



ESSAY QUESTION: "There are over 80 different terms commonly used to describe Comté. Every wheel is unique and has a slightly different set of aromas. Explain how Comté's production process contributes to this aromatic diversity. In addition, explain how you would describe Comté's tastes, texture and diversity of aromas to a new customer, as well as how you would suggest serving and/or cooking with it."

## On Speaking the Language of Comté

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In the beginning, there are words. Like the tiny building blocks of the fats and proteins that come together to become curds and whey, these sounds and letters come together to set a framework of how we share the world of cheese. Comté tells a tale uniquely its own, and I am its storyteller, weaving a web of words to create an experience for a captive audience, hungry to learn.

I begin with the romance. I tell them of the Jura, of rolling hills and verdant pastures, of rocky outcroppings and clean, crisp air. I tell them of elegant, mottled cream-and-ruddy-mocha cows grazing on high, flower-filled fields. They imagine themselves collecting rich, fresh milk, see themselves visiting *fruitières*, stirring milk in warm copper cauldrons steeped in centuries of tradition. Together, we visit *caves d'affinage*, wheels upon wheels of slowly maturing cheese, tucked away deep in stone fortresses and smelling of damp cellar and wood.

But this scene only tells part of the story. For a cheese like Comté, this is much too generalized, and we must dive deeper to understand the specificity of one wheel to appreciate it. My customers need to know why *this* wheel will taste like no other. They need to understand the unique footprint of *this* wheel at the microscopic level: how the air, the soil, the wind, and the sun of its microclimate changes a blade of grass that grows on a particular slope of hill. How the golden, egg-yolk color of the paste reflects the concentrated, bright colors of summer flowers in bloom. How the microorganisms that make this cheese *this* cheese vary from those that live just downslope, or just down the road, and how they imprint their flavors in *this* Comté.

And then, we connect language with the senses. Finally, we savor this Comté, this wheel, this bite (or two). A consumer may not speak the language of cheese when we begin this dialogue, but they will when we end it. They may not come into this being able identify this wedge's smell, of cooked milk and hay, but when I tell them to close their eyes and imagine the skin of a pudding, and the sweet, floral, dry aroma of a clean barn—they begin to understand. They may not immediately sense the notes of toasted hazelnuts and caramelized onions, but they can recall these flavors through my specific, detailed description. And when I encourage these flavor profiles by pairing with a roasted nut, or urge them to caramelize their own onions and melt Comté on top for the most elegant grilled cheese they can imagine—they begin to understand.

From words that tell of context and backstory, to the language of specificity that make any given wheel unique, it is how we tell this tale that creates a complete picture. Comté can speak for itself, of course, but with people like us to tell its story—why should it have to?