



## 05 Italy

### *Cheese from a tiny mountain hamlet*

In the upper Grana Valley in Italy's Piedmont region sits Castelmagno, a mountain town that has lent its name to a cheese with a history dating back more than a millennium. "Documents first mentioning it date from 1277, but there's talk of Charlemagne trying the cheese when he came over the Alps during one of his campaigns," says Giorgio Amedeo, a local producer who runs La Meiro dairy. Since 2006, Italy's Slow Food movement has worked with the area's artisan cheesemakers to ensure the foodstuff's future.

In the stone building housing her dairy, Nicoletta Viano of Alpe Chastlar begins her morning routine. Milk is drawn from cattle that in summer graze above 2,000m on herbs and flowers; in winter, locally grown hay is substituted. She sticks her hands in a vat to break curd into lumps that she then ties up in a cloth, known as a *risola*, and leaves to drain for 24 hours before cutting them in pieces and placing them in a bath of whey for up to three days. "It's hard work," adds Viano, wiping her brow. "But if we don't preserve these traditions, who will?" — IC

[terredicastelmagno.com](http://terredicastelmagno.com)

#### **How is it made?**

The cheeses are shaped into 6kg moulds and salted, then ripened in ageing huts at 10°C for 120 days, though producers tend to leave them up to two years more. With maturation, the cheese goes from a sweet to nutty flavour and becomes crumbly inside, often with blue-green veins.

