water
- 1 1/2 teaspoons (7.12 g) salt (optional)

Procedure:
1. Add milk, cream, and buttermilk to the upper part of a double boiler. Add enough water in the bottom of double boiler to prevent milk mixture from scorching. Warm to 85°F (29.4°C).
2. Add dissolved rennet, then stir gently for 4 minutes.
3. Cover the milk mixture and let stand for 1 hour or until the whey covers the curd and the curd breaks cleanly from the side of the pan. Maintain a temperature of 85°F (29.4°C) while the milk mixture stands.
4. Cut curd into 1-inch (2.5-cm) cubes and allow to stand undisturbed for 5 minutes.
5. Pour mixture into a muslin bag or cheesecloth-lined colander with a large pot to catch whey drained away from the curd. Place apparatus in the refrigerator overnight (Figures 6A and 6B).
6. With a wooden spoon, work 1 1/2 teaspoons salt into the drained curds.
7. Remove curds from cheesecloth or bag and place curds in clean sealable freezer bag.
8. Store packaged cream cheese in the refrigerator until ready for use.
**“Feta-style” Fresh Cheese**

Feta is a crumbly, salty, tangy cheese originating in Greece. It is commonly eaten fresh in salads, but is also used in Greek phyllo dough pastries. “Feta” is a protected designation term of origin by the European Union, which means only cheese products made following traditional methods in mainland Greece can be called “feta.”

**Ingredients:**

- 2 to 3 gallons (7.59–11.37 L; 17.2–25.8 lb; 7.8–11.7 kg) whole milk, pasteurized and non-homogenized
- 1/4 teaspoon MT1 starter culture (mesophilic)
- 1 rennet tablet or 1 teaspoon rennet, dissolved in 1/2 cup of water
- 8 tablespoons salt per 1 gallon whey to make whey brine

**Procedure**

1. Heat milk to 90°F (32.2°C) over approximately 30 minutes. Stir milk occasionally until reaching target temperature. Remove from heat source and transfer to holding table.
2. Sprinkle culture over milk surface and allow to dissolve for 2–4 minutes before stirring. Stir with 20 top-to-bottom strokes. Let sit for 2 hours.
3. Add dissolved rennet and stir in with 15 top-to-bottom strokes. DO NOT OVER-BLEND. Let curd sit for 7–10 minutes.
4. After 7–10 minutes, test curd for clean break—LOOK for custardy consistency. If curd does not break cleanly, allow to sit until clean break is achieved. Check curd every 5 minutes.
5. Using a clean long knife blade, cut into 1/4-inch (0.6-cm) cubes. Let sit for 10 minutes.
6. Gently stir cut cubes or curds for 1 minute.
7. Allow curds to settle to bottom of pot. Remove whey from pot and reserve whey in another larger pot.
8. Add enough salt to the whey to make a 3.5% brine solution (approximately 8 tablespoons salt per 1 gallon whey); heat whey brine to 150°F (65.5°C).
9. Slowly add curds to hot brine 1 cup at a time while gently stirring. This should take about 15–20 minutes.
10. Have cold distilled water available to cool curds if needed to reduce temperature to 118°F (47.8°C).
11. Float curds in the whey brine at 118°F (47.8°C) for 15 minutes.
12. Scoop curds using a perforated spoon to transfer curd to plastic molds (Figure 7A). Fill to the top and press lightly over another container to catch draining whey. Stack molds and press lightly.
13. Remove curds from molds and cut cheese into 1-inch chunks. Add more salt if desired (1 teaspoon per pound of curd). Season as desired with herbs, chile pepper, or other spices (Figure 7B).
14. Cheese can be transferred to molds to shape, or packaged into containers with lids. Can be eaten fresh, or allowed to age as long as desired.
Neufchâtel
Recipe adapted from McDaniel and Kendall (2004)

Neufchâtel (new-sha-TEL) is a milky-white cheese with a soft, smooth texture, and is low in fat if made with reduced-fat or fat-free milk.

Ingredients:
• 1 gallon (3.79 L; 8.6 lb; 3.9 kg) pasteurized milk (any level of fat)
• 1/2 cup (4 fl oz; 114 g) fresh cultured unsalted buttermilk OR 1/4 cup (2 fl oz; 57 g) fresh plain yogurt for culture
• 1 tablet rennet or 1 teaspoon liquid rennet, dissolved in 1/2 cup water
• 1 to 3 teaspoons (4.5–14 g) salt; at least one teaspoon salt is needed to form the cheese curd

