# Untold Italy Episode 241: Parmigiano Reggiano - A Story of Precision and Passion

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 241.

Ciao a tutti and Benvenuti to Untold Italy, the travel podcast, where you go to the towns and villages, mountains and lakes, hills and coastlines of Bella Italia. Each week your host Katy Clarke takes you on a journey in search of magical landscapes of history, culture, wine, gelato, and, of course, a whole lot of pasta. If you're dreaming of Italy and planning future adventures there, you've come to the right place.

Katy Clarke:
Ciao everyone. I have a special treat for you today. We're heading deep into the Emilia Romagna region to learn about my favorite and let's face it one of the world's favorite cheeses - Parmigiano Reggiano.

Joining us today is our great friend Giulia who is a food ambassador for her region and she does an excellent job of that I must say. Giulia is always learning and earlier this year she did a course to learn more about Parmigiano Reggiano and asked if we could have her teacher, one of the official cheese tasters from the consortium join us. What an honor, of course, I said yes, so you'll also hear the voice of Alessandro (Giulia's teacher) tell us about the culture, traditions and technique of this much-loved cheese.

Exploring these traditions at one of the local dairies is a highlight of our tour in the Emilia region and actually one of the reasons I wanted to do a tour there. Making parmigiano reggiano is both an art and a science but it's also about passion, dedication and learning. So let's dive in and hear all about it.

Katy Clarke:
Benvenuti, Giulia, and Alessandro, welcome onto the Untold Italy podcast.

Giulia Tamarri:
Buongiorno tutti.

Alessandro Stocchi:
Buongiorno

Katy Clarke:
Now, Giulia, we are old friends, of course, and you're always a welcome addition to our podcast. But some of our listeners may not know who you are. So can you please introduce yourself and let them know a little bit about you?

Giulia Tamarri:
Very gladly. So ciao a tutti, my name is Giulia or how I nickname myself, Travel with Rezdora. I am a gastro guide from Emilia Romagna, my beloved region, which is the region maybe that you know because of Modena, because of Bologna, but also because of the glorious food that we have and create with a lot of passion. And, actually, Katy, one of this food is Parmigiano Reggiano, which is actually what I would like to talk to you about today.

Katy Clarke:
Yes. We're very excited, Giulia. Yeah. And also Giulia is leading some of our tours for our Untold Italy tours. And if you're very lucky, you will have her as a host for several days. She's lots of great fun Now, Alessandro, welcome. We're so thrilled to have you join us today, and I can't wait to learn more about my favorite cheese. But before we get started, can you please let our listeners know something about you and your journey to becoming an expert in Parmigiano Reggiano.

Alessandro Stocchi:
Yeah. Bu buzzana tutti. My name is Alessandro, and, I work, as I said, for the consortium of Parmigiano Reggiano. So I am a 'battitore'. We never found a good translation for this. It's very typical and traditional terms. But I am one of the people that go checking every single wheel of our production, and maybe later I can explain you better what's my job for the consulting.

Alessandro Stocchi:
I also I'm a teacher of the professional parmigiano taster for the association. So we also have a a culture about tasting, of our products. So I also work for this association.

Giulia Tamarri:
And, actually, Katy, if I may add that that's how I know Alessandro because he has been my teacher. Oh. So this year, in order to further develop my knowledge for the Emilia tour with Untold Italy and my personal background, I took this special course called Parmelier level 1. It's like sommelier, but for Parmigiano Reggiano. And Alessandro has been my teacher, it's quite difficult to talk about Parmesan Reggiano with the expert next to me, you know, today.

Katy Clarke:
Wow. That sounds like a really fantastic course to do. So you basically, what you did was taste a lot of cheese. Is that what I'm hearing?

Giulia Tamarri:
Yeah. Exactly. Of course, Katy. Every single evening, we had, like, an amazing array of cheeses that we had to try. But, obviously, they taught us a lot about the theory behind the, the production process, but also how to taste it very well itself, which is actually very complex. Right.

Alessandro Stocchi:
As association, we think it's very important. Also, our technical part that's very very linked with the tasting, the technical part of the tasting, But, also, we think it's very, very, very important to have also an idea of everything that there is behind the product. So if you wanna really understand, I think every kind of elementary product, every kind of product, you need really to understand what there is behind to arrive there.

Giulia Tamarri:
Yeah. It was really, really cool, Katy. You should do it.

Alessandro Stocchi:
Yeah. I'll wait for you.

