



Panel

## 11.2. Cheese Making in the Alpine Space from the 18th to the 21st Century

**Panel organiser:** Roth, Ernst, ROTH-Stiftung Burgdorf, Switzerland

The history of cheese making brings us to the roots of an important economic branch in the Alpine Space. The fabrication of cheese in mountain regions had probably been initiated by convents. However, until the end of the Middle Ages cheese made in the «alps» lacked some of the qualities we associate with it today. The method of coagulating milk with rennet for example only was introduced at the beginning of the modern age. Today, the art of cheese making is represented in scientific works, literature, art objects, music, folkloristic art and craftsmanship. It also plays a considerable role in tourism. In the 19th century cheese processing was transferred from the alps to the valleys. This greatly increased the volume of the production and the product itself became more durable. Cheese became popular, often part of the daily food within the country as well as abroad. In this panel the basis for the foundation of a cheese dairy and its different forms of organisation will be looked at. Their destiny, development, success and failures, and their significance in the villages will be analysed on the basis of the minutes of three cheese dairies. The growing number of them will be looked at as well as on their mechanisation and their increase in capacity which led to a subsequent reduction of their numbers. We will also look at the development of cheese exports from Switzerland, its trade routes and the trade firms which gradually diminished when the commerce fell into the hands of a few big houses.

**Chair:** Roth, Ernst, ROTH-Stiftung Burgdorf, Switzerland

Thursday, 22 August 2013 // 1430 – 1630 // Session 11 – Room A-119

### 11.2.1. The history of Cheese Making and the development of cheese-dairies in Switzerland from the 18th to the 21st Century.

Paper

**Eichenberger, Ernst, Switzerland**

This paper looks at the history of cheese making, especially the development of cheese-dairies. Cheese making in the hilly and mountainous regions had been initiated and supported by convents. But only with the introduction of rennet did the production of cheese improve in a way which made it possible to produce hard-cheese with a high fat content and a finer, more aromatic consistency. This cheese was more suitable for export since it could be stored longer than the one before. In the second part of the paper I will trace the development of the cheese-production within Switzerland, especially the widening of the production space in the 19th century when more and more cheese was produced in the midlands. This growth in production was influenced by a rising demand for cheese not only within Switzerland itself, but also abroad. Crucial for making possible this development were the dairies. Their role and functioning will be discussed in the third part of this paper. Based on the analysis of the minutes of three cheese-dairies their destiny, here the development, success and failures as well as their significance for the villages will be discussed.

### 11.2.2. The dairy in Lombardy, between mountains and plains, during the nineteenth century

Paper

**Besana, Claudio, Università Cattolica, Milan, Italy**

**Locatelli, Andrea Maria, Università Cattolica, Milan, Italy**

This paper considers the dairy production in the irrigated plains of Lombardy during the first half of the nineteenth century. In this area of southern Lombardy, one or more structures ("casello o casone") produced butter, parmesan cheese and soft cheeses (stracchino). The dairy production was dispersed while trading activities were managed by mid and large wholesalers based in the main cities in the south-west of Lombardy (Milan, Pavia and Lodi): they sold Lombard cheese at long distances and created an international market for Parmesan. The research highlights the transhumance in the Orobian Prealps (Lecco, Bergamo and Brescia): during the summer the cattle-breeders (called Bergamini or Malghesi) raised cows in the mountain pastures and produced soft cheese. In the winter, they moved in the irrigated plains producing different types of cheese and to trade the cattle. This integration declined in the second half of the nineteenth century while plain dairy management was taken by local entrepreneurs, cooperatives (landlords and large tenants) and also by Swiss producers. At the same time, the "gorgonzola" was a new form of integration: this veined blue cheese, made from unskimmed cow's milk, was produced in the plains, aged in the caves of Valsassina (Orobian Prealps) and sold abroad. This production process enabled the development of relevant business experience and some entrepreneurs, as Galbani and Locatelli, exported their cheese worldwide.

### 11.2.3. The Development of Cheese-Export in Switzerland in the 19th century

Paper

**Roth, Ernst, ROTH-Stiftung Burgdorf, Switzerland**

This paper will describe and analyse the development of the cheese export firms in Switzerland. For a long time part of the dairy products were commercialised in towns by the manufacturers themselves. Since the end of the 18th century a bigger spill-over came on the market and the trade slowly changed to specialised merchants which were still situated in or at the periphery of the producing regions. In the first half of the 19th century, the improvement of the road system and the rise of the railways enabled them to move the cheese-trading houses to more central places. In the 20th century the dairy industry became highly regulated. The liberalisation of the dairy industry led to a process of concentration so that at the end of the 20th century there remained only a handful of trading houses while groups of cheese manufacturers formed new trading firms. The biggest share of Switzerland's cheese is now merchandised by the Emmi Käse AG.

#### Participants

**Besana, Claudio**

Assistant professor Economic History, Faculty of Economics. Teaches business history at faculties of Foreign Languages. Interests of research: economic and social patterns in Italy and Lombardy from 18th to 20th century; economic policy in Italy (1958 – 1963); Lombardy food industry in 19th century.

(Italy). Interests: taxation, economic development (18th-20th century) business history in Lombardy; European integration: welfare state and social policies in Europe and Italy.

**Eichenberger, Ernst**

Former civil servant with the Swiss Department of Foreign Affairs. Since his retirement he is actively involved in historical research, focussing on cheese making. Publication: «Käserel Oberblaken – Chronik einer Dorfkäserel».

**Roth, Ernst**

Born 1942 in Burgdorf, the exportcenter of the Emmental cheese. Studies in Zoology at the Berne University, lic. phil. nat; complementary studies in dairy-technology. 1969-1998 actively engaged in the cheese-export business. Since 1993 engaged in the promotion of Berner Alp- und Hobelkäse; 2000 - 2009 inventory of alp cheese-manufactories in Bernese Oberland. Touristic promotion of the Simmental as "AlpKultur". Since 2007 he manages the ROTH-Stiftung Burgdorf which is engaged in art-collection, bibliotheca and archives, focussing on the history of the Emmental county, cheese-manufacturing, cheese-export and dairy-industry.

**Locatelli, Andrea Maria**

Assistant professor Economic History, Faculty of Economics, Università Cattolica, Milan