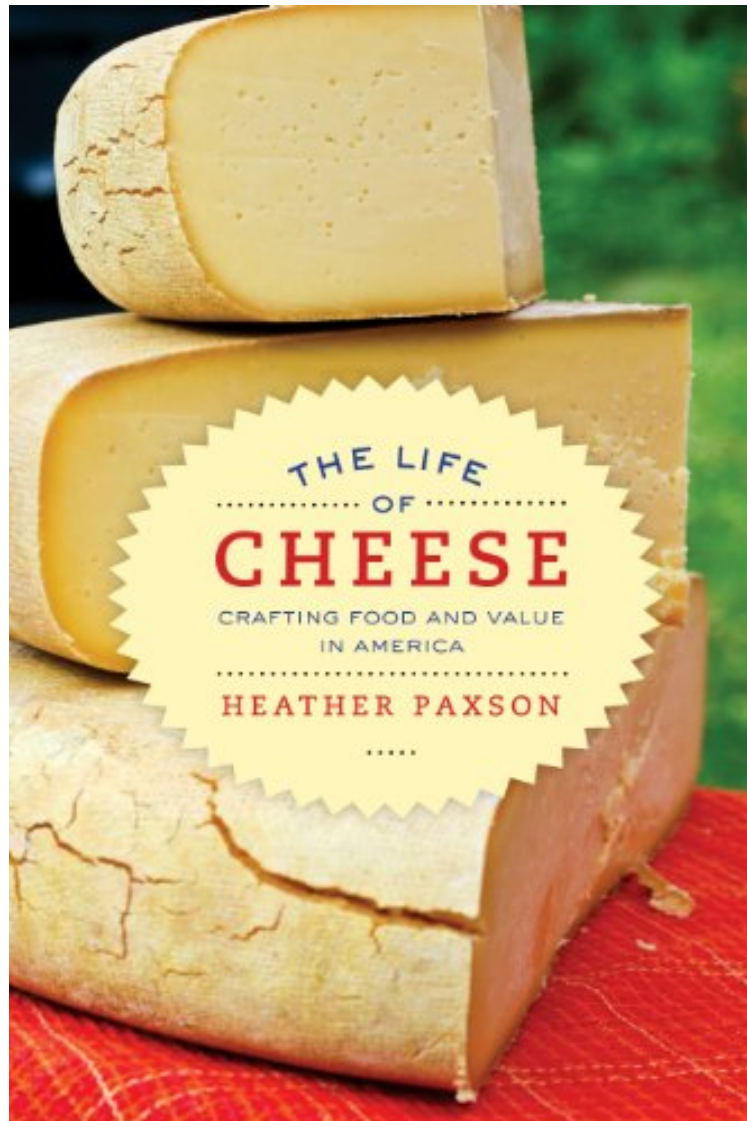


[Download] The Life of Cheese: Crafting Food and Value in America (California Studies in Food and Culture Book 41)

## The Life of Cheese: Crafting Food and Value in America (California Studies in Food and Culture Book 41)

*Heather Paxson*

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**Heather Paxson : The Life of Cheese: Crafting Food and Value in America (California Studies in Food and Culture Book 41)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Life of Cheese: Crafting Food and Value in America (California Studies in Food and Culture Book 41):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Entertaining and informative read! By CBiscuit Heather Paxson's book does a great job of looking into the artisanal food culture that has been steadily