Giulia Tamarri:
Yes.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah. Yeah. I'm coming. I'm coming. But, I mean, Alessandro, I think you must be an excellent friend to have to have all this knowledge and to have all this experience about Parmigiano Reggiano. But let's dive in a little bit more because I think it's, as you said, it's so important to understand the origin, the history, the production, the inputs, like the milk and all of the things - well were not very many things that go into the cheese, I think, but it's the quality of the ingredients as well. That's really important. So maybe if you can explain a little bit about maybe the history of the cheese and then how they go about making it.

Giulia Tamarri:
So it's funny because if I were to answer this question, what is Parmigiano Reggiano? I would answer this question Alessandro, very symbolically. It's what runs through our veins, of course, because it's what we are fed with since we are babies, pretty much. And, obviously, not just because some people claim it, but because the best chef in the world's claim it and also because there are many cheese contests all around the world, it's the best cheese in the world. Can I claim this, Katy?

Katy Clarke:
I think we can agree that it's the best cheese.

Giulia Tamarri:
Absolutely. And why is it so so special? Well, first of all, because of many reasons. First of all, because, of the fact that it's very special. We follow this, 9th century old tradition, so it has been created by monks in the Middle Ages, and we still pretty much use the same recipe. It's also because, there are very strict, regulations about the cheese. It's what we call a PDO product. So all the process, all the ingredients have to be strictly controlled. And, actually, Alessandro is the person that gives after the 12 months, which is the minimum ages for each will.

Giulia Tamarri:
He gives the OK to say if it's a Parmigiano Reggiano or not. Maybe, Alessandro, you should explain why.

Alessandro Stocchi:
Yeah. First of all, I think, as Giulia said, Parmigiano Reggiano is a PDO So it's very, very, very important to say that, first of all, we have only one area where it's possible to produce our cheese. And, our comprehensive area is composed by the province of Parma, Reggio Emilia, Modena, a little part of the province of Bologna to the left side of the Reno River, and a little part of the province of Mantua to the right side of the Po River. Only in this area, we can use our milk to be transformed into Parmesan Regional, and there is a very, very, very, very strong link by chemical and physical factor, but also by the human factor, the tradition and the culture, okay, with this area and our final product. A lot of time when someone try to copy, you know, what I'm talking about. I'm sure that you you can try to make it to do it exactly the same process for whatever you want, but it's absolutely not the same. Also, because we have to know that for our regulation, we can feed our cows only with natural ingredients.

Alessandro Stocchi:
And to give you an idea, we can feed our cows with fresh grass or hay that came minimum from 75% from our consorzio area. So this is very, very, very important when we think about chemical and physical factor. Okay? And then then you have to know that we work we make our cows twice in a day, 1 in the morning and 1 in the evening. In a very, very, very short time, we have to take and bring the milk into the dairy. Any kind of treatment is not possible for the milk. So no freezing, no cooling, no pasteurization. It's absolutely raw milk. And so what happened? That all the typical and unique but typical flora that we have in our fields, in our area, it passed through the grass and into the hay.

Alessandro Stocchi:
And by the grass and the hay arrives into the cows, then the cows give us the milk. And with any kind of treatment, we can transfer by the milk into the cheese. So in this process, our Parmigiano Reggiano is really an unique expression of this consorzio area.

Katy Clarke:
So the cows are the certain type of cows as well. Right? So they're mainly Friesians. Is that right? I don't know the word in Italian, Giulia.

Giulia Tamarri:
Frisona. Yeah. But also we can use other more typical local cows. So first of all, obviously, the one that I'm more most passionate about, which is the Modena white cow, or we also have the brown cows from the Alps, from the Swiss Alps, but also the local from Reggo area that are called the Vacche Rosse - the red cows.

Katy Clarke:

Oh, okay. I mean, I think this is so interesting because maybe in our English speaking culture, people wouldn't even think they just think it's there's a cow. You know? If they wouldn't think that maybe there's a special breed of cow that makes the right type of milk. When I was with you a few years ago and we went to the dairy, they were saying the Bianca Modernese cow, had a higher fat content in the milk than the Friesian cow. So it makes a slightly different cheese. Is that right?

Giulia Tamarri:
Yeah. It makes it creamier. That's for sure. So and, obviously, that's actually was part of, what during our course as Parmelier, sommelier or Parmegiano Reggio, they they actually made us compare the different varieties of milk and which effect it had on the actual cheese.

Katy Clarke:
Also, a couple of years ago, it was very dry. It was a drought in your region. So the Po River was very low and there wasn't much rain. So when that happens, can that change the way the cheese tastes as well?

Alessandro Stocchi:
Yeah. But you also have to remember that in the production of Parmigiano Reggiano, we have a very, very, very important artisanal part. Okay? Human factor, I hope you will be here in and in our conversation, and then you can see all the protests. And you will see that the cheese maker and the guys that's working the dairy, they really do a very artisanal job. Our dairies, they are not factories. Absolutely not. So what I want to say is that the human factor is very, very, very, very important also to arrive to the typical flower in our raw material channel.

