12 Million Kilos of Parmesan Lost in Earthquakes

Gabi Logan | (/users/gabi-logan)Tue, 06/05/2012 - 19:55

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More than 300.000 40-kilo wheels of Parmigiano Reggiano fell in an enormous domino effect as aging racks toppled into one another during the May earthquakes in Northern Italy.

Up to 10 per cent of this year's production has been lost, representing at least an 80 million euro loss for the industry. The youngest wheels of cheese were the hardest hit by the catastrophe, as both the under-six-month wheels and the briny baths that give Parmesan its signature salty taste and crumbly texture were lost.

Since the first earthquake, staff have urgently searched through the remains of their warehouses for salvageable wheels of cheese, but the subsequent quakes (http://italymag.co.uk/italy/emilia-romagna/new-earthquake-emilia-romagna) have rendered the work dangerous. Wheels that have broken open may mould over before they can be reached. The 27-month-old wheels have still not been uncovered.

In addition to the 10 storage facilities crippled by the quake, Parmesan producers have lost livestock and pasture land. The remaining cows' milk will be affected in terms of quality and quantity by the earthquake for weeks or months to come.

Producers must find storage facilities where to keep the salvageable wheels cheese at the exact right humidity and temperature. Only cheese aged in Reggio-Emilia or Mantova, in Lombardy, can legally be called Parmigiano Reggiano, but with the infrastructural losses in the region, they may need to be aged elsewhere.

Casumaro Maurizio, whose farm near Finale Emilia lies at the epicentre of the first earthquake (http://italymag.co.uk/italy/earthquake /60-magnitude-earthquake-collapses-historic-buildings-northern-italy-and-displaces-thousands) , has launched an online campaign (http://www.vogue.it/en/people-are-talking-about/last-short-notes/2012/05/parmigiano-earthquake) to sell the fallen cheese. Consumers can buy wheels of Parmesan from as low as 9€ per kilo directly from the producers to support warehouse reconstruction and pick up their cheese in Modena or have it delivered.

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