



The Shepherds - traditional cheese making

Throughout Sicily there's still the tradition of cheese making. The shepherds make cheese with milk from the sheep, goat or cow depends on the area.

Despite sheep and goats being more suited to the hilly and mountainous terrain and sparse vegetation, EU subsidies mean that more and more cattle are being farmed in Sicily. All produce enormous quantities of milk, flavoured by the wild herbs: thyme, fennel, sorrel, basil, oregano, mint and rosemary, on which the animals feed. The milk is then turned into a host of wonderful varieties of cheeses.

Pecorino: A sheep's cheese, made with full-fat milk, each region has its own version. It can be eaten fresh, immediately after production, when it is known as TUMA. Eaten after 15 days when the flavour is just starting to develop, it is known as PRIMO SALE. After 50 days it can be classed as SEMISTAGIONATO and after 4 months or more as STAGIONATO. Only this last qualifies for the Sicilian Pecorino DOP appellation.

Ricotta: This literally means "cooked again" and is made by re-boiling the whey left over when the curds have been lifted during the making of other cheeses. It is eaten fresh, baked or is salted and left to mature and is then used grated.

Caciocavallo: A cow's cheese which can be eaten at various stages: fresh, matured and occasionally, smoked (*provola*). It is made, like mozzarella, using the 'pasta filata' method. The curds are worked when hot into a stringy mass, this is then moulded by hand into a pear shape and the cheeses are hung to dry in pairs.

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