



ARTISAN CREAMERY

Sonoma County, California



PEPATO AND SAN ANDREAS BELLWETHER FARMS, CALIFORNIA

Bellwether Farms first started to age sheep milk cheeses in 1992. After two years of making a fromage blanc we took our first trip to Italy. At the urging of many of our Italian influenced chefs and friends we focused on Tuscany. Cindy and Ed took that first trip with the goal of learning enough of a recipe to begin producing a Pecorino here in Sonoma. After returning from the trip with pages of notes and even a few video clips we started making our cheeses. Initial results were promising and well received by our farmers' market customers but we had questions in all areas of its production and aging. In the spring of 1994 I took a trip back to Italy visiting a number of sheep dairies and cheese makers in Tuscany. Two years of experience making cheese gave me a much better understanding of what I was watching than Cindy and Ed had on their trip. It was apparent that there were many techniques we were not using that would give us more control over the quality of our cheeses. Experiencing the differences from one Pecorino to the next on this trip gave me a comfort level to explore the flavors of our milk and cheeses and work to bring out those we preferred. Within two years we were phasing out our Pecorino Toscano in favor of what we would call our San Andreas. By controlling the moisture level and the acid development we were able to explore flavors we found in our milk and cheeses to make a cheese that has a much smoother mouth feel and a complex depth of flavor yet retains its classic sheep characteristics. While our sheep cheeses are ripening they develop a smear on the rind that contributes its own interesting and complimentary flavor. Our Pepato is made using the same recipe and aging techniques but with whole peppercorns inside the wheel. We now prefer our cheeses be aged about 3 ½ months.

Ingredients:

Pepato: Raw Sheep Milk, Traditional Rennet, Cultures, Black Peppercorn and Salt

San Andreas: Raw Sheep Milk, Traditional Rennet, Cultures and Salt

Texture: Semi-firm
Aged: Minimum of 60 days
Rind: Natural