

Dear Friends,

During the course of these intense and exciting ten years working experience, as a professional taster and educational teacher of high quality, typical and artisan made P.D.O cheeses, mainly produced with 'raw milk', I have had the opportunity to taste and evaluate organoleptically, in most cases personally visiting the respective production zones, many hundreds of different 'cheese gems' from all over the world.

Cheeses made on farms in the countryside, in the hillsides and in the most beautiful mountain pastures, which even today, are inaccessible and at the highest altitudes in Europe, in North America, from Japan to New Zealand and Tasmania, and. of course in all the regions of Italy, the country where I live, from the north to the islands in the south.

With this vast experience, acquired every day directly working in the 'field', I can certainly affirm, that few regions in the world have in their DNA and in a relatively small area like Piedmont, such a large concentration of excellent cheeses, P.D.O, typical, unique and rare cheeses, so different from each other.

This diversity and variety of tastes and cheese making traditions are in fact due to many factors:

- The conformation of the territory (it passes from the plains, to the hills, to the lakes, to the mountains with the highest alpage pastures in Europe), historical reasons, and gastronomic 'imported and shared' traditions, have made Piedmont become a region where you can find cheeses made with all types of milk, which is very rare, and therefore, great cheese products produced with goat's milk, sheep' milk, cow's milk and a mixture of two types of milk.

In fact this region, so close to the Alps and to its 'cousin' France, has always been traversed by different cultures, which have marked and 'influenced', in a unique and unrepeatably way, the cheese making techniques, the aging methods and 'refining' techniques, which produce high quality cheeses.

Amongst those I wish to mention, apart from the Roman culture, are the many French invasions and dominations, which occurred repeatedly for centuries until just two centuries ago, as well as the 'quick' but very important incursions of peoples of Middle Eastern culture (the 'Saracens'), and the important 'Occitan' culture, of Provençal origin, both in the south of Piedmont, territories that are today the provinces of Alessandria and Cuneo, which is the province where this Congress is held .

Thanks to the combination of all these important different cultural experiences, which have shaped the land and its products synergistically, in Piedmont, the first region from which, only 150 years ago, the creation and unification of ' Italy as we know it today started, you can find a small region with one of the largest concentration and variety of cheeses in the world.

Acid coagulation cheeses, uncooked, semi-cooked and cooked cheeses, sheep's cheese, alpage cheeses, such as the rare Castelmagno , blue-molded cheeses, bloomy rind cheeses, ricotta finished (aged) in the hay, etc. ...

In order to be able to understand and better appreciate the most important characteristics of quality and authenticity, and describe all the smells, tastes, and aromas that distinguish the cheeses, it was decided to hold this workshop, with guided tastings of n° 5 of the most important cheeses produced in Piedmont, learning the correct tasting method and cheese terminology, used by professional tasters, so as to discover how to taste cheese, which is a fascinating experience, but one which requires at the same time, a lot of attention and concentration.

Using this method, we will taste in fact, the famous **ROBIOLA of ROCCAVERANO P.D.O.**, made from 'raw' goat's milk, with acid coagulation and a 'bloomy rind', produced in Southern Piedmont. This cheese originates from the Saracen raids.

We will also taste the excellent P.D.O '**Bra Duro**' (hard version) and '**Toma Piemontese**' cheeses made from cow's milk, both significantly influenced by the near-by and always present French dairy cheesemaking culture and technology.

Originating from the Occitan culture, and thanks to the herbs found on the best mountain pastures in Piedmont, made only in a few thousand forms, with raw cow's milk, from the important breeds of cattle 'Bianca Piemonte', and produced only during the best months for the cows to graze in the mountain pastures, which is to say, June, July, August and a few days in September, we will taste the **P.D.O 'RASCHERA DI ALPEGGIO'**.

Finally, we will taste one of the rarest Italian and European cheeses, the prestigious P.D.O '**CASTELMAGNO**', produced in small quantities, with the difficult and laborious technique of grinding the curd into tiny pieces and pressing the fresh wheels at length.

Thank you for your presence and participation at this Workshop on typical PDO Piedmont cheeses.

Kind regards

Cristiano De Riccardis

