



Research & Industry

PhD Project – The Artisan Cheese Culture of the West Country

Overview

The main aim of this project is to investigate the culture of artisan cheese makers, in particular the ideology of the cheese makers and how it impacts on their production methods and choice of product. It also seeks to identify and more deeply understand how artisan cheese production – with reference to its scale and scope – is embedded in the regional identity of the rural South West as an area traditionally associated with dairy and small scale speciality food manufacturing.

About the Project

The project was submitted by Victoria Osborne, a part time PhD student at Bath Spa University. Artisan cheese making has undergone resurgence in the last 20 years with more than 570 new varieties being introduced in recent years. Global consumer movements with a focus on gastronomy, agriculture and food that is linked to place, tradition and authenticity have influenced this growth in the market for 'artisan' products, together with an increasing interest in 'where our food comes from', agro-industrial practices and a desire to connect with the producers of our food. The West Country region has a high proportion of specialist food producers as well as a long history of dairy farming and farmstead cheese making. In 2007, 72 producers in the West Country manufactured some 30% of Britain's monthly cheese production, 30,000 tonnes. Of this monthly output 23 artisan cheese makers have a shared output of just 12 tonnes - some with production of just 400kg a month.

The generally accepted meaning of the word 'artisan' in relation to food is the making of a craft product by hand. One of the first tasks of the project has been to clarify this definition and distinguish between speciality and artisan cheeses, as they are often confused and used inter-changeably. This research project is endeavouring to discover the motivations of small producers for creating labour intensive, premium products by hand instead of adopting semi-industrial production methods. Victoria will seek to determine whether they are driven by lifestyle choices or by pragmatic business motives. To discover this, she will examine the role of cheese making in the producers' lives: is it a family tradition, are they entrepreneurs or are there other categories of motivation such as farm diversification?



Artisan cheeses of the South West

Fast Facts

- A multidisciplinary project which spans diverse disciplines and brings together researchers in Food & Nutrition and Geography.
- Provides the student with an opportunity to pursue a career in academia.
- This project has enabled the School for Science, Society & Management to build on and enhance its research provision.