

Case Study Summary: West Country Farmhouse Cheddar

Brief description of product (specification) and area	Cylindrical or block-shaped pale yellow hard cheese, made on the farm from raw or pasteurised cows milk from producers' own herds in South West England (Somerset, Dorset, Devon, Cornwall) except in times of shortage when it can come from farms in the surrounding area (Gloucestershire, Wiltshire). The curds are separated, cooled and cut then turned and stacked by hand in a process called "cheddaring". The cheese is matured in the area for at least 9 months. The area is permanent grassland.
Background/history/motivation	Economic: CAP, deregulation of UK dairy market and cheap industrially-made cheddars and imports, bargaining strength of UK multiple retailers. Orientation towards quality, authenticity, differentiation and traceability.
Status of protection (PDO or PGI), other labels/trademarks	PDO since 1996. Monitored by a private entity (Product Authentication International) to ensure compliance with the Regulation. Variously certified by baseline Assured Food Standards scheme, Linking Environment And Farming (LEAF), Soil Association (organic), RSPCA Freedom Food (livestock welfare) and retailer schemes. Some production of named farms sold under "West Country" brand created by the producers' association or under multiple retailer premium white brands, sometimes incorporating the PDO symbol.
Environment: Overall assessment	Dairy farming to produce West Country Farmhouse cheddar has, overall, a positive effect in light of worse alternatives (loss of permanent grassland through land abandonment, conversion to arable farming where unsuited to the land, development). Helps conserve traditional landscape, knowledge and methods. Highly integrated production system. Farmers strive to maximise milk output but PDO cheese production linked to producer interest in conservation, animal welfare, organic production, other traditional products.
Environment: Most important effects (positive/negative?)	<p>(+ -) although water use is quite high in dairy farming and overall demand is increasing in the area, water is plentiful and the traditional, highly integrated production methods are likely to reduce need.</p> <p>(+ -) water quality: medium-high fertiliser input, but risk of diffuse pollution lesser than for alternative land uses where these are unsuited to the soil type. Producers follow certified schemes, which reduce pollution risk. Some production is conservation grade or organic and this is likely to increase.</p> <p>(+) soil: regional poor soil structure and heavy rain creates risk of water pollution where land use is inappropriate. PDO maintains dairy farming and is likely to permit correct stocking rates and grazing intensity, helping conserve local grassland, hedgerows and trees.</p> <p>(+) Contribution to traditional landscape and land-type maintenance.</p> <p>(+ -) Biodiversity: maintenance of indigenous grass species, and wildlife in hedgerows and woodland.</p> <p>(+ -) Energy/Waste – because of highly integrated, traditional production, this is reduced compared with industrial cheddar making (e.g. reduced transport, plastic packaging, energy for pasteurisation in some cases).</p>
Effects on regional economy: overall assessment	Marginal.

<p>Economy: key data (e.g. scale of production, jobs, price premium...)</p>	<p>12,000 tonnes per year. Family-run farms, plus employees on larger farms. Total average around 10 people directly involved in cheesemaking per farm. Indirect effect on jobs in livestock care, marketing, PR, packaging and retailing.</p> <p>Price Premium (consumer sale) average of around £10.40 kg compared to £7.80 kg for industrially produced premium mature cheddar. No premium at consumer level compared to artisan farmhouse cheddars outside the PDO.</p>
<p>Organisation of producers' group, structure of production and marketing. What role does producers' group play?</p>	<p>West Country Farmhouse Cheesemakers' cooperative runs marketing, PR and trade relations for the producer farms. Present in all national and regional media. Has role in wider promotion of PDOs and PGIs: leading London conference and PDO/PGI lunch.</p> <p>Strategy: tap into interest in local and regional foods and premium products produced on a small scale, importance of people and place in contrast to mass manufacture and the industrialisation of agriculture. Unite producer and consumer. Highlight uniqueness of the landscape and farmers.</p>
<p>Role of subsidies – national/EU funding supporting the product or the region (e.g. LEADER)</p>	<p>Product: CAP dairy subsidies and quotas, agri-environment and rural development schemes. Marketing subsidy from Milk Development Council (UK public body). Region: LEADER+ and Local Food Works projects on local food in production area but not specific to the PDO. Taste of the West industry body promoting local food and drink in general.</p>
<p>Synergies with other sectors/issues, e.g. regional identity, social structure of the region etc.</p>	<p>Synergies exist with regional identity and culture, tourism.</p>
<p>Characterisation of the case – Role of GI for the product. What is particularly interesting, what can be learned from the case?</p>	<p>The main aim of the PDO is to promote quality, uniqueness (“real” cheddar) and authenticity. Important effort to maintain sustainability and create a niche, value-added product in a struggling UK dairy sector. Highly integrated production; dairying is suited to local permanent grassland landscape. Regional identity. Difficulties: comparatively low consumer and retailer understanding/recognition of GIs in UK, simple cheddar is a commodity, bargaining power of retailers, industrial cheese moving into premium market and import success of foreign speciality cheeses. But consumer, media and retailer interest is growing in the PDO, expected to lead to increased “West Country” brand sales and a higher profile for PDOs on packaging and marketing.</p>