STRUCTURED APPROACH TO TASTING CHEESE

Dairy Lexicon

Dairy flavours are the flavour and aroma expressions that arise directly from the milk and from its transformation through the fundamental processes of cheesemaking and aging.

They are the foundation of every cheese's flavour profile and should be assessed before other flavours are considered. In fresh and young cheeses, they may be the only register present. In aged and complex cheeses, they remain the base from which all other flavour development is understood.

Dairy flavours are organised into five groups. A single cheese will often show expressions from more than one group simultaneously, and the presence or absence of a group is itself informative. The groups reflect how dairy flavour transforms from its most direct milk expression through to its most developed and metabolised forms.

Milk - character of the milk itself: its type, freshness, and likely species. These are the most immediate dairy observations and the ones that usually point most directly towards milk type.

Soured - flavours that arise from acidification; the action of cultures on lactose and milk proteins. These are the defining dairy flavours of lactic set and young rennet set cheeses and persist as background notes for most cheeses.

Milk fats - the perceived level and presence of fat in the cheese; from thin and light through to the extreme richness of triple cream styles. This is a register of intensity and weight.

Sweet dairy - the sweet expressions of milk; from the natural sweetness of lactose and fresh cream through to the aged character of caramel, toffee, and fudge.

Savoury dairy - the savoury, metabolised expressions of dairy. The flavours that arise when fat and protein are transformed through enzymatic activity and ageing. These range from the clean character of fresh butter through to the deep, complex savouriness of long-aged cheese.

Guide Terms

- Milk
- Soured Dairy
- Milk fats
- Sweet Dairy
- Savoury Dairy

Dairy Flavours

Group	Guide term	Detailed terms	Description
Milk	Cows' milk	Fresh cow milk, Raw milk, Sweet milk, cultured milk	Neutral, slightly sweet character of cows' milk
	Goats' milk	Goaty, Caprine, Tangy goat	Tangy character of goats' milk - ranges from delicate herbal notes to a more pronounced animal, caprine note in aged styles
	Sheep's milk	Lanolin, Sheepy	Rich, slightly waxy, animal-edged character of sheep milk
	Buffalo milk	Sweet cream, Mild dairy, Warm milk	Sweet, mild character of buffalo milk; gently sweet, occasionally warm and nutty in its dairy expression
	Unclean milk	Cow-y, Billy goat, Farmyard, Off-fresh	The barnyard, animal or off-fresh character – defect
Soured Dairy	Lactic	Light ferment, Strong ferment, Buttermilk, Fresh lactic	Clean, bright, and tangy; the primary fermentation note in most cheese styles and the defining register of lactic set cheeses
	Yoghurt	Set yoghurt, Greek yoghurt, Kefir	Fuller, more rounded and complex lactic character
	Sour cream	Crème fraîche, Cultured cream, Soured fat	A richer, creamier expression of fermented dairy where the fat character and soured character are present together
	Whey	Fresh whey, Sweet whey, Whey ferment, Stale whey	The sweet-sour, slightly fermented character of fresh whey; most prominent in young and fresh cheeses where whey character has not yet been suppressed by pressing or aging
	Cottage cheese	Fresh curd, Loose curd, Mild curd	The mild, slightly lactic, curd-present character of fresh unsalted or lightly salted curd
Milk fats	Light	Skimmed milk, Semi-skimmed, Low fat, Thin, Dry	Clean, low-fat presence; the dairy character is present but thin
	Milk fat	Whole milk, Full fat, Neutral fat	The standard, balanced fat presence of whole milk
	Rich	Full cream, Jersey milk, High fat	A pronounced, generous fat presence; coating and satisfying
	Triple cream	Clotted cream, Double cream, Enriched cream	The extreme fat presence of cream-enriched styles; the fat is the dominant sensory experience
Sweet dairy	Milk sugar	Lactose, Corn flake milk, Fresh milk sweetness	Direct, clean sweetness of lactose in fresh milk and young cheese; most clearly perceived in very fresh or minimally acidified styles
	Sweet cream	Fresh cream, Light cream, Single cream	Mild, rounded sweetness of fresh cream; carrying a light fat character alongside the sweetness
	Cooked milk	Steamed milk, Condensed milk, Scalded milk	The warm, slightly sulphurous sweetness of heated milk
	Caramel / Toffee / Fudge	Caramel, Toffee, Fudge, Butterscotch, Dulce de leche	Deep, complex cooked sweetness; most pronounced in long-aged Alpine, Grana and washed curd styles
Savoury Dairy	Buttery	Fresh butter, Sweet butter, Unsalted butter, Cultured butter	Clean, rich fat character of butter
	Rancid / Butyric	Rancid butter, Baby sick, Butyric, Soapy	Sharp, possibly unpleasant character of advanced lipolysis; present at characteristic levels in some blue styles and in some aged Grana styles
	Salted fresh curd	Salted curd, Fresh cheese savour, Mild savour	The clean, direct savouriness of salted fresh curd
	Aged curd	Aged curd, Mature savour, Developed dairy, Dry Curd	The deeper, more complex savouriness arising from proteolysis during aging; a rounded, mouth-filling savoury depth that is make and post make dependent
	Brown butter	Toasted butter, Cooked fat, Beurre noisette	The Maillard-derived savoury-fat character of transformed dairy fat; a deep, warm, slightly toasted quality distinct from fresh butter; most associated with long-aged pressed and Alpine styles

Dairy Wheel Graphic

