



MINAS ARTISANAL CHEESE MAKING



MINAS GERAIS - BRAZIL

MINAS ARTISANAL
CHEESE MAKING

2nd Revised Edition



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RECOGNIZING IMMATERIAL CULTURAL HERITAGE IN BRAZIL

At the beginning of the 21st century saw heritage protection agencies consolidate cultural diversity, as a par excellence value of humanity. Since the 1940s, Brazil, a country the size of a continent, has been implementing actions to identify and understand cultural diversity as part of the public policy to protect and safeguard values found in our cultural bases, linked to the desires and needs of collectives. The National Folklore Commission was the starting point of this process, a collegiate created for the study and intellectual production of Brazilian popular culture.

At the end of the 1980s, the Brazilian Federal Constitution affirmed the understanding that intangible cultural assets constitute the cultural heritage of society because they are a reference to the identity, action and memory of its different forming groups. Safeguarding forms of expression, ways of creating, doing and living, through inventories and records, has become a duty of the Public Power, with the participation of communities, groups and relevant non-governmental organizations.

Faced with this new paradigm, the field of Brazilian heritage has sought new strategies for the identification, documentation, investigation, preservation, protection, promotion, valorization, transmission and revitalization of said heritage in its various aspects, based on the social processes that generate them and through the subjects that produce them. As a continuation of this work, Brazil instituted, through Federal Decree Number 3,551, of 2000, the Registry of Cultural Assets of Intangible Nature, a legal instrument for safeguarding, recognizing and valuing Brazil's intangible cultural heritage.





Based on this legal instrument, 52 intangible cultural assets have already been recognized, related to Knowledge – knowledge and ways of doing rooted in the daily life of communities –, Celebrations – rituals and festivities that mark the collective experience of work, religiosity, entertainment and other social life practices –, Forms of Expression – that may manifest themselves through playfulness, scenery, plastic arts, music and literature – and Places – spaces where collective cultural practices are concentrated and reproduced.

In 2003, the 32nd session of the UNESCO General Conference promulgated the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, reaffirming the importance of intangible cultural assets as a source of cultural diversity and a guarantee of sustainable development, as well as the common concern of safeguarding humanity's intangible cultural heritage. Based on the Convention, the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage at the international level was strengthened with the representative list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Six Brazilian cultural heritage assets are inscribed in the list: Kusiwa Art – Wajãpi body painting and graphic art, Frevo, Roda de Capoeira and Samba de Roda from the Recôncavo Baiano, as forms of expression; Círio de Nossa Senhora de Nazaré and the Cultural Complex of Bumba Meu Boi from Maranhão, as Celebrations.

Intangible cultural assets, which have been recognized, or are in the process of doing so in Brazil are directly linked to the dynamics of everyday life and thus, represent the most authentic Brazilian nationality values, expressing their own reason for existing for communities. This cultural asset category proposes the recognition of cultural diversity from the collection of its creative process present in customs, habits and ways of being.



ACERYO IEPHA

By bringing to the cultural asset idea the notion of cultural reference, associated with specific social groups, the Brazilian State assimilates the meanings of the symbolic present in the artifacts and practices of cultural making. The promotion of safeguarding actions and plans is based on recognizing resignification processes, critical for continued manifestations as per values attributed by the holders. Local values gain legitimacy, and public policy actions take on a responsibility vis-à-vis social groups directly linked to heritage preservation.

Having as its identity force the domains of social life, manifested in intangible heritage, Brazil reinforces the importance of the knowledge present in food culture by recognizing the different ways of making artisanal Minas cheese. In 2008, through the Registry, the cultural asset was protected as a dynamic craft that has its own procedures, tools and forms of production, marketing and consumption. Furthermore, it generates a sense of belonging, economic opportunities, self-esteem and collective improvement in the quality of life found in cultural territories in the Minas Gerais state.

The cultural landscape formed in these territories shelters paths and roads that lead to the farm and fields, relationships between rural producers and the environment, handicrafts and manual work, family work, rural buildings, cuisine and cooking, ways of hosting, hospitality, of consuming artisanal cheese and sociability established around this consumption, rural language and identity discourses. This set of cultural manifestations was established from the occupation processes of territories, in which their own knowledge of natural resources management in ecosystems and specific environments, as well as models of economic survival of the population groups that inhabit these regions were affirmed.





