



MILK	Pasteurised cows milk
RENNET	Traditional animal rennet
MADE BY	Dick Willems
REGION	Coolea, near Macroom, County Cork
FLAVOUR & TEXTURE	The textures are smooth and close-textured. The flavours are usually rich and sweet, often hinting at hazelnuts, butterscotch and honey. At other times, they may be long-lastingly nutty but with a savoury edge. Either way, the flavours are complex and mouthfilling.

Dicky's parents Helene and Dick Willems moved to Ireland in the late 1970s from the south of the Netherlands. They had spent 12 years in catering and felt they needed a change of lifestyle. They bought a farm in a beautiful, but remote part of the country. Coolea is a small village nestled in among a deep, quiet mountain range where the Irish language is still widely spoken and where the Willems thought they'd have a complete change of pace.

They started making cheese as a hobby, from the milk of their few cows, but the cheese just tasted too good. First neighbours started to want it, then shopkeepers including Neal's Yard Dairy. Before long it was a small business. In 1991, Dicky joined his parents full time and a couple of years later, he took over as head cheesemaker allowing his mother to follow her ambitions as an artist. By 1999 Dick sr. retired and Dicky and his wife Sinead took over the business now buying milk from 2 local farmers. Most recently their daughter Shona has chosen to begin helping out in the cheese store for a few hours before or after school, turning cheese and applying the breathable orange plasticote coating that forms the rind.

Dicky makes 2 types of cheese: one for maturing and another that is intended to be sold young. For the maturing cheese, which we buy at Neal's Yard Dairy, they use milk from Daniel Lynch's farm. He has a Friesian-Hostein herd and his

farm lies on what Dicky describes as classic Irish bog as it's peaty, moist, acid soil. The milk from this farm tend to give sweeter cheeses with more maturing potential when the herd are out grazing pasture. Due to the nature of the soil and its drainage however, they have to be inside for the winter months and during this time, Dicky doesn't make maturing cheese but a higher moisture recipe which he sells young when it is gentle and milky.

Dicky's cheesemaking is governed by observation and reaction to changes in the milk and curd. Some days the milk is more acid before the starter has been added and the make will go more quickly. When this happens, he tends to cut the curd smaller so that it doesn't seal in too much moisture. He even records the weather on his daily make sheets. This isn't due to an idea of atmospheric pressure affecting the cheese, but rather a practical consideration. On sunny days, the cows will happily wander round the whole of the field whereas on rainy ones they tend to stay closer to the hedges and under trees where the grass is less luxuriant and there are more wild plants and nettles. This of course affects the composition and flavour of the milk.

Coolea cheese is made to a recipe similar to Dutch Gouda. Dicky makes cheese using pasteurised milk, but in other respects it is a very traditional recipe: handmade and using traditional animal rennet.

