Long Paddock Cheese: a dream for dairy

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A group of Australian and international cheese experts are working to redefine and ignite Australian artisan dairy through two interlinked businesses: Long Paddock Cheese and The Cheese School, based in Castlemaine, Central Victoria.

Long Paddock Cheese is a small-scale artisan organic cow's milk cheese brand produced at and sold from its own purpose-built facility at **The Mill Castlemaine**. Opening in late 2020, Long Paddock Cheese makes handmade artisan cheeses of the highest quality, all ripened to perfection and beautifully presented. There's also an onsite shop, and Long Paddock cheeses are now distributed around Victoria and interstate.

The Cheese School offers professional artisan cheesemaking and other dairy and small-scale business training for cheesemongers, regulators and home cheesemakers.

The two businesses bring together French cheese experts Ivan and Julie Larcher and their business partner Alison Lansley, a former corporate lawyer now dedicated to Australia's artisan cheese industry. Together, Long Paddock Cheese and The Cheese School are a bold and ambitious vision to build and strengthen the artisan cheese industry in Australia.

While Long Paddock Cheese only opened in early 2021,it was years in the planning.

Raising the bar

"Sometimes I laugh, because those around me look at me and say, 'What do you think you're doing?'" Lansley says. "Yes, it is a big, ambitious vision, there's no doubt about that. It's really about trying to help build capacity in the artisan end of the dairy industry, where there really hasn't been that much support in the past. And it's a matter of trying to excite other people as well, to get them involved and become part of that vision."

Unlike other artisan industries that are now thriving, such as craft beer and charcuterie, the artisan cheese industry hasn't experienced the same growth and development. This is something both Long Paddock Cheese and The Cheese School plan to change.

"When you look at these other industries, a whole lot of support mechanisms have come into play," Lansley says. "But it just hasn't happened with dairy. And I think that part of the reason is, it's definitely a lot harder. Cheesemaking is bloody hard and really complicated. To make good cheese consistently over a long period of time, there's a whole range of things that you've got to do. And that's where support and training come in."

Julie and Ivan Larcher have brought their cheese expertise Down Under. And we are truly grateful.

The cheese whisperer

Bringing his expertise to the two operations is Ivan Larcher, also known as "the cheese whisperer". Larcher has worked closely with artisan cheese industries in countries such as the US and the UK, and has now moved to Australia with his family to create incredible cheeses and share his wealth of knowledge with cheesemakers at all levels.

"He is one of a kind," Lansley says of Larcher. "He's got very good formal training and qualifications. He worked in the French cheese industry for a long time. Then he spent a lot of time in countries like the UK and the US, working directly with cheesemakers, helping them set themselves up. He's seen it all, and he's done it all. And he's a very good teacher."

Course at The Cheese School cover everything from soft, hard and blue cheesemaking to cheesemonger and retail training. And it's not just for those who want to start their own dairy business. The school also offers cheesemaking courses for home cooks.

"The response to it has been fantastic," Lansley says. "We've had people from all over Australia come to the school. There have been cheesemakers from a very big Australian cheese operation and cheesemakers from mid-sized businesses through to people who are looking to set up their own small farmhouse cheesemaking operation. Chefs are very interested in cheesemaking, too. We've had quite a few do our fundamentals course."

The spruce bark wrapping gives Driftwood a lovely earthy, woodsy flavour.

Meet the cheeses

Long Paddock Cheese's handmade cheeses are deliciously different soft and semi-hard cheeses that you won't find anywhere else in Australia. The cheeses are made with quality organic milk from nearby dairy farmers Shane and Cindy Attwell, and all have a definite Australian identity as well as a dash of French flair.

"If you're a sensible cheesemaker, you wouldn't be making as many different cheeses as we do," Lansley says. "For efficiency and productivity, and for economic reasons as well. If you focus on two or three cheeses, it makes a lot more sense. But we do it because we want to showcase different styles of cheesemaking for the school."

Banksia is similar to Tomme de Savoie, which comes from the French Alps.

The Long Paddock Cheese selection

Silver Wattle is a soft and unctuous lactic cheese, luxuriously light, with an almost mousse-like paste but a savoury, rich and buttery flavour.

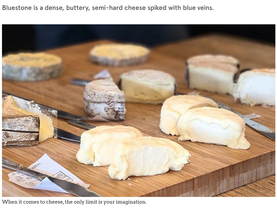
Driftwood is a funky spruce bark-belted soft cheese made in the style of Vacherin Mont D'or, eaten like a Camembert, or baked for maximum molten effect.

Banksia is a six to eight-month Raclette-style cheese. It's firm and elastic, yet creamy and melty and packed full of sweet grassy and savoury flavours.

Ironbark is a 12-month Alpine-style cooked-curd cheese, with smooth dense paste and savoury brothy flavours.

Granite is a 10 to 12-month clothbound Somerset-style cheddar, dense yet crumbly, daffodil yellow in colour, moist and buttery with complex flavours of grass, butter, a hint of earth, a clean line of acid and long satisfying umami deliciousness.

Bluestone is a dense, buttery, semi-hard cheese spiked with blue veins.



When it comes to cheese, the only limit is your imagination.

The sky's the limit

While Long Paddock Cheese and The Cheese School have only been in business for a short time, the impact both operations have already made on the artisan cheese industry in Australia is truly exciting. It's also great news for Aussie cheese lovers everywhere.

"When I came into the industry, I was kind of stunned by the lack of training and other resources for cheesemakers," Lansley says. "What we want to achieve is to raise the profile of what we're trying to do here in Australia. It's getting people to think more about this type of food, in all its different variations. Cheese is endlessly fascinating and endlessly varied. There's no limit to the number of different types of cheese that you can come up with."

You'll find Long Paddock Cheese listed on the EATIVITY Local Food Directory. The EATIVITY Local Food Directory is on a mission to support the local food movement by connecting consumers with local, sustainable and artisan food producers, growers and farmers right across the country. Are you an Australian food producer who'd like to sign up or find out more? Go to the directory or email us at directory@eativitynews.com

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