Evaluating the benefits and risks of organic raw milk cheese. Challenges in the production of organic cheese made from raw milk


Summary

Raw milk offered for sale within and into the European Union has to be produced according to the requirements of Commission Directive 89/362/EEC and to meet quality standards described in Council Directive 92/46/EEC. Together the regulations say many things about the quality of milk and the hygienic means of production including guidance and requirements for:
- The means of production, farm specifications etc.
- Processes, milk handling
- Animal health
- Milk composition related to quality - especially antibiotics, cell count and bacterial content (Hillerton & Berry, 2004)

Unpasteurized milk and the associated food products (yogurt, butter, cheese etc.) made from raw milk is safely produced and consumed in many areas around the world. Cheese making is a major industry worldwide, while most of the production comes from large scale industrial producers; a large part is still practiced on a relatively small scale which accounts for the rich diversity of cheeses available. Cheese is made from milk, which contains milk fat and coagulated proteins and preservation is largely achieved by controlling the pH and water activity (Little et al., 2008).

In the European Union the production of both fresh and raw milk cheeses is allowed. Between 1995 and 2004 cheese production increased by nearly 15 %, with per capita consumption growing at an average rate of 1.5 % per year. Nearly 40 % of EU milk is consumed as cheese. Four Member States (Germany, France, Italy and the Netherlands) produce more than 75 % of the cheese in the EU. The European dairy industry processes approximately 135 million tons of raw milk into a broad range of products, both for consumption and for use in the production of many food, feed and pharmaceutical products. The raw milk delivered by the EU-25’s 1.6 million dairy farmers, processed by the dairy industry, plays a vital role in rural areas (EU, 2006).

About 700 000 tons of raw milk cheeses are produced annually in Europe, particularly in France, Italy and Switzerland (Beuvier & Grappin, 1997). In these areas a large variety of traditional cheeses are still produced using raw milk.

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the mass market (and for pasteurization), the industrial process has triggered a mechanism from which it is hard to escape. It is common knowledge that farms for the intensive production of milk use a massive quantity of antibiotics, to avoid the cows getting sick and being unable to produce. Antibiotics are designed to kill harmful bacteria, but they also kill useful ones.