

## *Asiago Cheese P.D.O.*

*(Source: Consortium for the Protection of Asiago Cheese)*

### **Asiago d'Allevo (ripened variety)**

This variety is manufactured by processing milk obtained from 1 or 2 milking operations. Only cows' milk is used to produce Asiago Cheese. After collection and before the Cheese-making process is begun, the milk undergoes partial skimming treatment. Coagulation occurs by means of the addition of a coagulating enzyme (of bovine origin) at the temperature of  $35^{\circ}\text{C} \pm 2^{\circ}\text{C}$ . The half-cooking process is continued until the mass being worked reaches the temperature of  $47^{\circ}\text{C} \pm 2^{\circ}\text{C}$ , which takes about 10-12 minutes.

Following heating, and after the cutting operation, or 'spinatura', in which the mass of Cheese curd is broken up into granules, the curd is extracted and the Cheese is placed in moulds for forming. After the portioning operation, and a few hours' rest (3-5 h) on the wheying table, the cheeses are turned. The product is then sent to the presalting area, where the removal of whey is completed and the forms are marked with the seals of the regulatory board. The whole process is completed in three to five days, during which time the forms are turned various times.

The salting operation is then carried out. This can be done in two ways: either with the surface dry-salting technique or with brine.

The final phase is the seasoning period, in which the cheeses are left in storage bays to ripen. At this point, the important factors are temperature ( $13\text{-}16^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) and the degree of humidity (80-85%).

### **Asiago pressato (the fresh variety)**

This variety of Asiago is obtained exclusively with whole cow's milk, procured from 1 or 2 milking operations.

The bovine enzyme is added to stimulate coagulation of the milk at temperatures generally ranging from  $35\text{-}40^{\circ}\text{C}$ .

The curd is cut as soon as it reaches a suitable consistency. This operation is performed with a curd-knife when the granules have grown to the size of a small nut.

The half-cooking process continues until the mass of curd being worked reaches a temperature of  $44^{\circ}\text{C} \pm 2^{\circ}\text{C}$ . After the half-cooking process the curd is extracted and placed in the moulds for forming.

The working of the curd which has just been extracted is the important phase in the production of fresh Asiago and includes the operations of repeated cutting of the curd, salting and turning the cheese.

The curd is then placed in the moulds, sometimes after previous portioning, and is compacted by manual or pneumatic presses.

The presalting operation takes place while the Cheese is kept at controlled temperature (13-15°C) and relative humidity (85%) for periods varying from 36 to 96 hours.

The salting operation can be carried out in two ways: either with the surface dry-salting technique or with brine (16-19°B).

The final phase is the ageing or maturing period, during which the cheeses are left in storage bays to ripen. The important factors are the storage temperature (11-14°C) and relative humidity (80-85%).

### Asiago D.O.P. is produced only in certain areas

From the pasture-land in the Po Valley to Alpine meadows on the Asiago plateau and in the province of Trent. The milk-collection areas and the specified traditional zones of production, which have been established by law, lie within four provinces in the north-eastern region of Italy. The areas are the two provinces of Trent and Vicenza, and parts of the lowland provinces of Padua and Treviso. In the year 2000 production of Asiago Cheese exceeded 20,000 tonnes (+33% with respect to the previous three-year period) and an invoice turnover of about 75 million Euro was recorded for the same year. These figures raised the Asiago brand to the fifth position in the Italian National market listings for D.O.P. cheeses.

Asiago D.O.P. - Cheese, half-cooked, produced with cow's milk in two different varieties		
Cheese type	Asiago d'allevato (ripened variety)	Asiago pressato (fresh variety)
Seasoning	d'Allevato: max. 2 years Mezzano (medium-ripe variety): 3-5 months	Pressato: 20-40 days
Form	cylindrical, with straight sides, and flat or almost flat upper and lower surfaces	cylindrical, with smooth, convex sides, and flat or almost flat upper and lower surfaces
Size	30 -36 cm diameter 9 -12 cm high	30 - 40 cm diameter 11 - 15 cm high
Weight	8 - 12 Kg.	11 - 15 Kg.
Crust	smooth and regular	fine and elastic
Appearance and consistency	small holes, straw colour, crumbly	larger holes, light colour, soft
Flavour	distinct piquant taste	sweet, delicate taste