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Blessed is the cheesemaker

How to be
Will Studd, big cheese

CCHEESE has been the focus of my life for more than three decades, developing from an interest in cooking and traditional natural foods and a curiosity about how they were made.

Initially, I chose a safe professional career in chartered accountancy — big mistake. After a miserable year of working as an articled clerk in London with a major accounting firm, I quit.

After a few false starts my first big break came in 1975 after I sub-let a rundown delicatessen at the back of a smart supermarket based in Notting Hill Gate. The arrangement was simple but clever.

Supermarkets are about strategically stacking a range of basic items on shelves and selection is determined by volume and profit. In contrast, a carefully selected range of interesting quality products is critical in a delicatessen, backed by friendly, knowledgeable and motivated staff.

I stocked the shop with the finest foods I could find in London, and artisan and farmhouse cheeses soon became a major feature. The formula worked and over the next five years I opened six more delicatessens in central London.

In 1980, I sold the business

and migrated to Australia with my wife and young family. Fresh produce was abundant and extraordinarily cheap, but when it came to interesting cheeses, there was absolutely nothing.

Most of the Australian cheeses available were blocks of industrial cheddar with strange names such as Tasty and Coon. Interesting European cheeses were also extremely limited and their quality and presentation were depressing.

I realised many Australians had never experienced well-made traditional cheese and decided to establish a wholesale cheese distribution company.

My first air shipment of French and English farmhouse cheeses sold out within a few days. Then I had a visit from young cheesemakers Laurie Jensen and Richard Thomas, who were seeking advice on how to sell their new creamy blue cheese from Neerim South.

At last I had found an Australian cheese with flavour and character. We named it Gippsland Blue and its success marked the beginning of an exciting new direction.

For the following 15 years I mentored dozens of new artisan cheesemakers on what cheeses to make, how they should taste and how to name and market them. On regular buying trips to



Will Studd never ceases to be amazed by the many wonderful varieties of cheese made today.

PICTURE:
ANGELA MILNE

Europe I learnt a lot about benchmark cheeses.

Still, I remained frustrated by local regulations banning cheeses made from raw milk. Most of the well-known cheeses in Europe

are made from raw milk, and apart from genuinely reflecting their region of origin, they also taste better.

In 1996 I decided to do something about it and formed an association of specialist cheese lovers to lobby for new regulations, but my intentions went belly-up. It took eight years, and a legal challenge involving Roquefort, before they agreed to review the regulations for cheeses made from raw milk other than hard-cooked parmesans types.

It was a difficult and testing period, but I was determined not to give up despite threats of jail and huge fines. I was particularly touched when the French government awarded me the Ordre Merite du Agricole, but disappointed to find that instead of supporting a choice, some local cheesemakers regarded the

whole question with deep mistrust.

There was a feeling of great relief when Food Standards Australia New Zealand finally announced in 2005 that

Roquefort could be sold legally, and that it planned to review the Australian dairy processing standards.

These days I am a director of two cheese companies: Calendar Cheese, distributor of a wide variety of fine-quality cheeses throughout Australia, and Fromagent, which imports benchmark cheeses from Europe. My colleagues in both these organisations have played a huge role in my professional success.

My first book, *Chalk and Cheese*, was self-published with friends at Purple Egg in 1999.

My second book, *Cheese Slices*, has just been published and I organised the edit and design. It is linked to a documentary TV series of 20 episodes. It has aired in more than a dozen countries, reached an audience of more than 60 million and is used for training.

CV

Born London, 1953.

Education Mill Hill School, Leeds University (economics, honours, BA).

Jobs Builder's labourer, factory hand, shop assistant, founding director Butterfield Cheese Factors, founding partner Richmond Hill Cafe and Larder, founding director Calendar Cheese Company and Fromagent.

Mentors Pierre Androuet, Patrick Rance, Randolph Hodgson.

Unwinding At home on the Mornington Peninsula, tending the vegetable garden, fishing and occasionally pretending to surf.

Timing and luck are important in any business, and since I began my career there has been a huge resurgence of interest in artisan cheese in many parts of the world. We are becoming much more aware of what we eat — a reaction to the bland mediocrity of mass-production.

The demand for artisan cheese with distinctive flavours, textures and aromas continues to grow, and I never cease to be amazed by the many wonderful varieties made today, and the skills and traditions of those who make them.

The more I travel and learn about cheese, the greater my passion, and sharing that with others is extremely rewarding.

I want to make a real difference to what future generations of Australians will enjoy and encourage a better understanding of what makes some cheeses more special than others. If I think about it now, that seems a good reason to go to work.

PAUL EDWARDS