Giulia Tamarri:
Mhmm.

Alessandro Stocchi:
Of course, more than the kind of cows that we are using.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah. So the how is it... what does the cheese maker do to influence the cheese, to enhance the cheese?

Alessandro Stocchi:
The cheese maker have a very artisanal, part in the process, of course. So as you said before, every day, the milk is different. You have always to remember that we work with raw milk. So maybe yesterday, it rains or we have very sunny and hot summer. Okay? So also the feeding of the cows, of course, is different. Okay? And, so every day, the cheesemaker have to understand what is different today, between yesterday, and between tomorrow. And so you have to, you know, maybe we have the Spinatura so we have to broke the curd, okay, into the milk. And then maybe we need to stay some second less or some second more.

Alessandro Stocchi:
A very, very small difference in the making process, it means that we have a very important difference into just tomorrow. So this speaker and the guys have every day to understand the the meal that they are working today. When they are cooking the meal, maybe they have to go a little bit slower or let it be faster today. This is a difference important for us tomorrow.

Katy Clarke:
Wow. It must take a lot of training to get that level of experience.

Alessandro Stocchi:
Absolutely. Yeah. Also because only the human factor any kind of machine can replace this. So you will see that the cheese maker works with their hands in the milk. So they need a lot of experience to to become a Parmigiano Reggiano cheese maker. You need really maybe 15, 20 years of experience before. Also, because you have to know that you have a great responsibility. Okay? If something wrong, it depends on the work of all the farmer around.

Alessandro Stocchi:
And as Giulia said before, you know the success of your work only after 12 months.

Katy Clarke:
When you come knocking.

Alessandro Stocchi:
Yeah. Exactly.

Katy Clarke:
So when the cheese maker they have the milk and they're cooking it. Do they add any other ingredients to the milk for making the cheese? What is added to the milk?

Alessandro Stocchi:
Yeah. We use the milk, and the milk that we use is a blend of skim milk of yesterday night and the morning milk of this morning. And then you have to know for that we need about 500 kilos of milk to produce a wheel of 40 kilos. So when you have in your hands, the classical piece of Parmesan of 1 kilo, ok? You have in your in your hands 14 kilos of milk.

Giulia Tamarri:
Wow Alessandro. I've never thought about it actually. Now that you give numbers and figures, it's crazy, isn't it?

Alessandro Stocchi:
Yeah.

Giulia Tamarri:
14 kilos of milk. Wow. Katy, that's a lot. Isn't it?

Katy Clarke:
That's a lot. And how much milk would one cow produce a day?

Alessandro Stocchi:
Maybe in the medium, it's about 30 kilos per day.

Katy Clarke:
Oh, okay. Those cows are busy.

Alessandro Stocchi:
Other kinds of cows, they produce more or less. So, we use, the milk of yes. Skinned milk of yesterday night and whole milk of tomorrow. Then we are ready to add the first ingredients. That's the whey.

Alessandro Stocchi:
The part of the milk that don't become to use. You know? So every day, we take away the serum, and tomorrow, we add 25 kilos for each cauldron, okay, of whey of yesterday. Because the whey is full of good lactic ferment. So we want to give just like a starter, and for us, it's only a natural starter. So we add the serum the whey of yesterday. So the good lactic to ferment can give a very powerful hand, the good luck to ferment of today into the milk. And we want to create the acid ambient to work than the rennet. So then the second ingredient is the, only natural rennet for us, so So absolutely natural ingredient.

Alessandro Stocchi:
So a very small quantity of rennet - 25 grams around for 1,000 kilos of milk. In about 10 minutes, each they create an enzymatic shock, so they transform the milk from a liquid state into just like a gel state. You know? Okay? It's like a creme caramel. Do you know?

Katy Clarke:
Yep.

Alessandro Stocchi:
And then arrive our there. And as said before, only with the hands have to find exactly the right moment to broke the milk. to broke the crown, to obtain some grains big as rice to give an idea. This is a very particular process, and they start very slowly, with a particular movement, and then they go faster to obtain these grains, and then they have to cook these grains. In about 10 minutes, they cook, and they arrive at about 44 degrees. So we're at at 44 degrees. They don't touch anymore the cauldron, the container where they are cooking the milk. So they don't touch more cauldron for 1 hour. During this hour, all the grains, they fall down to the bottom, and one way or the other, one way or the other, one way or the other, they create a big bowl of cheese into the bottom of the cauldron.