MINAS GERAIS: BRAZILIAN CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND WEALTH

The Brazilian territory is full of historical-cultural processes that express food cultures of social groups, transmitted by generations that are characterized by identity systems in each region. In the continuity and transformation processes, the use of certain products is seen, which added to others, make up traditional social identity structuring practices. The process for building these identities goes beyond the meanings of everyday life and turns into paramount elements, which are recognized as identity markers of collectives, a region, or a country.

Minas Gerais, a Brazilian state identified by gold and precious stone mining, dating back to the 18th century, has much more than the beauty of the Baroque Mineiro expressed in its colonial centers, recognized as Cultural Heritage of Humanity: the cities of Ouro Preto, Congonhas and Diamantina. Traditional food practices, techniques for making food, the knowledge involved, ways of eating, the proximity of people, utensils, kitchens and landscapes are living cultural constructions present in the daily lives of these territories. In food culture related manifestations, the ways of making Minas Artisanal cheese are at its core.


Minas Artisanal Cheese is one of the oldest and most traditional Brazilian cheeses and, over the years, it has become a symbolic element capable of representing collectivity and expressing an idea of belonging to certain cultural identities in the state of Minas Gerais, and even in Brazil. Therefore, the ways in which this cheese is made have been recognized as intangible cultural heritage of Minas Gerais (2002) and Brazil (2008).



MINAS ARTISANAL CHEESE: HISTORICAL AND IDENTITY PROCESS

Ancient food produced and appreciated in various societies, cheese has become a frequent part of eating habits. The different ways of making cheese came about through the need of transforming an extremely perishable product, milk, into something more durable, cheese. Other symbolic elements were gradually associated, and making and consuming cheese took on different meanings.

In Minas Gerais, cheese production is a permanent historical practice. Cheese making and consumption started with the colonization process undertaken by Portugal back in the 16th century. Cattle ranching was critical to the first attempts of expanding inland into the Brazilian territory, which took place between the end of the 17th century and start of the 18. This inland movement in the colony, towards the Minas Gerais hinterlands, was motivated by an interest in finding gold, and other precious metals and stones. Gradually, the mining region witnessed a considerable population increase that led to the settlement of villages and farms, which contributed to the development of a livestock economy. Along with the expansion of economic and social relations, several food practices characteristic of the rural universe began to develop. These activities decisively influenced the food culture of Minas Gerais, giving rise to a unique and original cuisine that is still present today, as one of the central elements of what makes up Minas Gerais' identity.



Tell me what you eat and I will tell you which god you worship, under which latitude you live, in which culture you were born into and to which social group you belong to. Reading the kitchen is a fabulous journey into the awareness that societies have of themselves, into the vision they have of their identity.

Sophie Bessis

Chesse is a food that has consolidated itself as a Minas Gerais cuisine icon. Its production processes were constituted as part of the food supply, in the midst of a diverse economy, in which agriculture, mining, handicrafts and the provision of various services were interdependent sources of resources. In the 19th century, cheese proved to be important to boost the Minas Gerais economy, being widely spread around farms in the region, becoming an everyday item on the Minas Gerais residents' tables and sold on shelves and markets. It was also already in circulation supplying Rio de Janeiro and other Brazilian states.

The techniques related to the ways of making Minas Artisanal Cheese are expressed as dimensions of sociability, meanings of everyday life, elements of sociocultural importance. Cheese gradually becomes a frequent food in eating habits and its production defines how the entire production process is handled, very much a feature of the territories identified in Minas Gerais. Its consumption increases, as it is used in traditional recipes, holds its place in people's homes, parties and in the population's daily diet.

Reports from foreign travelers who visited Minas Gerais during the 19th century express the socio-cultural importance of cheese present in the daily consumption of the population. According to some narratives, this item was always present on the shelves of markets, integrated with local and imported products of English origin. They also describe the frequency with which cheese was consumed by Minas Gerais families, as well as its presence in various recipes of the local cuisine.

Other documents also reinforce the importance of cheese as a food and economic reference in Minas Gerais and other regions of Brazil. Such is the case of an inventory found in the Lisbon Library, where purchases for family consumption are listed, from July 1793 to October 1796. On the list of supplies, there are dozens of cheeses in 13 out of the 40 month-period covered by the shopping lists. They were purchased in large quantities at the same time, which presupposes the practice of consuming matured cheeses.

