



VELLA CHEESE COMPANY

made by hand since 1931

sustainably produced since 2003

VIRTUAL CHEESEMAKING TOUR

THE MILK ARRIVES

Each morning that cheese is made, the fresh milk arrives straight from the dairy. Vella Cheese has used milk from nearby Merten's Dairy in Sonoma for more than 20 years.

The milk travels less than six miles from pasture to our cheese factory.

No growth hormones are given to Merten's cows.



HOLDING THE MILK

The fresh milk is pumped into a holding tank.

PASTEURIZING THE MILK

The milk is heated and held at 161 degrees F. for a short time to destroy any harmful bacteria.

This process is called PASTEURIZATION.



CULTURING THE MILK

The warm milk is pumped into a stainless steel cheese vat.

Each vat holds 1200 gallons of milk.

Here, a special STARTER CULTURE changes a small amount of milk sugar into lactic acid.

An hour later, a coagulant is added to make the milk separate into CURD and WHEY.



CHOOSING A CURD CUTTER

The solid curd mass is cut into smaller pieces.

Different cutters are used for different styles of cheese.



STIRRING THE CURDS



CURDS AND WHEY

The curds and whey are gently stirred and cooked.

Separation between the curds and whey continues.

THE CURDS DEVELOP

Vella Cheese is a hands-on cheese factory

Here you can see the difference between soft, partially formed curds on the right, and the completed hard curds on the left.



MEASURING THE CURDS

It takes approximately ten pounds of milk to make one pound of cheese.

CHEESECLOTH

Cotton cheesecloth and string are used to shape the wheels of cheese.



SHAPING THE CHEESE BALLS

Once the whey is drained off and recycled back at the dairy, the curds are measured, placed into in cheesecloth squares, shaped into balls and tied.

It takes many years of practice to form the balls correctly and quickly. Cheesemakers must apprentice for three years before becoming union cheesemakers.

Combined, the four cheesemakers at Vella Cheese have more than a hundred years of cheesemaking experience.

CURDS IN CHEESECLOTH BEFORE SHAPING



SHAPING THE BALL

It takes both skill and hard work to shape the approximately ten pound mass of curds into a uniform ball.



TYING THE BALL

Each ball of cheese is hand tied. Here Ig Vella is tying this ball. Ig made cheese every weekday for over 30 years.



PRESSING THE CHEESE BALLS

The balls of cheese are stacked and weighted with containers of water to press more whey from the cheese.

This takes a day or so.

Notice that the bottom balls are already developing their final wheel shape.



BRINING THE CHEESE

The wheels of cheese float in a salt solution or BRINE for three days to create the natural rind. Brining lets each wheel of cheese absorb just the right amount of salt.

The rake in the photo is used to turn the wheels so that they absorb the brine uniformly.

CURING THE CHEESE

After the wheels are brined, they age until their edges firm up. This usually takes about five weeks.



THE DIMPLE

Hand-shaped wheels of cheese have a dimple or BELLY BUTTON where the cloth was tied and pressed into the cheese ball.

VELLA TRIVIA QUESTION

How do you know when the cheese is dry enough to coat?

ANSWER

Press the cheese's belly button.
When ready, it will resist gentle pressure.

COATING THE VELLA DRY JACK

Each wheel of Vella Dry Jack cheese is hand-coated with a special mixture of soybean oil, cocoa, and pepper.

This coating prevents damage to the cheese and keeps it from becoming overly dry while it ages. And it makes the rinds of the cheese especially delicious.

Don't cut off the rinds and throw them away. Enjoy them!



AGING THE DRY JACK

Vella Dry Jack cheese, newly coated and ready to age.

Vella Dry Jack ages for seven to nine months.



VELLA SPECIAL SELECT DRY JACK

Vella Special Select Dry Jack ages for up to two years.



PACKAGED CHEESES

Ready to ship