Alessandro Stocchi:
So after 1 hour, they are waiting for the extraction of the big ball. You have to imagine it just like a big mozzarella now, very wet, very soft. They extract the big ball of cheese. They cut it in the middle, divide, and we have our 2 wheels of Parmigiano Reggiano from the same culture. We call it twins.

Giulia Tamarri:
And, actually, Katy is very from a tourist guide point of view, Katy, it's amazing to take people around and show them what happens. And this also happens during our Emilia tour, now that we go to the dairy farm and we actually go very early. It's so worth waking up early that morning just to see the birth of the Parmigiano Reggiano is fantastic. And, actually, seeing the cheese master. How Alessandro was describing using the we call it spinatura or this this long tool. Imagine, like, a very big how would you describe it? Like, a long...

Alessandro Stocchi:
Just like a big ball with a long knife - all around round.

Katy Clarke:
Okay.

Alessandro Stocchi:
And they with this with this, instrument, they really have to cut and to broke the gel, the milk. And, yeah, we want to take the grains.

Giulia Tamarri:
Beautiful. It's beautiful to look like, really.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah. I remember. And do you know what? When you were talking, I was thinking, wow. I just love that it's tactile and it's hands on, and they're doing it based on touch. And, you know, why I love going to Italy is a lot of this experience and knowledge is only here that will never ever be replaced by a robot. You know? Like, can you ever imagine that a robot would take over this job?

Giulia Tamarri:
Oh my gosh. I hope not. I cry thinking about it.

Giulia Tamarri:
Alessandro and I really- it's impossible because we talked about this expertise, you know, that each cheese master must have and takes so many years, depending on obviously all these conditions that only humans can feel.

Katy Clarke:
And I think anyone who gets a little bit sad in the English-speaking world - there is so much focus on doing everything faster, doing it more efficient, doing everything, you know, with technology. But, you know, it's really relaxing to come to Italy and to hear about a process like this, which is never ever going to be replaced by a robot. You know? So it's really comforting to me, actually, because people do value this product because of exactly the care and attention that's being put into it by human beings. And I think I'm someone that loves technology as you know, but I do also have a very strong appreciation for this process that is just incredible. So okay. So once you get the 2 balls, the twins balls of cheese, what happens next?

Alessandro Stocchi:
Then during the first night, you are ready to add our origin marks, k, or. Then the last ingredient that we want to add is the sold. So the wheels remain some of the solution with water and sold for 18, maybe 20 days, then they're going to the warehouse. Then they stay into the warehouse, as Giulia said before, medium for 12 months. Because we would know maybe only after 12 months if the wheels that we are producing today, they maybe can become can be Parmigiano Reggiano, okay? Meaning, only after 12 months because and this is my job. So now I'm ready. It's like so, Parmigiano Reggiano is the only one PDO over the world that's at every single pieces of the production.

Alessandro Stocchi:
So last year, we produced about 4,000,000 wheels we checked, 4,000,000 wheels 1 by 1. When you buy a piece of Parmigiano Reggiano, you can be sure that some me or a colleague of mine have checked that right from my wheel, but have the characteristic to be the real Parmigiano Reggiano. We check the wheels only with a hammer. This is the only one instrument that we use. And with the hammer, we check all the surface of the wheel. And by the sound, we recognize if inside we have some kind of defects. So for a perfect wheel, we have a completely full paste inside. We don't have any kind of spaces inside.

Alessandro Stocchi:
If something go wrong, we have some spaces. Maybe you know Emmenthal cheese. This kind of cheese, they have some bubbles of air around. Okay? For them, it's a characteristic. They want this, but not for us. So if something like this happen, it means that something go wrong. We have a bad fermentation, and it means that we have maybe some sour flour, maybe bitter flour to the cheese or so on. Something go wrong.

Alessandro Stocchi:
So with the hammer, when we arrive over this defector, if we have defect, we hear a difference in sound, and then we can do our selection. So only the perfect wheels goes in our Parmigiano Reggiano 1st category. We say, okay. This is perfect. After us, arrive a colleague of us and with a fire marker, put the PDO fire marker over the wheel. Then with the 12 month and the fire marker, now is Parmigiano Reggiano. You can call it Parmigiano Reggiano.

Katy Clarke:
Okay.

Alessandro Stocchi:
Then we have, another category where we have a wheel with maybe a very small defector. So it's not perfect, but we have a small defector. So we said, okay. It's the Parmigiano Reggiano, but it's a second category 1. So we put the fair mark of the PDO, but after us, arrive a colleague of us and with the machine, it erase a lot of line all around over the skin. So as a customer, you can recognize the second quality between the first one. This is still Parmigiano Reggiano, but it's not good for a long aging. So we got these wheels in a very short time, 14 months, 15 months, and it's much more common that you can find maybe, for example, grated.