Assessing cultural production over time and as part of a historical process presupposes considering not only cultural diversity or the nature of representations, but mainly their continuity. The ways Minas Artisanal Cheese is made constitutes a continuous knowledge transmission process, and in some families this production is already in its fifth generation. For example, the practice of processing raw milk is a knowledge learned at home from an intimate relationship between producers and their environment



ACERVO APROCAN



ACERVO IEPHA

MINAS ARTISANAL CHEESE MAKING

Minas Artisanal Cheese, characterized by the use of raw milk in its manufacturing, is the result of a knowledge and a traditional way of making the product, following the same principles since its origin. Notably, it has a collective feature, in a long identity-building historical process. The process uses characteristic sociability patterns, associated to the essential activity of a typical farm in the state of Minas Gerais, where cheese is the product that brings its actions together, resulting in a process that makes the economy of local municipalities dynamic. Making artisanal cheese from raw milk is a daily activity, performed 364 days a year. Its production is present in several regions of the state of Minas Gerais.

In the already identified producing regions of Minas Gerais, the ways artisanal cheese are made are relatively similar, with small adaptations related to the environment and tradition, which together with each region's specific geographical and biological conditions, give the product particular traits, thus, defining each cheese's unique flavor and characteristics. The region has its own physical-natural specificities, which offer typical pasture lands and the development of specific bacteria, which multiply in each of these microclimates. Added to this, its own cheese making technique - the handling of the milk, curding, curds, pressing methods, maturation time - turn it into a unique food.

The labor used for the cheese production process varies according to the producer category. The small producer usually uses family labor for the entire production process, from the care of the herd, the milking process, which is usually manual, to the production of the cheese itself, up to the sale. The average producer, on the other hand, uses both family labor and external labor for help. The big producer acts as supervisor of the works and basically uses auxiliary labor, with the cowboy taking part in the whole process, followed by one or two employees, who hold the traditional knowledge and are effectively responsible for making the cheese.

¹ As a matter of tradition and custom, Good Friday is the only day when cheese is not made. On that day, it is distributed to people in the area, and used for dulce de leite, or greengrocers.

² It should be noted that in the Alto Paranaíba and Serra do Salitre regions, the "cheesemonger" is someone who sells cheese, the middleman, and not who makes it, as that person is called the "cheesemaker".



The cheesemaker, the one who makes the cheese, when not the farmer himself or his wife, helped by one or more children, must be someone preferably born and raised in the farm, who values the product, with a sense of responsibility assumed and valued as an essential worker in the production process. He is the closest employee, who deserves the most care and attention from the boss, and must have mastery of the farm and knowledge of the entire process, from taking care of the corral to the final stage of cheese production and its trading. Cheesemakers say that you do not learn to make cheese at school, but by watching others making it, and making it together. The know-how is passed on from father to son, mother to daughter, master to apprentice, one day after another, throughout life, emphasizing the figure of the cheesemaker as the holder of the knowledge of how to make the product.

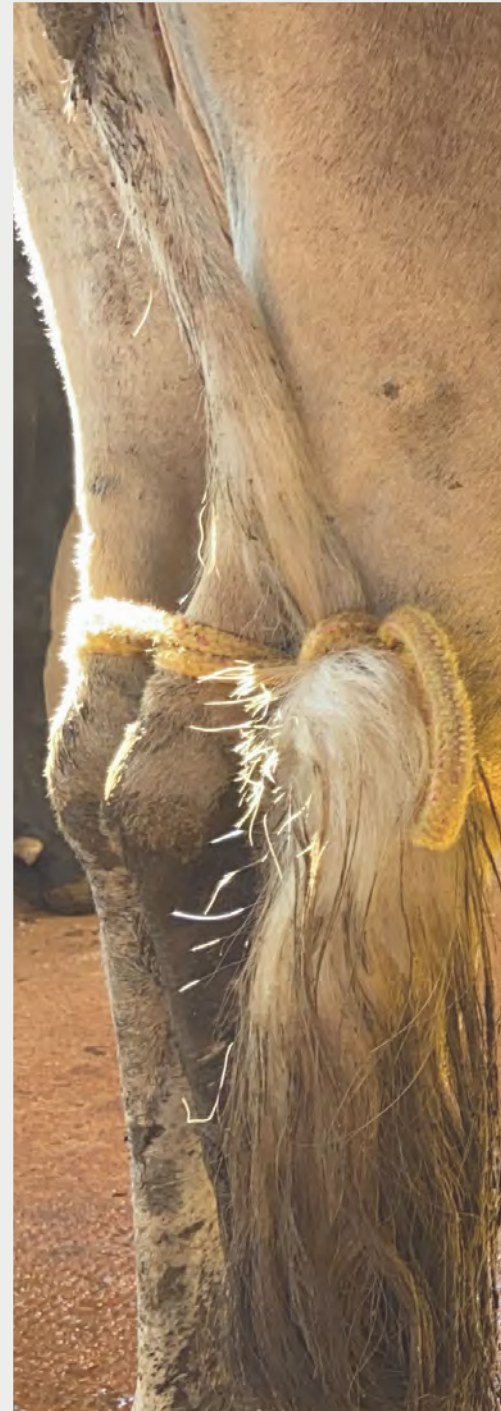
In the Serro region, making cheese is an almost exclusive male activity. In the regions of Alto Paranaíba and Serra da Canastra, women perform almost all stages of production, and in some municipalities, most of the labor employed in cheese making is female. In most of these situations, she is the farmer's wife and shares responsibility for production with him.