Procedure:
1. Add 1 gallon of milk to the upper part of a double boiler. Add enough water in the bottom of double boiler to prevent milk from scorching. Stir in buttermilk or yogurt and warm slowly to 92–94°F (33.3–34.4°C). Maintain this temperature range through Steps 2 and 3.
2. Add dissolved rennet to milk mixture and stir for 2–3 minutes. Allow milk to sit undisturbed for about 30 minutes or until a firm gel forms. To test for curd formation, cut a slit in the curd with a metal spatula, slip the spatula under the curd, and lift slightly. If the cut in the curd breaks clean, it is ready for Step 3.
3. Cut the curd into approximately 1-inch (2.5-cm) cubes. Stir gently and continuously for 20–30 minutes to help firm curds. Keep the temperature range at 90–94°F (32.2–34.4°C).
4. Pour off whey. Allow the curds to settle, and dip out the remaining whey.
5. Add 1 teaspoon salt and mix gently. Wait 5 minutes and mix in the second teaspoon salt. Wait 5 more minutes and mix in the last teaspoon salt. The second and third additions of salt are optional.
6. Divide the curds into two batches and proceed as follows for each batch.
7. Line two perforated coffee cans with clean cheesecloth or muslin. Place half of the cheese curds inside each lined can. Fold the cloth over the top and add the follower.
8. Apply pressure by pressing with a weight, such as a number 303 can of food, until the surface is smooth (2–4 hours). Do this in the sink to allow the whey to drain out of the cans.
9. Remove the formed cheese and the cloth. Wrap the cheese tightly in plastic wrap or waxed paper and store in refrigerator. It will keep for 7–10 days under refrigeration. It can be frozen for 4–6 months. However, freezing lowers the quality of the cheese.

Pizza Cheese
Recipe adapted from McDaniel and Kendall (2004)

Also known as mozzarella, this fresh cheese is very mild in flavor and adds texture to cooked dishes. Fresh cheese can be stored in water but must be eaten within two days.

Ingredients:
• 1 gallon (3.79 L; 8.6 lb; 3.9 kg) 2% milk OR 2 quarts (1.9 L; 4.3 lb; 1.95 kg) whole milk plus 2 quarts skim milk
• 1/4 cup (2 fl oz; 57 g) fresh, plain yogurt
• 1 tablet rennet or 1 teaspoon liquid rennet, dissolved in 1/2 cup water
• Brine: use 2 lb (907 g) of salt per gallon (3.78 L) of water

Procedure:
1. Heat milk to 90°F (32.2°C) and add yogurt. Stir slowly for 15 minutes while maintaining this constant temperature.
2. Add dissolved rennet and stir for 3–5 minutes.
3. Cover, maintaining temperature at 90°F (32.2°C). Allow to stand until coagulated, about 30 minutes.
4. Cut curd into 1/2-inch (1.27-cm) cubes. Allow to stand for 15 minutes with occasional stirring.
5. Slowly increase temperature to 118°F (47.7°C) over a period of 45 minutes. Hold this temperature for an additional 15 minutes. (Total time for this step is 1 hour.)
6. Allow curd to settle under whey. Remove whey and transfer the mat of curd to a flat pan that can be kept warm. Do not cut curd mat, but turn it over every 15 minutes over a 2-hour period. Mat should be tight when finished.
7. Cut the mat into long strips 1–2 inches (2.5–5 cm) wide. Put curd in enough hot water (180°F; 82.2°C) to cover curd. Using wooden spoons, tumble and stretch curd under the hot water until it becomes elastic, about 15 minutes.

8. Remove curd from hot water and shape it by hand into a ball or a loaf. Place cheese in enough cold water (40°F; 4.4°C) to cover cheese for approximately 1 hour.

9. Remove cheese from cold water and put it into a saturated salt solution (brine; see recipe above). To prepare salt brine, keep the brine cold (40–50°F; 4.4–10°C) while the cheese is in it. Excess salt will remain on the bottom, which is normal. Because a brine solution is corrosive, use a heavy plastic, glass, or pottery container. Cover any exposed areas of cheese with dry salt or brine. Leave cheese in the brine for 24 hours.

10. Remove cheese from brine and let it dry for several hours. Wrap in plastic wrap or place in a sealable bag and refrigerate. This cheese can be used immediately or stored under refrigeration for 1 week.

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CHEESEMAKING RESOURCES AVAILABLE ONLINE

This site sells products for making and customizing cheese, including coloring, cheese wax, cheese ladles, cheesecloths, draining mats, and thermometers.

Glengarry Cheesemaking and Dairy Supply  http://glengarrycheesemaking.us
This site sells cheese presses, molds, rennet, ripening racks, drying racks, cheese vats, pasteurizers (both commercial and non-commercial), curd cutters, coatings, waxes, kits, videos, and more.

Junket  http://www.junketdesserts.com/recipes
This site provides information on rennet products as well as recipes for soft cheese and custard desserts.

Moorlands Cheesemakers  http://www.cheesemaking.co.uk/
This site sells cheesemaking kits of all sorts, as well as molds, rennet, and other supplies. Although this site is based in the United Kingdom, shipments can be accepted in the U.S.

This site is for non-commercial cheesemakers. They offer many complete kits for cheesemaking, along with ingredients and equipment.
REFERENCES