Alessandro Stocchi:
Okay. Yeah. And then we put in the 3rd categories. So this is not Parmigiano Reggiano. So we don't put the fire market, but the colleague of mine that before engraves the line over the skin now takes away all the part that have the origin marks of Parmigiano Reggiano or the channel. So the wheels, they remain completely white, and the producer can say it as Italian cheese, white cheese, any kind of name they want, but any kind of pediment to the PDO Parmigiano Reggiano. This is the main instrument that we have to give the guarantee to the consumers that when you buy a piece of Parmigiano Reggiano, you can be sure that right from wheels that deserve the brand Parmigiano Reggiano.

Katy Clarke:
I really respect that, and I think it's really important because you can buy here in Australia Parmigiano Reggiano. And after spending time with Giulia a couple of years ago and I came back home... do you remember this? And I said, Giulia, they're not even saying how many months is aged on the on the cheese. And so now I've become very bossy at the delicatessen, to say, now where is this... I wanna see the wheel. You know? Sometimes maybe people relied on that we don't know all of those amazing things that you just told us. So just like if you're going to buy a Gucci handbag, you wanna know that it was made by the, you know, the proper Gucci. Right? And it's not cheap, the cheese, and nor should it be really. But if you want the good stuff, the proper Parmigiano, you need to look for the right brand.

Giulia Tamarri:
You know, Katy, I'm so glad you mentioned that. I like, there are many Parmigiano Reggiano nerds like me. So what I do when I go traveling, and I am also in another city, I normally go to the cheese shop and see what I want to see the wheel because on the actual wheel, you find the a special number because, obviously, each dairy farm is characterized by a number, and you could actually find out, first of all, if it's the real stuff. Okay? But second of all, you could also ask from which dairy farm exactly it comes from.

Katy Clarke:
And I can just see you going around Sicily looking for your Parmigiano Reggiano.

Giulia Tamarri:
I I am the nightmare of every cheese shop all over Italy and more. I was actually in Edinburgh the other day, and I went to check, and they actually showed me. And they knew actually where it came from. At least they knew which province out of the 5 it came from. So so that's another, way to check if you're getting your, cheese from a good shop.

Katy Clarke:
Alessandro, you said there was 4,000,000 wheels produced every year.

Alessandro Stocchi:
Yeah.

Katy Clarke:
Is that the 1st grade cheese? Is or is that everything?

Alessandro Stocchi:
We have some for some wheels in the first category, some in the second, and some in the third. Yeah. The medium is about the 10% of second, and total of the second and third is about 10%. But I want to say this thing. That thing is very, very, very, very, very important. Sometimes when I talk about my job, someone said, "okay, but maybe" they think about maybe Parmigiano Reggiano one of the most important, you can say, PDO product all over the world.

Katy Clarke:
Yep.

Alessandro Stocchi:
So may have but you can have some defect that it seems that some is something wrong. I think it's absolutely the locust. Because as before, we work with natural ingredients, any kind of preservatives, any kind of this. As said before, the human factor is very important. The artisanal part is very important. So if you do anything in the nature, you know that not every time the things go in the way that you want. It's absolutely normal. So I think that maybe if the day when we will have 100% of perfect wheels all the same, anything is myth, I think that's not the right way.

Alessandro Stocchi:
It's absolutely normal that something go wrong. So this is just like another one, just, proof. Yeah. Another proof of the nature and the artisanality that there is behind our product.

Katy Clarke:
I think that's lovely. I think that's just perfect, actually, because just like human beings, we're not all perfect either. Right? So, you know, let's I like to compare myself to a round of cheese. Anyway, Alessandra, how many when you're doing your normal testing job, how much cheese -

how many rounds would you taste every day?

Alessandro Stocchi:
We check every day about 1,000 wheels.

Giulia Tamarri:
Wow. 1,000, Alessandro.

Alessandro Stocchi:
1,000 medium. We have 21 people that make this job.

Katy Clarke:
Wow. And so and what sort of training did you need to do to do your job?

Alessandro Stocchi:
To understand and to learn our job, and there are no schools. So students is really a job that you can only learn learn it by doing. So when I started here in the consortium, there were very old people that think this job will be for 40, 45 years, and only with the time, with the experience, they can teach you this job. So today is exactly the same. So if you want, you need a lot of passion about all the production chain, and you need a lot of patience also to understand and to learn the job. And als you need a lot of understanding about all the producers, so because you need a lot of just like I can say, sensibility about the job because you can understand that by my job, it depends also all the the money that they can have, ok? Well, I have to be sure that I'm working the right way every day. By a side, I will not have to demote the producer, and by the other side, I have to give the guarantee to the consumer that I'm making in the right way my job.