The Minas Artisanal Cheese making process basically consists of milk coagulation, pressing, salting and maturation, using the following ingredients: raw cow's milk, coagulants and salt. All these raw materials can be produced on the farm, with the exception of salt, obtained in other regions. The process comprises the sequence of activities listed below.

1. OBTAINING THE MILK: MILKING, MILK STRAINING AND PACKAGING

Milking is the first step in the manufacturing of cheese, where raw milk is obtained. When the process is carried out manually, the milked milk is taken to the cheese factory, where, still outside, it is poured into a funnel and passed through a cloth filter, in order to remove any particles capable of contaminating the cheese.

When milking is mechanical, the milk goes straight from the hoses to the transferor. When the desired amount is reached, the liquid is poured into a can, which is sent to the production room, where the coagulation process begins.





ACERVO APROCAN

2. | ADDING RENNET AND DRIP

Coagulation of milk is the next step in cheese production. Ordinary rennet or homemade rennet, made from the dry and salted stomach of a calf or goatling, can be used. In the Canastra region, in ancient times, it was common to use coagulants made with segments of armadillos' stomachs. The rennet is the element that separates the curds from the whey, allowing the production of cheese. Subsequently, the drip is placed as a complementary form to the rennet.

The so-called “pingo” is the natural lactic ferment developed over time that gives cheese specific microbiological characteristics, conditioned by each place's type of soil, climate and vegetation, responsible for the product's consistency pattern, color and specific flavor. It is what makes a cheese from Serro different from a cheese from Canastra, or Serra do Salitre, or even Araxá. In this natural yeast, a whole set of lactic acid bacteria, specific to each region, is agglutinated, which constitutes the link between the past and the future. The drip is collected from the whey drained from the cheeses after salting, when the coarse salt deposited on one of the surfaces of the cheese neutralizes bacteria considered harmful for human consumption, guaranteeing the good conditions of the ingredient that will be used next day for making a new batch of cheese.

As a rule, for coagulation, rennet is added in a proportion of 25 milliliters for every 100 liters of milk, and the drip in a proportion of ½ liter for 100 liters of milk. However, these measures are only an approximation, as cheese manufacturing is directly related to climate variations. When the weather is colder, more drip or rennet have to be used.

The name “pingo” (which translates to drip) comes from the verb to drip. It is a clear reference to the whey that, after undergoing fermentation, comes off the cheese and drips into another container. The dripped whey is collected and stored for use in the manufacturing of other cheeses. It is, without a doubt, the main ingredient of artisanal cheese. In addition to conferring the characteristic flavor and aroma of this product, it also carries all the regional reference that gives the cheese its identity.



ACERVO APROCAN

3. | COAGULATION, CUTTING THE CURD AND STIRRING

Approximately 40 minutes after adding the rennet and the drip, the milk concludes its coagulation and the curd is cut and stirred for about 3 to 5 minutes, to separate the liquid from the solid mass.

4. | DRAINING AND PLACING THE CURD MASS INTO PANS, MANUAL SQUEEZING AND PRESSING

After about an hour, the curd mass precipitates and the first draining is carried out. Then, the manual pressing or squeezing is carried out. The objective at this stage is to remove as much of the whey as possible from the curd mass.

While in Canastra and Alto Paranaíba a fabric wrapped around the curd mass is used to extract the whey, thus, having a cheese with less moisture. In Serro the pressing is done with one's hands straight onto the pans. After working on one side of the curd mass, turn the pan over, so the other side may be pressed.

There is also the custom of making the “merendeiro” (which translates to lunch box), especially in Serro, which is a small cheese, made with the curd mass left over from the pressing process, for consumption by the family and employees. Often, the “merendeiro” is a task for the apprentice, who, taking advantage of the insufficient curd to make a normal-sized cheese, has the opportunity to learn the technique.





