

News, lore and bite-sized reviews

100-Mile Cheese

In their recent book, *The Hundred-Mile Diet: A Year of Eating Locally*, authors J.B. MacKinnon and Alisa Smith write of the challenges of eating only locally produced foods. The buzz around their project has spawned a movement, with green-savvy gourmets wondering, “Could I do this? How would I survive without coffee, chocolate, Parmigiano Reggiano and Thai red curry paste?” These are terrifying questions, for sure.

Cheese-loving Torontonians taking the hundred-mile pledge will do better than those with mocha-java addictions. A quick map study shows that GTA fromagistas have plenty of options to serve with their turnips.

Cheddar

In 1903 there were 3000 cheddar makers throughout Quebec and Ontario, making it virtually impossible not to buy local. Most of these producers closed or were bought out as cow milk cheese operations mega-sized during ensuing years. Luckily, one of the survivors, **Pine River Cheese** of Kincardine, a cooperative established in 1885, meets the distance criteria for Torontonians (or Bramaleans, at least!) Other venerable cheddar makers including **Black River**, **Jensen** and **Maple Dale** are just outside Toronto’s orbit, but within reach of hundred-milers from Ottawa, Kingston and Prince Edward County.

The unfortunate thing about cow dairying is that with the exception of on-farm processors (none currently making cheddar in Ontario), milk comes from pooled sources, and in some cases has traveled quite a distance to arrive at the cheese maker. This mixed and unidentifiable provenance frustrates localists, cheese makers, environmentalists, and raw-milk cheese advocates alike.

European-Style Cheeses

Portuguese, Greek and Italian-Canadians have long supplied recipes, labour and a customer pool for small and medium-sized businesses making European-style cheeses. Toronto’s proximal sources for these well-priced staples include **Paron Cheese** (Hamilton region) for Montasio and other treats, **International Cheese** (Keele and St. Clair) for pizza needs, and **Portuguese Canadian Cheese** (Etobicoke) for a tasty spectrum of cow and goat cheeses named after individual Azores islands. When purchasing locally made “supermarket cheese”, make sure that the first ingredient is milk, not modified milk ingredients. This latter category includes protein powders and butter oils requiring unnecessary energy input to produce and transport.

Artisan and Specialty Cheese

Monforte Dairy (Millbank), and **Ewenity Dairy Co-op** (Shelburne area) make all manner of sheep milk cheeses: fresh, aged, bloomy, smoked, herbed, wined and brined. **C'est Bon Chèvre** (St. Mary's) offers inimitable fresh chèvre, while **Woolwich Dairy** (Orangeville) provides a more prosaic version, and is experimenting with ashed and bloomy forms.

In My Fridge

Here are a few of the unabashedly 4 000-mile cheeses I'm enjoying right now. I would gladly move to a Spanish island or the Pyrénées to lessen the petrol-burden of my preferences, but I'm not ready to give up these costly imports just yet.

Mahon: This pasteurized cow's milk cheese from the Balearic Islands has a round-sided square shape from the knotted cloth used to squeeze and drain the curds. At its best when *curado* -- rubbed with oil and paprika and aged over 6 months -- **Mahon** is fruity and pleasantly piquant, with an unmistakable Mediterranean quality that's enhanced when batons are drizzled with sweet olive oil and fresh tarragon.

Majorero: Another Spanish island cheese, **Majorero** is a firm pressed raw goat's milk disk from the Atlantic Canary islands. Though young springy versions are not that special, the dense dull-ivory aged wheels convey a spectrum of toasted, spicy nutty aromas and flavours. Phenomenal with a rare bottle of Rogue Brewery's Soba Ale, **Majorero** will go nicely with your favourite brown ale.

Ossau-Iraty: This name is an umbrella appellation for a range of ancient raw milk sheep cheeses from the Basque region. Good when young and supple, or when hard and covered with a mossy-smelling tough grey rind. Fragrant, sweet and lanolic, **Ossau-Iraty** is a gentle surprise for those used to salty, coarser Italian pecorinos.

On the Calendar

April 30 **Ontario cheese at Somewhereness**: Wine-tasting hosted by Stratus, Malivoire, Norman Hardie, Tawse and Flat Rock Cellars
<http://somewhereness.com>

May 3 **Night School for Cheese Fans: Spring Cheese**
Leslieville Cheese Market <http://leslievillecheese.com>

May 5 **Cured Meats and Ancient Cheeses**
St. Lawrence Market Talk <http://www.cheeseculture.ca/news.html#1>