Alessandro Stocchi:
And, also, my job, you can understand, is a very artisanal job. Only with a number, 300 grams, number.

Giulia Tamarri:
Amazing.

Alessandro Stocchi:
We have to understand how is inside a 40 kilos wheel of cheese.

Katy Clarke:
So Yeah.

Alessandro Stocchi:
We need to be sure that we are working in the right way.

Katy Clarke:
So when you were a kid, did you think that you would be doing this job when you were, like, a small boy?

Alessandro Stocchi:
I was always interested in... I'm always patient, always been passionate in all the gastranomic production. As, Giulia said before Emilia Romagna is is full of very important products. So I was, always interested in, but, I was also interested in this kind of job because it's a very particular job. And then I have the possibility to start it, but I never think about this before. So yeah.

Katy Clarke:
It's so interesting. Like, I I'm actually doing a talk to some students tomorrow and, like, I just think that, you know, some kids maybe just don't even know that this job is possible, you know, so it would be really fascinating. Is there anyone from outside Emilia Romagna who does your job?

Alessandro Stocchi:
Yeah. We can say that there aren't many but there's more than quantity of people. I don't know how many they are, but a lot of, various we're going to get people that link the job outside, but we can say that Parmigiano Reggiano is the only one product that's, like, every single wheel of production.

Katy Clarke:
And it's worth it. It's interesting because, you know, in our culture, we if we go to Italian restaurant and we ask for cheese, will someone grate some parmigiano reggiano for us? But that's not the only way to eat it. Right?

Alessandro Stocchi:
We can use Parmigiano Reggiano in the kitchen in a lot of different way. So we can grate Parmigiano grate it in Parmigiano Reggiano, and and you can use it as ingredient in the kitchen. Okay? That give more flavor to your dishes. But you have to know that by this aging of the cheese, it seems a lot also the flavor and aroma and the texture also of the cheese. So to give you an idea, maybe a younger one, 16/18 months, for example, maybe it's better if you want to pair this maybe for an aperitif. You can use with the sparkling white wine or maybe you can use a slice in a very fresh summer dishes or salad. Okay? Because it remains very with a lot of lactic flavor and maybe when he's young, it's still sweet, a little bit sour. Okay? But not so much intense.

Alessandro Stocchi:
Then we have the 24 months that's the classical aging for us. So in this aging, you can rate the cheese because during the aging of the cheese, the humidity squeezes out from the wheel. So the texture, it becomes more crumbly and with a higher velocity and soliditiy. So at 24 months, we have a medium intensity in that you can use this aging as ingredient in the

kitchen. But also you can, for example, pair this kind of Parmigiano with honey, maybe with, jam. And then you also can try to pair with a lot of product that have a medium intensity of aroma. Yeah. Then we have another one maybe when we start from 36 months, okay, we can start to pair with more intense aroma.

Alessandro Stocchi:
So also, for example, balsamic vinegar, of course.

Giulia Tamarri:
Yay.

Katy Clarke:
Yay. We love balsamic.

Giulia Tamarri:
Not sorry. No. For many people, it's the perfect we call it the perfect wedding. Traditional balsamic vinegar. Right?

Katy Clarke:
Yeah. The traditional one. The proper one.

Giulia Tamarri:
Yeah.

Alessandro Stocchi:
Yes. So you can pair with this kind, of product, but also in the years, we have a lot of pairing and a lot of experience, very interesting. So also with the maybe after the dish with the very long aging - maybe 60 months, 70 months. You can pair with Marsala, a lot to give an idea or Scottish whiskey or Amarone, also other wine. Okay? With Lambrusco from the same territory here. We can try a lot of experience and the different aging of Parmigiano Reggiano. They give us a very high variability also in the flavor and aroma. And then in context - we have a very big context.

Alessandro Stocchi:
Okay? So we can use it for a lot of, different pairing. So Giulia, she's also a taster after the course, can also give you your opinion about this.

Giulia Tamarri:
Oh, no.

Alessandro Stocchi:
Yeah. Yeah.

Giulia Tamarri:
Now I feel under pressure. No. Well, of course, we have already mentioned traditional balsamic vinegar. To me, it's fantastic. Personally, I actually enjoy Parmigiano Reggiano on its own as a snack. For example, during the day, I love my snacking of my 12 months Parmigiano Reggiano, but, obviously, when I am at the table and I'm properly having dinner with my friends, it's my way to show off, you know, because my fridge is always very sad, but it's I have always got very special Parmigiano Reggiano from different dairy farms, from different types of milk. So with some nice, of course, also Lambrusco from my area, very versatile - on meat. Recently, Alessandro, I think you might like it too.