growing in the United States. The book evidently focuses on the cheese making aspect of this subculture, while also going into the particulars of the various kinds of dairy farming involved. From an anthropology perspective Paxson takes an approach of not only breaking down the process of artisanal cheese making but also looking into the lives and motivations of those involved in the trade. The diverse backgrounds of the cheese makers and farmers find a commonality by having similar motivations. These motivations span from wanting to work with animals by living a farm life to creating a sustainable business to pass onto future generations. Ultimately Paxson's work is an entertaining read that is still able to be a valid anthropological study in subculture world of artisanal cheese making. The three different types of animals used for cheese making all require different skill sets and thus attract different character types as well. These three animals are cows, sheep, and goats. Paxson states that the dairy farmers or cheese makers have very different personalities depending on the type of animal they choose to work with. Sheep farming is more in line with those who enjoy living on the pastureland, as sheep require extensive roaming space and need to be moved frequently. Goats are for those who really enjoy working with animals, as Goats are said to be the best animals to own as they enjoy people and have unique personalities. Finally cows are said to be for those who enjoy working with machinery. Cows being the most popular form of dairy farming are also the most efficient, as they produce the largest quantities of milk and require the least amount of moving. Each animal type also requires a different method for care, milking, and for cheese production. In both artisanal and industrial cheese production cows are the most common animals used. As mentioned cows produce the largest quantities of milk and are the most efficient milk producers. Paxson mentions that there is a large quality difference between industrial cow milk production and artisanal. Industrially farmed cows are largely fed a grain diet and are not able to pasture graze. Cows used for artisanal cheese making are on the other hand raised on mostly pasture grass and are rotated to new pastures regularly. Being raised on their natural diet apparently gives the milk and ultimately cheeses a smoother and better taste. The digestion process of rumination for cows also helps create this fine tasting milk that is desired by the artisanal cheese making community. Industrially farmed cows are fed grain so they do not go through the process of ruminating the cud. Sheep and goats produce much less milk but the quality and taste is significantly different that it results in different cheeses. Sheep's milk in particular has the highest quality of fat, which results in a very different cheese and cheese making process in comparison to others. The diverse background of the cheese makers also illustrates the unique sub culture of artisanal cheese making. Paxson interviews and spends time with many different cheese makers. It is interesting to see and learn about their diverse backgrounds and motivations for becoming cheese makers. Many of these people previously had little to no experience with cheese making or even any form of farming. While Paxson mentions many different backgrounds the majority of these artisanal craftsmen can be summarized in two major categories. The first are those from cities that had success in their corporate life but are choosing to leave behind the office for one of hands on work in nature. While the second main group is made of those that had access to some form of milk producing animal and have gotten into cheese making as a means to maximize profit. The first group seems to perhaps have been motivated by some glamorized image of a gentleman farmer or getting to work with nature. Whatever the case this group of former office workers appears to be a quickly growing one. To such an extent that members of the second group are mentioned to often try to distance themselves from the first. As many cheese makers choose to identify themselves as farmers, which to them resonates with hard workers producing milk and creating cheese to have a living. While seeing the inexperienced former city cheese makers as those who are in it for an investment or some glamorized idea of artisanal crafts. Regardless of the diverse backgrounds of the cheese makers they both have to deal with the same complex issues with production and FDA regulation. Artisanal cheese makers are faced with many regulatory issues that jeopardize their ability to be profitable. Perhaps the most major issue is the one of pasteurization. The FDA requires that certain measures be taken to insure that the milk and cheese are safe to eat. The reason why this causes an issue is that a pasteurizer is an expensive machine that not many artisanal farmers can afford. The FDA also requires that certain kind of cheeses are aged for 60 days to ensure they will be safe to consume. The legitimacy of these regulations is debated, with Paxson speaking with proponents for and against. Some argue that raw milk products are dangerous and have led to deaths, while many in the cheese making community think the regulation are excessive and jeopardize the viability of many businesses. Many of the farmers believe that if proper measures are taken place then raw milk can be safely used with no risk to the consumer. While both sides have their arguments it is true that the situation causes for a more complex process of production by following in place regulations. The Life of Cheese provides the reader with an in-depth look into the 'old-school' subculture of artisanal cheese making in America. Paxson does a great job of covering the different craftsman, farmers, animals, methods, and locations involved. This background leaves the reader with a deep knowledge of who is involved and what takes place to get the desired results required for successful artisanal cheese making. Paxson's work is a great example of how to look into a craft/production culture and is thus a great addition to any anthropology course of study. Her approach could be transferred to essentially any other food production community with similar success. Overall The Life of Cheese is an informative, entertaining, and valuable read. 1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. The ethics, economics and emotional register of artisanal cheesemaking By LN The Life of Cheese focuses on artisanal cheese production and consumption in Wisconsin, Vermont and California with an emphasis on the craft of

cheese making. The book also looks at the complexities of the micro-biome of cheese including a thoughtful discussion of the intersection where regulatory frameworks and the different microbiological realities of diverse cheese types introduce some unexpected slippages. Some cheeses get safer to eat after 60 days. Others might actually become rather dangerous (not to mention less delicious) past the 60 day mark. Paxson's treatment of concerns like this would be interesting for cheese lovers but is also quite useful for technology studies scholars and people interested in the construction of knowledge itself. For a food studies title, this book included the requisite history of the craft and consumption practices we've come to expect any food studies scholarship would have but it goes beyond that to integrate some technology studies and consumption studies work. I especially liked the way she pointed out that new artisanal cheese farmers have to both make reference to old traditions and ignore the reality that the bulk of 'traditional' cheesemaking took place (and still takes place) in large companies, in part because small-scale farms are economically tenuous. I would have liked to see more about how the idea of contributing to the social good by eating locally produced cheese is connected to other ethical consumption practices. Paxson is rightfully complex in her discussion of what may or may not be 'ethical' about eating local cheese, but she doesn't go far enough to connect the artisanal cheese narrative to larger cultural tropes of situating moral labor in small-scale consumption decisions and production practices.

Cheese is alive, and alive with meaning. Heather Paxson's beautifully written anthropological study of American artisanal cheesemaking tells the story of how craftwork has become a new source of cultural and economic value for producers as well as consumers. Dairy farmers and artisans inhabit a world in which their colleagues and collaborators are a wild cast of characters, including plants, animals, microorganisms, family members, employees, and customers. As "unfinished" commodities, living products whose qualities are not fully settled, handmade cheeses embody a mix of new and old ideas about taste and value. By exploring the life of cheese, Paxson helps rethink the politics of food, land, and labor today.

“[The Life of Cheese] offers a unique glimpse of people who have taken food-making into their own hands.”