5. | SALTING AND TURNING THE CHEESE

While still in the pans, the cheese receives a layer of coarse salt on top and, at the end of the day it is turned over so that the opposite side is salted.

6. COLLECTING THE DRIP

After the second salting, at the end of the day, the producers collect the drip. The salt is intended to accentuate the flavor of the cheese and help maintain the drip in good condition, which will be used the next day. The bacteria present in the drip will direct the fermentation of the next production batch. They are the ones that maintain the product's uniformity and specificity. Whenever a producer has a problem with the quality of his cheese, he goes to the neighbor to get a new drip and rebuild the microbiota. This is what makes raw milk cheese a living food and the way it is made is a process that requires constant attention to the production environment's details.



7. REMOVING THE PAN AND FINISHING

After approximately 48 hours, the cheese can be removed from the pans and the finishing process begins. This phase, known as grating or rasping, consists in preparing the cheese for better aesthetic presentation. In the Serro region, the entire surface of the cheese is scraped with a grater to make the surface homogeneous. When not sold in bakeries in town, the gratings are used in dishes and greengrocers to feed the farm residents. In farofas, breads and delicacies, the grated cheese is used in association with other farm products – such as cornmeal and manioc flour.

In the regions of Canastra and Serra do Salitre, the finishing is done with sandpaper, or else it is not done, leaving the yellow bark in its natural state.





8. | MATURATION AND CURING

Next, the cheese goes to a space called the cheese room, where it rests on wooden boards to go through the maturation process, during which time it rests. This period can vary from 7 to 40 days, depending on the region, climate conditions and desired level of maturation. The maturation process is faster in hot periods, as the action of microorganisms becomes more accelerated. In this space of time, the cheese significantly reduces its dimensions, reaching up to half of its initial size. Serro cheese, for example, is matured in 14 days and Canastra cheese completes its maturation in 21 days.

During the maturation process, the cheeses must be turned twice a day, once in the morning and once in the afternoon, so that the maturation occurs evenly. Aged cheese is free from harmful bacteria to humans and acquires ideal conditions for consumption. As with the aging of wine, cheese gains more flavor with aging and its taste changes every day. A well-produced cheese improves its flavor and quality with aging, in addition to recovering the tradition of ancient times, when transport and trading difficulties kept the cheese on the aging shelves for longer.

9. | HYGIENIZATION

Once the production process has been completed, the procedures for cleaning instruments, containers and the cheese dairy's premises are followed. Believing in the value of hygiene for reaching a quality cheese confirms the convergence found in the different ways of making Minas Artisanal Cheese with the "best production practices" provided for in state health legislation. As it is produced from raw milk, Minas Artisanal Cheese is a live food and is sensitive to any type of environmental variation, which can influence its taste, texture and balance.

In general, Minas cheese Artisanal has a cylindrical shape, with 15 to 16 centimeters in diameter and 4 to 8 centimeters in height. It has straight edges and flat faces, being aesthetically well worked after the maturation process, before being sent for consumption. In general, it weighs from 1.0 to 1.2 kg. Depending on the maturation time of each cheese, the rind is more or less yellowish. The consistency is soft, tending to harder, the more matured the cheese. The texture is smooth and may occasionally have small mechanical holes. The color is homogeneous cream-white.





HERITAGE AND SAFEGUARDING

The ways in which Minas Artisanal Cheese is made are anchored in a living tradition, where permanence and transformation have interacted for centuries, developing the knowledge that the environment, techniques and representations will not split from each other. This has significant heritage value, expressing feelings of belonging, bringing identity elements together for social groups from the state of Minas Gerais, bringing light to Brazil's cultural wealth.

However, for a long time, the different ways of making cheese were not supported by the health legislation, which did not consider the differences and needs of artisanal production. The motivation behind recognizing Minas Artisanal Cheese as an intangible cultural heritage, was the result of the need for safeguarding the traditional practice of making cheese from raw milk. This practice was under threat by technically based health legislation, which tried to apply the set of rules created for industrial dairy producers to artisanal cheese making, thus complicating or even impeding its production and sale. Another reason for this recognition was the need to characterize the different ways of making Minas Artisanal Cheese from raw milk, so as to value traditional processes, to the detriment of industrialized cheese, which called themselves "Minas cheese", promoting unfair competition.