Giulia Tamarri:
Alessandro, you are from Reggio. Right? Yes. Recently, I was in Parma, and I ordered Rosa di Parma Yeah. Which is this, fillet of beef. I think it's veal. And inside, you have parma ham and Parmesan Reggiano. Wow, Katy. It's to die for.

Giulia Tamarri:
You know? And, obviously, I would put the Parmesan Reggiano everywhere. Yeah. I know.

Katy Clarke:
I know you would. So, I mean, I think it's really interesting because what is it that makes it so delicious? I mean, when it's all of this tradition and, like, long process, but the process creates umami, doesn't it? It's that flavor that is present in, not so many ingredients, but it's that intensity of flavor. It's like an explosion in your mouth, and you can really taste it, can experience it, as you say, in all those different levels, and I that's why I like it anyway. What about ice cream, Giulia? You're always trying to get us to do gelato flavors. So..

Giulia Tamarri:
Katy - I almost forgot about that, of course. Well and actually, you could also have because as gelato taste. Now, obviously, not every gelatieri are skilled artisan that can transform Parmigiano Reggiano in an amazing gelato experience, But, actually, I know a few that do, and it's absolutely fantastic. Because it's definitely not the way you would think of Parmigiano Reggiano, but it could also be as a gelato taste, a gelato flavor. I hope Katy we made everyone mouth water after this recording. What do you think? I really hope so curious to come and meet with us and also experience with us Yes. The actual experience of visiting a dairy farm, meeting the cheese master, meeting who knows? Maybe the, an expert like Alessandro.

Katy Clarke:
Is there a way I mean, not everyone can come with us because we have very limited spaces to go on our special tour, but if someone is coming to Modena or Parma or Reggio, is there a way for them to visit one of the farms? And how would you recommend people do a tasting?

Giulia Tamarri:
Well, first of all, they should always refer to the official website of the consortium. So in

that, there are there is a list of dairy farmer that manage their visit because some dairy farms are equipped enough with their guides, they speak fluent English and so on. So that's definitely a way to, I would say, check the website, the official website, but also the, you could also contact, local guides that can take you. And smaller farms not always have, you know, the capacity and the ability to offer their own tours. So in that case, you'd need to refer to a specialist.

Katy Clarke:
You can't just turn up as what these people are making cheese. It's a very important job. You can't just arrive. You know, you need to make a booking or go with a guide, but I have to say, and maybe this one for you, Alessandro, there probably aren't enough tours happening. I think there's an opportunity for someone to do more of these because there's a lot of people very interested in understanding more about the process of making Parmigiano Reggiano. I would say - we probably get maybe 3 or 4 inquiries a week just for people specifically wanting a tour. So, yeah, it's it's difficult. Anyway, we're gonna keep looking and helping people find, but you can still do tastings in maybe the market in Modena as well.

Giulia Tamarri:
Also, visiting market is an amazing experience to in order to be able to taste the actual product, but I would say the complete experience would also really be visit the dairy farm, you know, and buying the the cheese from that dairy farm. Another thing we haven't mentioned is the ricotta as well, because we use the what's the whey that is left over from the Parmigiano Reggiano production to make ricotta. So that experience you can only do if you do visit their farm, you know.

Katy Clarke:
It's incredible. I think behind every truly iconic product, there's so many passionate and dedicated people who go into making it and supporting it to make sure that the quality is maintained. And, you know, no doubt that is 100 percent the case with Parmigiano Reggiano, and I'll never stop eating it. I can't wait to come and learn more because, you know, I know that I don't even know 1% of what goes into making this amazing and iconic Italian cheese, and can't wait to come and visit with you all and and learn some more.

Giulia Tamarri:
Yes, Katy. We're waiting for you. Come.

Alessandro Stocchi:
Yeah.

Katy Clarke:
Is there anything else you wanted to let anyone know about Parmigiano Reggiano? Is there one last thing we should know?

Alessandro Stocchi:
I maybe it should became interesting for people. Also, I'll talk about the imitation for Parmigiano Reggiano. You have to know that Parmigiano Reggiano is the most the most imitated elementary product all over the world. So all our producers, they are just, like, proud about this because if everyone in every part of the world try to copy you, it means that they really recognize the quality. But you can imagine that from the other side is an incredible domain for us. So, in your way, you can produce any kind of product in the market and call it Parmesan or Parmesana, Regginito name that remind you to the brand Parmigiano Reggiano. Only if it's the real Parmigiano Reggiano you can call it Parmigiano Reggiano only if you are really talking about, for example.

