

Meet Paris's first cheese maker

Paris resident and writer **HELEN MASSY-BERESFORD** has a brie-f encounter with the first man to make cheese in the capital

PARIS has its first ever traditional French cheese maker.

Entrepreneur Pierre Coulon, 35, opened his production area which also doubles as his shop, La Laiterie de Paris, just before Christmas selling organic, fair trade, regionally-sourced products in the 18th *arrondissement*, just a few minutes' walk from Montmartre.

It is surprising that, despite France's reputation for cheese, Paris has not had its own maker of traditional French cheeses before, although mozzarella is made in the capital.

"In other countries, including the UK, there has been a tradition of producing cheese in cities but in France it has always been more about regional production," explains Mr Coulon, as he darts back and forth in the premises on the rue des Poissonniers.

Unpasteurised cows' milk for the cheeses is delivered twice a week from the Seine-et-Marne department, around an hour's drive away.

"I absolutely wanted it to be

organic. It's a great producer with a herd of Normande cows," he said. He also has deliveries of goats' milk for cheese and sheep's milk for yoghurt coming in.

He plans a variety of produce, from goats' cheese to blue cheese, a Mirabelle-liqueur finished cows' cheese and a cheese washed in the local beer, brewed just a few hundred metres away at the Brasserie de la Goutte d'Or.

Making use of what is available locally is important to

him. "The cheese is a 100% local product and a nod to this area, which is a great place for an experiment like this."

The project was mostly crowdfunded, with over half of the contributors coming from the 18th *arrondissement*. The Paris city authorities, which are aiming to diversify the areas shops and in particular encourage more food retailers, quickly found him a site. "I really

wanted to take inspiration from the energy of this neighbourhood," Mr Coulon adds.

The Goutte d'Or neighbourhood is a traditional working class Parisian quarter, transformed by immigration from France's former colonies in Africa. Now, young professionals, entrepreneurs and start-ups are moving in, changing the face of the neighbourhood.

Even if he has started his new venture in a fast-changing area of the city, Mr Coulon does not want to be seen as a gentrifier – he plans to sell his cheeses at affordable prices with a small

round cow's cheese priced at €4, rather than the €5.50 he says a similar product would normally sell for in a Parisian cheesemonger. He believes the area has a real need for its own cheese shop. "There is a shortage of good bakeries and wine shops – and don't even get me started on cheese."

Mr Coulon has come to Paris via a circuitous route: a masters in psychology, a stint on a farm rearing goats himself, learning throughout the US and Canada, a spell working for a master cheesemaker and a cheese-themed pilgrimage across France and further afield, learning the techniques he needed to set up on his own.

Having learned how hard it is to make a living with a dairy herd, he plans to support them. "Life as a farmer was difficult: there is a big disconnect. Farmers are not valued at all," he says.

"I pay €0.75 a litre for cow's milk, versus the standard price of €0.33. It's not in my interest not to pay a proper price because even if I get rich the producer will go out of business."

"Paying a higher price for the milk also guarantees better treatment for the animal that supplies it and if I'm paying a fair price that allows me to be demanding about quality."



Pierre Coulon received funds from locals

First successes for new Made in Paris label

SOME 250 producers in the capital have taken up the label *Fabrique à Paris* according to figures released in December.

The label was launched in October 2017 and,

with the first honour going to a ham created the 11th *arrondissement*, initially covers three categories: artisan food, artisan production (for functional products) and creative products (clothing and jewellery).

€5bn to help economy in small towns

THE government has unveiled a €5bn plan to boost the economies of France's small and medium-sized towns.

Territorial cohesion minister Jacques Mézard said the towns, which are home to almost a quarter of the population (23%), provide 26% of the country's jobs and have an "essential role to play in the French economy".

A fifth of the fund for the five-year *Action cœur de ville* campaign will be used to improve housing in rundown towns. The rest will be used to fund a range of schemes including cutting unemployment particularly among young people, boosting healthcare and improving town centres by introducing new rules for out-of-town businesses.

The way of the jackal?

HUNTERS in the Alpine Haute-Savoie claim they have evidence that golden jackals are now living and hunting in the mountains of eastern France.

The predators are usually found in North Africa, Asia and south-eastern Europe, but have been making their way west via the Balkans since the 1980s, experts say.

The hunters say photographs from automatic imaging systems, which are used to monitor lynx and wolf movements in the area, have caught jackals on camera.

Sightings have been confirmed in neighbouring Italy, Germany and Switzerland, but this would be the first evidence of the animals in France.

But experts say they need more evidence before confirming the sighting. They describe the hunters' black-and-white photographs as inconclusive.

Now vegans can enjoy Camembert, as dairy-free version launches

A CHEESE producer from the Lorraine region has launched vegan Camembert, although labelling rules mean she cannot officially call it cheese.

Anne Guth, 28, launched her company Les Petits Véganes after struggling to find reasonably-priced vegan cheese in France.

Her Camembert is made from cashew nut milk and appears virtually indistinguishable to the eye from the usual white circular blocks.

However, perhaps not the taste. When challenged in a blind tasting test conducted by the news site FranceInfo, cheesemonger Clément Maudet said: "The texture is bizarre – it's quite mousse-like. It is a very mild product, but with a not-altogether pleasant aftertaste."

While cheap industrial Camembert costs €1.41 and its more specialist AOP raw milk version costs €6, the vegan version will set you back €10.90.



Could you spot that this Camembert is vegan?

The process of making the vegan Camembert is similar to that when using normal milk, combining the cashew nut milk with cultures, fermenting it to create the shape, and maturing it for taste over at least one month. The only stage that is missed is the curdling

process seen with normal milk, but otherwise the process includes the fermentation stage, the refinement process, and final maturation. The Lorraine-based company also makes blue cheese (*Le Bleu Lorrain*) and garlic soft cheese (*Le Petit Frais à l'Ail*) and hopes to produce upwards of 3,000 'cheeses' per month.

■ Independent cheesemakers and factory rivals in Normandy have agreed to meet this month to discuss an agreement over the labels *Camembert AOP de Normandie* and *Fabrique en Normandie*.

It is hoped the meeting end the 'Camembert wars' between major industrial producers, whose cheeses are *Fabrique en Normandie* using pasteurised milk and independent artisans, who stick to traditional techniques and use unpasteurised milk as demanded by the strict *appellation d'origine protégée* (AOP) label.

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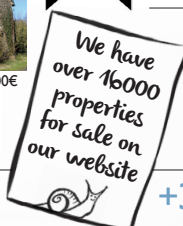
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