As a result of intense mobilization by civil society, public institutions and above all, traditional producers/knowledge holders, who were facing the risk of seeing artisanal cheese making become an extinct practice, the State Institute of Historical and Artistic Heritage of Minas Gerais (Iepha-MG) recognized the way "Serro Artisanal Cheese" is made as the state's first Intangible Cultural heritage. It is registered in the knowledge category. This protection, which came about in 2002, had the aim of safeguarding the features related to the original recipe, and the artisanal manufacturing process of the Serro Cheese. It recognized, protected and encouraged its production, ensuring sustainability to local producers and the economy. In 2012, the registry of the way artisanal cheese is made in the Serro region reached its 10th anniversary and its protection was revalidated by Iepha-MG. In fact, another four towns were included in the safeguard's reach, which started to contain 11 municipalities.



The revalidation of the title of cultural heritage of the state of Minas Gerais demonstrates that the values built around this knowledge remain an important cultural reference for local residents. The study for the second revalidation is already underway and its main objective is to update, in a collaborative way, the registry of Minas Artisanal Cheese producers and producer associations, increasing the area covered by the protection and revalidating the safeguarding plan.

In 2008, identifying different ways of making Minas Artisanal Cheese in other parts of the state territory and the risk of losing this important tradition, led the National Historical and Artistic Heritage Institute (Iphan) to recognize the different artisanal cheesemaking techniques in the Serro, Serra da Canastra and Salitre regions, as Brazil's Cultural Heritage. Indeed, they were inscribed in the Registry Book of Knowledge. Identified as traditional knowledge and a striking feature of the cultural identity of these regions, these production techniques, despite keeping regional specificities - as in the form of pressing the curd mass (with cloth or without cloth, for example), in the cheese maturation time and preponderant male or female labor -, have as common points the use of raw milk, the addition of the drip and the use of predominantly family labor, through which knowledge is passed on between generations, orally and through practice. The product resulting from this is identified by the knowledge holders, public and private institutions, as well as civil associations that deal with this universe, as Minas Artisanal Cheese (MAC). Indeed, part of its trait is its inseparable link between the product and knowing how to make it.

However, in addition to product, the different ways of making Minas Artisanal Cheese add to the set of inseparable material and symbolic elements, which can only fully exist and be understood in relation to one another. The act of making cheese and the specific knowledge related to it are inseparable from the house, the property, the cheese factory with its utensils, animal husbandry, subsistence agriculture, production inputs, kitchen and cuisine, the values of friendship, tolerance, neighborhood, hospitality, among many others. Minas Artisanal Cheese also originates from the complex interaction between soil, plant, climate and production methods, and traditional raw materials, resulting in a unique food, impossible to be reproduced elsewhere. From this intimate relationship between culture and nature, in which the natural environment is appropriated and transformed by men, artisanal cheese production emerges as an activity inherent to everyday life and is also a defining feature of Minas Gerais cultural landscapes.



All this translates into a vast repertoire of traditional knowledge, including ways of marketing and consuming artisanal cheeses, and constitutes a striking feature of each region's cultural identity, however, going beyond the territory of production. From the daily life on the farm to the home environment of the urban consumer, cheese is a basic and irreplaceable element of the rich food culture of Minas Gerais. Traditionally consumed by Minas Gerais residents of all social classes, artisanal cheeses from Minas, fresh or matured, are always present on the daily table of families and at parties, bars, shops, fairs and markets. A socialization and hospitality expression element, it serves to accompany coffee or cachaça in conversation circles and to celebrate the abundance and richness of Minas Gerais. It also goes with sweets and jams and as an ingredient of countless delicacies, among which the incomparable cheese bread. Loaded with a sense of belonging and identity, these practices – making and eating cheese – also characterize the natives of Minas Gerais in the eyes of other Brazilians, and can be considered one of the greatest expressions of being from Minas Gerais. Minas Artisanal Cheese, recognized and valued in several regions of Brazil, is one of the symbols of Minas Gerais cuisine.

It is in this sense that safeguarding the different ways in which Minas Artisanal Cheese is made becomes relevant for the policy of preserving Minas Gerais and Brazil's culture and secular history. Its recognition as Intangible Cultural Heritage has led to the consolidation of a collaborative network, led by heritage protection agencies and made up of producers/holders, civil society organizations, and public agencies that serve rural producers⁴ and that seek to strengthen and perpetuate the production, circulation and consumption of Minas Artisanal Cheese. Together, these institutions increasingly offer assistance to local producers, especially with the expansion of the notion and use of the so-called “good practices” that guarantee greater safety to the consumer.