Alessandro Stocchi:
Outside from UMA's, UA, a lot of time, is not so easy for the people to recognize the real one. So maybe because also today, we don't have, I think, enough culture about this. So the 2 instruments that you have to recognize, the real one is the typical dot over the skin. Okay? This dot have, like, a legal value. Okay? So you can search for the dots for the skin or for the Parmigiano Reggiano logo over the packaging. Okay? Maybe you can give your picture, get the upstairs, so you can also have the official logo. And with the logo, the official logo over the packaging or with the dots, you can be sure you are buying the real one. So tell to your to friends, your parents, everyone - whoever that you have searched for this.

Giulia Tamarri:
Only the real. Only the king. Only the real one.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah. It's really interesting because here and, I mean, don't be shocked and don't be angry with me, but they cut it up so that you can't see the rind. I mean, I believe them. They're good people.

Giulia Tamarri:
You know? That's cheeky Katy because, you know, we also use the rind.

Katy Clarke:
I know. It's so good. So as

Giulia Tamarri:
Italians, we would be like, hey 'why are you not giving me the rind? Because I might use it.' Because as you know, we instead of using, like, artificial stock, we use the rind. So to make risotto, and we use that to to make broth. Absolutely. We would complain. Absolutely.

Alessandro Stocchi:
Or you can put the rind of Parmigiano Reggiano over the barbecue. So you have a crunchy part outside and the juices inside.

Giulia Tamarri:
And Aussie barbecues are so famous! Katy, we should start a revolution here.

Katy Clarke:
We start a revolution with the barbecued, Parmigiano Reggiano. Well, you know, actually, my husband puts it in a pasta sauce. Some, like, even, like a ragu, just makes it more more the flavor, you know, of the cheese. I don't know. It tastes good.

Giulia Tamarri:
There is no wax. It's all edible, so why not?

Katy Clarke:
Yeah. That's really interesting because I think people do think it's wax. Right? But it's not.

Giulia Tamarri:
Only 3 ingredients. So no wax.

Katy Clarke:
All right. Grazie, Giulia and Alessandro. Look, it's just been amazing. I just love hearing about the products of your region and especially this cheese, which is my favorite. And I hope everyone who's listening can hear that this is something important. It's a tradition that's important, and you're so passionate about it. And that's a really good reason to come to Emelia Romagna and experience it for yourself because I feel like sometimes we're rushing around so busy and we're thinking the robots can fix everything, but they're never gonna fix your cheese.

Giulia Tamarri:
Never. Never. To claim a famous phrase from Massimo Bottura, this is the land of slow food and fast cars. And for sure, Parmigiano is one of those slow food that you have to try.

Katy Clarke:
Absolutely. Well, thank you so much for spending time with me today. I really appreciate it. It's been lots of fun and, I hope to see you soon.

Giulia Tamarri:
Thank you, Katy.

Alessandro Stocchi:
Thank you. Bye.

Giulia Tamarri:
Grazie Tutti. Ciao. Ciao.

Katy Clarke:
And that my friends is why I love Italy. The passion, the dedication and commitment to a quality product. There's no compromise. They are committed to making the most excellent cheese - the king of cheeses. But also, there's no waste - you can eat or cook with the rind, ricotta is made with the leftover milk product and if the cheese isn't up to scratch is used for something else.

And they know, the essence of this product is in the human touch. The knowledge gained from years of experience and training. You can't automate this cheese making and that's magnificent.

I have to pinch myself that I have the opportunity to spend time with people like this and I truly wish it for all of you. Of course, Italy's sights and history are magnificent but if you want to get to the heart of Italian culture, try to meet people like Alessandro and Giulia. It's life-changing.

We have a few spots left on our Spring tour of Bologna, Modena and Parma next year where we visit the mountain parmigiano reggiano dairy that was featured on Stanley Tucci's Searching for Italy and whose cheese is used by one of the world's greatest chefs and local Emilian, Massimo Botturo.

I've been there and it's incredible. This is not a place you can visit independently unfortunately however if you'd like help planning your travels in this region we also offer trip-planning services where our consultants can help you taste the most incredible Parmigiano you've ever popped into your mouth.

Of course, you'll find the details of the consortium, our Emilia tour and a link to our Emilia guide in the show notes at untolditaly.com/241.

Thanks to all our wonderful listeners for your ongoing support of Untold Italy. I hope you enjoyed today's show. If you did, we would love it if you shared it with your Italy-loving friends and family. Grazie to those of you who have already done this - it is so appreciated.

That's all for today, next week we're taking another magical trip to Italy via the soundwaves.

But until then it's "ciao for now".