

KIRKHAM'S LANCASHIRE



MILK	Unpasteurised cows milk
RENNET	Traditional animal rennet
MADE BY	Graham Kirkham
REGION	Lower Beesley Farm near Goosnargh, Lancashire
FLAVOUR & TEXTURE	Lemony, yoghurt and savoury ending up on a real Lancashire tang. The texture is moist, rich, crumbly and creamy with what's locally known as a "buttery crumble".

Graham Kirkham, following his mother's recipe, combines curd from three days of cheesemaking to create the rich, buttery taste of old-fashioned Lancashire. The cheese is made with one third of yesterday's curd, one third from the day before and the last third from the day before that. This recipe dates back to a time when farmers didn't specialise in dairy herds and as they only had a couple of cows it took 3 days or more to get enough curd to fill one mould.

In keeping with that early tradition where as likely as not, the cheesemaker would have let the milk sour naturally, Graham uses very little starter. This means that the acidity rises more slowly and the natural flora of the milk have time to develop their own flavours, giving complexity to the finished cheese. Mixing the curd from 3 days also allows Graham to achieve the right level of acidity in the cheese. Some days he may need more of day 3's curd (the most acidic) but some days he may need most of day 1 or 2.

The Kirkham's have the best and simplest quality control of all cheesemakers we know. Graham makes the cheese, while his dad milks the cows. If there's anything different about the milk or they want to discuss the latest test results, they can talk about it

over a tea break. No need for complicated graphs. Because of this close link, Graham doesn't need to pasteurise and he is the last Lancashire cheesemaker to make unpasteurised cheese.

He's also the only Lancashire-maker using traditional animal rennet. The Kirkham's did try a couple of batches with vegetarian rennet in the mid 1990s when after the BSE scare it looked for a few weeks as though animal rennet might be banned. They were never satisfied with the results in the finished cheese and switched back as soon as possible.

Finally, Graham is the only Lancashire-maker to butter the outside of the cheeses, because it forms a seal less air-tight than wax, allowing the lemony, tangy, savory flavours and buttery, fluffy, crumbly texture ("dreamy creamies," he calls them) to develop.