Safeguarding policies also enabled the emergence of health regulations that deal with artisanal cheese production in a particular way, recognizing, finally, the importance of cheese making from raw milk in the social, economic and cultural context of the state. And, to meet health related demands, without risking losing the traditional way of making cheese, producers are increasingly organizing themselves in associations and cooperatives. Together, traditional producers are strengthened and acquire the necessary conditions to meet the

⁴ Instituto Mineiro de Agropecuária (IMA), Technical Assistance and Rural Extension Company of the State of Minas Gerais (Ema-ter-MG), Secretariat of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply of Minas Gerais (Seapa) and Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply (Mapa)



requirements of the legislation, defining safe hygienic standards and improving the biological quality of the product through the management of production and commercialization, as well as controlled health regulatory practices. As a result, there is an increasing presence of artisanal cheese in the Brazilian consumer market, with all the guarantee and safety necessary for the quality and taste of a good product.

The organization of producers into associations is one of the requirements for granting the Geographical Indication, a collective trademark registration at the National Institute of Industrial Property (INPI), already won by the producers of Serro cheese and Canastra cheese. This instrument contributes to the establishment of product quality standards and broadens market prospects, providing access to rights and improvements, such as public financing for their production and marketing.

Contemporaneously permeated by issues of food safety, health certifications, traceability, denominations of origin, associations, national and international marketing, inspection, adequacy of legislation, among others, this tradition has welcomed, in recent decades, the introduction of a series of innovations, such as alterations to the materials used in its tools and production environments, the implementation of production and marketing management processes, the health control of the herds and the mechanization of some of its processes (such as mechanical milking). These innovations, before necessarily posing a risk to their continuity, emerge as part of the very process for strengthening and affirming these ways of making cheese. Therefore, the challenge is preserving the cultural asset, securing its traditional production techniques, meeting health regulatory conditions, which in order to be effective, do not need to be incompatible with customary practices.

As a result of all this effort, Minas Artisanal Cheese has been obtaining more and more excellent results in national and international cheese competitions. As an example, we have the “Mondial du Fromage et des Produits Laitiers”, the main meeting point for those involved in the cheese and dairy sector. In the 2021 edition, Minas Artisanal Cheese won 40 medals, taking Brazil to second place in the competition, losing only to France, the event’s host.

In addition, Minas Artisanal Cheese has proved to be an important product for rural tourism, with enormous growth potential. More and more, tourists seek the cheese-producing regions to discover and enjoy their beautiful landscapes, their typical food and the interac-



tion with their simple and hospitable people. The inclusion of the artisanal cheese production process and its entire history in tourist and gastronomic itineraries is contributing to the development of the activity in the state and to income generation.

