

THE OXFORD COMPANION TO
CHEESE

Edited by
CATHERINE DONNELLY

Foreword by
MATEO KEHLER



Toma Piemontese is an Italian PDO (protected designation of origin) cheese produced from cow's milk throughout the provinces of Cuneo, Turin, Biella, Vercelli, Novara, and Verbania and in some towns in the province of Asti. About a thousand tons are produced every year. Toma Piemontese is the most widespread and probably the oldest cheese of the Piedmont region, where the production of cheese and its consumption by common people were first documented in the eleventh century. The cheese had its origins in the mountain pastures of the Piedmont Alps, but throughout the centuries its production has gradually come down to the valleys.

Toma Piemontese is produced with whole or partially skimmed milk. After a double curd cutting, the cheese is put into molds (typically named *fascere*), pressed for 24–72 hours, and salted, traditionally by hand or in brine, for 24–48 hours. See *FASCÈRA*. The ripening time is 15 days for the small size, which has a diameter of about 6–10 inches (15–25 centimeters) and weighs about 4–8.6 pounds (2–6 kilograms), and 60 days for the large size, which has a diameter of about 8–12 inches (20–30 centimeters) and weighs about 13–17.6 pounds (6–8 kilograms).

There are two types of Toma Piemontese. The first type, Toma Piemontese PDO, is produced with whole milk and has a dough-white or ivory-white appearance with small and sparse holes. This cheese has an elastic texture, a mild odor with milk and cream characteristics, and a delicate, sweet taste. The second type, Toma Piemontese semigrassa PDO, is produced only in a large size with semi-skim milk. Its appearance is yellowish with small and sparse holes. This cheese is characterized by a consistent texture, a strong and persistent odor, and a very savory, salty flavor.



Toma Piemontese is probably the oldest cheese of the Piedmont region of Italy, shown here in both its whole fat and semi-fat versions. © GIUSEPPE ZEPPA

See also ALP CHEESEMAKING; ITALY; and TOMME.

Assopiemonte DOP e IGP. <http://www.assopiemonte.com>.

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Giuseppe Zeppa

Tomme is a generic term used to describe a round flat cheese with a grayish natural rind. The name most likely derived from the Greek word *tomos* or the Latin *tomus*, meaning a cut, slice, or section of a book. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “tome” as a large or weighty book. The use of this term in describing a cheese most likely came from someone asking for a large slice or piece of cheese, but later the term was applied to the entire wheel.

While there are no official rules defining what makes a cheese a Tomme, they are often named after their place of origin such as the famous Tomme de Savoie made in the French Alps, which is typically made from skim cow's milk after the cream is taken for butter production. This pressed cheese was produced and consumed in high mountain pastures; its peasant origins and direct consumption explain its rustic appearance. Tommes were made famous in France and Switzerland, but have declined and are now commonly made throughout the United States. If you ask cheese professionals to define Tomme, some will likely suggest that a Tomme is essentially a “farmer's cheese” made and consumed on the farm. See *FARMER CHEESE*. Others may tell you that a Tomme is made during summer months while cows are eating fresh, green grass, and others will say that Tommes are only made by professional cheesemakers.

The most common similarities that Tommes share are their shape and size. They are bigger and rounder than they are thick. They can range from 6–40 inches (15–100 centimeters) around and are typically 3–4 inches (7–10 centimeters) thick. Grayish natural rinds tend to be a common characteristic as well, but this rind color is not as consistent a characteristic as the size and shape. The majority of Tommes go