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Our Cheese Trade in Danger



At the annual convention of the Eastern Ontario Dairymen's Association a report of which appeared in last week's issue, several statements were made regarding the cheese industry, and the quality of Canadian cheese that our dairymen should take into their most serious consideration. A couple of the leaders in the export trade made the startling statement that the reputation of our cheese had gone back five years. To-day the Englishman is enquiring what is the matter with Canadian cheese, that it does not keep as well as it did a few years ago. Surely, if these statements are correct, and no one present expressed a doubt as to their accuracy, we have reached a most serious state of affairs in connection with our most important industry, and one that should stir up every dairyman to do his utmost to remedy matters.

But what has been the cause of this deterioration in quality? Several conditions in connection with the manufacturing and shipping of cheese came out in the discussion at the convention, to which a large share of this deterioration may be ascribed. Notably among these is the practice of many factories of shipping their cheese too green. In a number of cases cheese have been known to have been shipped out of the factory when only a couple of days old, and one or two instances are known where cheese were shipped when only twenty-four hours out of the hoops. Under such conditions how is it possible to supply our export trade with the finest quality of cheese? It can't be done, and factories which adopt such practices are not supplying their customers with cheese, but with raw curd, and should be fined for selling goods under false pretenses.

The explanation of this condition of affairs seems to be this: A few years ago there was an urgent demand for a more meaty and softer quality of cheese instead of the rough, harsh, dry stuff being made at that time. To meet this demand, many makers have, perhaps, gone to the other extreme, and are turning out a quality of cheese deficient in keeping qualities. And, perhaps, the makers are not so much to blame as would appear at first sight. To make a soft, meaty cheese, it is absolutely necessary that the maker should be able to control the temperature of the curing-room. In the majority of our factories the curing-rooms are in such bad shape that if a cheese is not made firm and dry, it will go off flavor quickly. This has resulted in makers where curing conditions are bad, using a large amount of starter, so as to induce the milk to work quickly and the cheese to break down rapidly. To keep such cheese in a dilapidated old curing-room, with

the temperature up near 90 degrees, would mean a serious loss to the factory, and the only salvation is to ship them as quickly as possible. This, as we have pointed out, has been largely practised, and the cheese, while passing inspection on this side, would land in Great Britain in a soft, mushy condition, having no keeping qualities whatever.

No cheese should be allowed to leave a factory till it is at least two weeks old. But to keep cheese in the average curing-room for that length of time during the hot weather, unless they are made stiff and firm, is practically impossible. To get at the root of this matter, then, there must be a renovation of the curing-rooms of probably three-quarters of the cheese factories of this province. While this renovating process is going on, makers should use judgment and common sense in regard to making. It is a foolish, and at the same time a rascally piece of business to ship curd instead of cheese under any conditions. A starter is all right in its place, but when its use is abused, as has been shown in the case of makers rushing through the business too quickly, then it had better be discarded altogether, and the old style of ripening adopted.

Another rascally practice as brought out at the convention is that of getting rid of a lot of old, rancid cheese by grinding it up and putting it in the centre of good cheese. A maker that would do that should be dismissed on the spot. There is no room for him in the business, and he had better seek a living elsewhere. One can hardly credit that such a thing has been done. But it is only too true, and to the lasting disgrace of the maker and the patrons who countenanced such action. Any maker is liable to have a batch of cheese occasionally that may be a little off, and the best way of getting rid of them is to label them as such, and sell them for what they are worth as culls. A half-a-dozen "culls" distributed through a shipment may cause serious injury to a factory's reputation; whereas, if they were especially marked and sold separately from the regular shipment, would go forward without any comment whatever.

The conditions of the past season certainly show that we are not getting any nearer perfection in our cheese-making methods. The too numerous complaints in regard to last year's goods indicate that there is a screw loose somewhere, and that a special education of the patron, the maker, and everyone connected with the business in better methods, is urgently needed. There are no indications that the quality of milk supplied the factories is improving very much, and that makers are as up-to-date and as skilful in their methods as the needs of the trade demand. As the Minister of Agriculture well said at Smith's Falls a week ago,