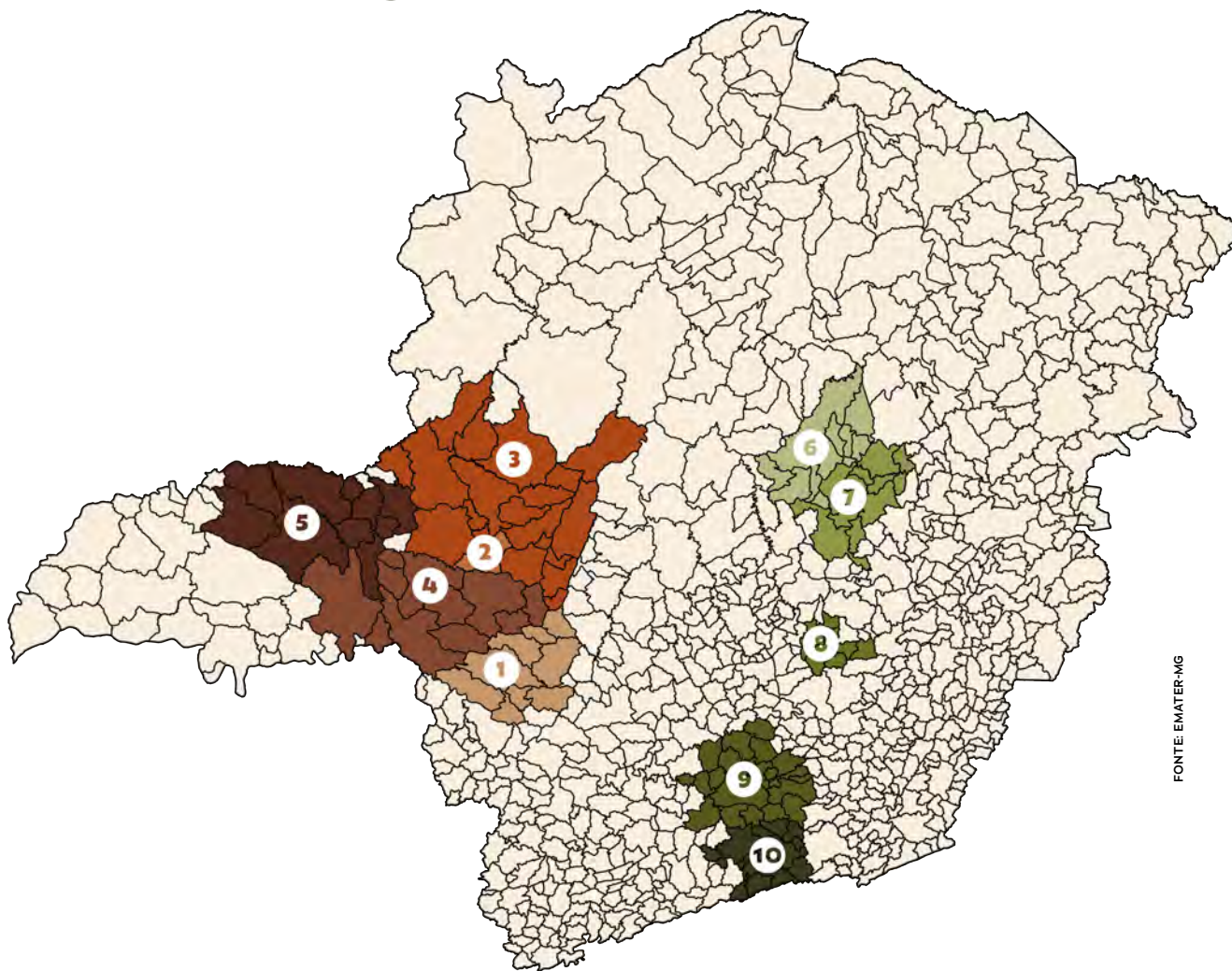
In November 2021, the registration of the “Artisanal Way of Making Cheese from Minas in the Regions of Serro and Serras da Canastra and Salitre” was revalidated by the National Historical and Artistic Heritage Institute (Iphan). For that, a study was developed that identified the continuity of the meanings and values of the “Craftsmanship of Making Cheese” for memory and collective identity, remaining as a great identity reference for the state of Minas Gerais and a mark of Brazilian cultural diversity. The expansion of the territorial scope of the safeguarded property was also approved, excluding the identification of producing regions and changing the title to “Ways of Making Minas Artisanal Cheese”. The scope started to consider other regions that, through studies of the physical environment and production processes, were characterized as producers of Minas Artisanal Cheese, since in them a significant historical and cultural rooting of the way of making the cheese was identified. So far, the following Minas Artisanal Cheese producing regions have been recognized: Diamantina, Araxá, Canastra, Campos das Vertentes, Cerrado, Serra do Salitre, Serra do Ibitipoca, Serro, Triângulo Mineiro and from Serra da Piedade to Caraça.

The traditional practice of artisanal production of raw milk cheese is present in a significant part of the state territory and demonstrates the strength of this tradition and its strong foundation. Indeed, it is not by chance that cheese has become the identity brand of the Minas Gerais state. Identifying territories that produce artisanal cheese shows commitment to continuous safeguarding action, furthering knowledge on the protected asset and strengthening the network that works in favor of the knowledge holders and their continuity, having their demands and needs as reference.

Strengthening the exchange between knowledge holders, public and private institutions and other players that make up the safeguarding network found in Brazil will secure dialogue with international bodies and agencies. In fact, this emerges as the next target to be aimed for, in favor of safeguarding the conditions to ensure the ways Minas Artisanal Cheese are made are preserved, as well as the passing on of the knowledge they are founded on. Recognizing a cultural asset in its several scopes and the shared management of its preservation and promotion ensure national and international visibility for Brazilian cultural heritage. It is an important example of how culture and tradition may work as development instruments, strengthening small local economies, democratizing income distribution and improving quality of life.

MINAS ARTISANAL CHEESE PRODUCING REGIONS

- 1 CANASTRA
- 2 SERRA DO SALITRE
- 3 CERRADO
- 4 ARAXÁ
- 5 TRIÂNGULO MINEIRO
- 6 DIAMANTINA
- 7 SERRO
- 8 ENTRE SERRAS DA PIEDADE AO CARAÇA
- 9 CAMPO DAS VERTENTES
- 10 SERRAS DA IBITIPOCA



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