



Press release

The mountain cheese celebrations have begun!

The Mountain Cheese Olympics in Jura

Bellelay, 23rd October 2009 – 100 international judges came to Bellelay Abbey today to decide which of the 605 mountain cheeses entered were the best in their category. Which of the cheese-makers have won one of the 61 medals will be announced on Sunday in Saignelégier at the prize-giving ceremony. Cheese-makers from the well-known European mountain nations have been joined by colleagues from as far afield as Japan, Mexico and Canada – all vying for the title of the world's best mountain cheese.

Federal Councillor Doris Leuthard came to Bellelay Abbey to visit the big competition and commend the judges as she watched them at work. She then joined Michel Probst and Andreas Rickenbacher, two government representatives from the cantons of Jura and Bern, to open the Tête de Moine museum and the Cheese Market in Saignelégier.

There will be one star illuminating the Jura region this weekend, throwing a dazzling spotlight on the world's mountain cheeses. When the Olympic Cheese Market, with 70 producers, was officially opened, the first guests were able to experience the panoply of varieties and delightful tastes on offer. 40,000 visitors are expected in Bellelay and Saignelégier over the weekend.

The importance of mountain cheese...

Ten days ago, competition organisers witnessed a touching incident that clearly demonstrates the importance of this competition for cheese-makers. A competition entrant from the Ancona region wasn't prepared to let anyone else deliver "her" cheese to St Imier. During his welcome address, the Director of FROMARTE and President of the organising committee underlined the importance of the Mountain Cheese Olympics with this touching story: *"If an elderly lady, picture a typical Italian Nonna, travels a full ten hours by train to personally deliver her cheese samples to the competition – yes, she wanted to be absolutely sure that the cheese arrived safe and sound – if this lady then turns around and, on the same evening, travels another ten hours back home because of her sons and her work, how better can I demonstrate the implicit importance of the Mountain Cheese Olympics? We are delighted that this Nonna will be with us tomorrow evening in Jura so that we can give her a big hug".*

Taking a close look at mountain cheeses

The 605 mountain cheeses entered for the competition in 15 main categories and 16 sub-categories with designation of origin were assessed and awarded marks by 20 judging groups comprised of a maximum of 6 judges. The judges, from both home and abroad, all work within the fields of dairy farming and the cheese industry, trade, catering, consumer protection and/or the media. They based their judging on the competition rules and evaluated the cheeses entered according to their appearance, taste and aroma and the consistency of the body. Just over half of the cheese-makers who entered the competition come from Switzerland, largely due to the fact that the 6th Mountain Cheese Olympics is being held here for the second time. There are around 50 entries each from Italy, France, Germany and Austria with cheese-makers from Canada, Mexico, Japan, Portugal and Spain also entering just under 10 cheese samples.



One particular group of cheese experts will be looking forward to tomorrow evening when they will receive their diplomas as «Sommelier Maître Fromager», the first successful graduates of FROMARTE's new course.

What our experts had to say

This morning, the Director of the Federal Office for Agriculture, Manfred Bötsch and the Director of Swiss Tourism, Peter Schmid took part in a round table event along with other guests to discuss consumers' expectations of a regional product.

Mr Schmid spoke about the growth that tourism brings to the mountain regions. The partnership between tourism and agriculture signifies an additional development and safeguards a large number of jobs : *"I am delighted to be able to show you the opportunities that tourism can offer the mountain regions."*

Manfred Bötsch emphasized the Olympic spirit between the best alpine and mountain cheeses and underlined the significance of the cheese specialists' craftsmanship : *"The Olympics and the mountain cheeses are top ambassadors for Swiss dairy farming."*

The added value that mountain regions provide for both agriculture and the population as a whole was the subject of Thursday's discussions. The two-day seminar, with a podium discussion, was attended by agriculture and tourism representatives and took place prior to the Mountain Cheese Olympics in Tramelan.

A festival for everyone – for the cheese fans of today and tomorrow!

When you are standing in the midst of the covered mountain cheese market with its 70 chalets loaded with cheese delicacies from the local region, from Switzerland and abroad, when you are at the biggest Swiss mountain cheese buffet or the giant mountain cheese fondue for 1000 guests, it is easy to be amazed at the sheer diversity of mountain cheeses with their exquisite tastes and aromas. And if it all becomes too much, there is the organ concert to enjoy at Bellelay Abbey, or why not partake of a fondue in a horse-drawn cart in Bellelay itself.

There will be a multitude of events throughout the whole weekend, giving visitors of all ages a chance to experience and learn about crafts, traditions and history. In the Tête de Moine museum and with a play that will be presented several times throughout the weekend, visitors will be whisked away on a journey through time to learn about the history of the monks and their cheese, the Tête de Moine. You can also see how this famous cheese, older than the Swiss Confederation itself, used to be made during the presentations that will take place daily at the market in Saignelégier. You can also watch Gruyère or Parmiggiano cheese being made during the live cheese-making demonstrations. Other facets of the Jura region will be on display, too, with chainsaw wood sculpting and horsemanship shows.

The children will have a great time as well: they can make their own cheese at the Mountain Cheese Olympics, ride ponies and horses, enjoy crafts, face-painting and tractor competitions. In Saignelégier, they can enjoy rolling cheeses, milking cows or hanging from the Flying Fox as they whizz through the air! There's even a cheese circus to delight all our younger visitors.

Throughout the entire Mountain Cheese Olympics, there will be a chance to visit the largest Swiss wind and solar power plants, situated above St Imier. The Longines museum and the Spielhofer dairy in St Imier will also be offering free tours for the whole weekend.



Travel arrangements and venues designed with our visitors in mind

Our great cheese festival will take place even if it rains, with both our venues offering covered stands and activity areas. Extra trains provided by the SBB (Swiss railways) and a shuttle bus service arranged by the Chemins de Fer du Jura (Jura Railways) will ensure that your journey to Saignelégier and the connections between Bellelay and back again will be stress-free. Entry to all the venues is free of charge.

Notice to editors and registration for the 6th Mountain Cheese Olympics

Media representatives can visit the 6th Mountain Cheese Olympics.

Please visit <http://www.caseusmontanus.ch/2009/en/media/> for further research material (images and texts).

We look forward to seeing your publication and will gladly answer any questions you may have.

For questions about the event:

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