

Pine River Cheese and Butter Co-op



Long ago in Bruce County, a group of dairy farmers gathered to discuss new ways of marketing their milk. They decided to pool their money and build a cheese factory. The company would manufacture cheese and butter, and raise hogs. The year was 1885 and this was the first meeting of the Pine River Cheese and Butter Co-op in Ripley.

More than 120 years later the co-op no longer sells hogs but it does make cheese the 'old fashioned way'. Much of the processing is still done by hand. Once the milk is pasteurized, the colour and rennet are added and that's when the curds and whey separate. The curds are raked and flipped by hand, a process that would be automated in most factories. Only liquid milk is used, not 'milk ingredients' or protein powders. (Most modified milk ingredients used in commercial cheeses are imported from overseas.) And Pine River cheese is aged naturally; no artificial means are used to accelerate the process. According to General Manager Bill Rutledge, this extra effort results in better flavour but the co-op's efforts aren't always rewarded. Grocery stores display Pine River cheese alongside mass-produced cheeses, and consumers tend to compare prices but not necessarily quality.

Thirty-five dairy farmers living in Huron-Kinloss Township and the former Kincardine Township own shares in the co-op. Pine River employs 40 to 45 full- and part-time workers and has many community connections. In 2009 the factory began processing sheep's milk from a local Mennonite family into feta cheese. **Mildmay Cheese Haus** ages Pine River cheddar and sells it from their retail stores in Mildmay and Port Elgin. And the company supports several local charities and is working on getting cheese and cheese curds delivered to local high schools in an effort to improve teen health.

Pine River cheese is carried in Kincardine's three main grocery stores, some of its convenience stores and most restaurants including the **Bruce Bar & Grill, Harbour Street Brasserie, Gilley's Feed Lot Restaurant, Oliver's on Queen, Best Western Governor's Inn and Watercress Bistro.**

You can watch cheese being made from the viewing gallery open Monday to Friday (no charge). The factory is located at 635 Highway 21, Pine River, N0G 2R0. 1-800-265-1175 ▪ info@pinerivercheese.com ▪ www.pinerivercheese.com

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