

# Cheesemaker interview questions

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## What to expect

Cheesemaker interviews mix technical process questions with food safety and behavioural scenarios. Employers want to see that you understand the science behind the make, can follow hygiene and compliance rules, and will speak up when something looks wrong.

- **Technical process:** Questions about pasteurisation, cultures, rennet, curd cutting, pH and moisture control.
- **Food safety and hygiene:** Questions about HACCP, cleaning, sanitation, allergens and record keeping.
- **Behavioural:** Questions about teamwork, reliability, handling mistakes and working in a small team.
- **Scenario and judgement:** Questions about what you would do if a batch or piece of equipment went off track.
- **Sensory and quality:** Questions about taste, texture, appearance and consistency.
- **Motivation and fit:** Questions about why you want this role and how you handle shift work and physical demands.

A typical process starts with a phone screen, then a tour of the make room and a face-to-face interview with the head cheesemaker or production manager. Some employers include a short practical task, such as checking pH or cutting curds, and you may meet the team you would work with.

## 1. Walk me through how you take milk from pasteurisation to a pressed wheel of cheese.

### Why they ask

This tests your end-to-end process knowledge and whether you understand how each step affects the final cheese.

### How to structure your answer

A step-by-step walk-through that covers each stage in order and explains why you do it that way.

### Example answer

*"I start by checking the pasteuriser is at the right temperature and the milk is ready. Once it is cooled to the set temperature, I add the starter culture and let it ripen so the pH starts to drop. Then I add rennet, stir it in and let the milk set. When it gives a clean break, I cut the curd with the knives, then stir and heat it gently to expel whey. I check the pH and curd firmness as I go. When it is ready, I drain the whey, hoop the curds and press them under the schedule for that style. After pressing, the wheels go into brine or the maturation room, and I record every step in the batch records."*

## 2. How do you monitor pH and moisture during the make, and what do you do if a reading is off target?

### Why they ask

Employers need to know you can control the variables that decide yield, texture and shelf life.

### How to structure your answer

Technical problem-solving: describe your routine, the tool you use and the corrective actions you take.

### Example answer

*"I take pH readings at set points, usually at ripening, at cut, at drain and at press. I use a calibrated pH meter and record each reading against the target for that cheese. If the pH is dropping too fast, I might cut earlier or adjust the temperature. If it is too slow, I check the culture activity and the room"*

*temperature. For moisture, I check curd firmness by hand and adjust cutting, stirring or cooking time. If a reading is off, I log it, tell the head cheesemaker and adjust the next step so the batch stays within spec."*

### **3. Tell me about a time you spotted a food safety or hygiene issue and how you handled it.**

#### **Why they ask**

Food safety is non-negotiable in dairy, and employers want to see you act rather than ignore a problem.

#### **How to structure your answer**

STAR: situation, task, action, result.

#### **Example answer**

*"In a previous role, I noticed a faint off smell near a drain in the make room just before a batch was due to start. I stopped the setup, told the supervisor and helped clean and sanitise the area. We took swabs and found a build-up in a hard-to-reach corner. We re-cleaned and re-sanitised, and the batch went ahead safely after we confirmed the area was clear. After that, I added that corner to the daily cleaning checklist so it did not happen again."*

### **4. You arrive for a shift and the cheese vat temperature is running warm. What do you do?**

#### **Why they ask**

This tests your judgement under pressure and whether you can protect the batch without panicking.

#### **How to structure your answer**

Assess, isolate, escalate, record: a calm judgement structure.

#### **Example answer**

*"First I check the actual temperature with a calibrated probe and compare it to the set point. If the vat is genuinely warm, I stop adding cultures or rennet until I know the milk is within range. I check the jacket valves and the controller for a fault. If I cannot fix it quickly, I call the head cheesemaker or maintenance. I would not start a batch if the temperature is out of spec because it affects culture activity and safety. I record the issue, the time and what I did, and I keep the milk cool until we decide whether to proceed or divert it."*

### **5. How do you keep batch records accurate and useful for the next shift?**

#### **Why they ask**

Good records are how a creamery traces problems and keeps consistency across shifts.

#### **How to structure your answer**

Process and detail: describe what you record, when and why.

#### **Example answer**

*"I fill in the dairy batch records software as I go, not at the end of the shift. I record milk volume, culture and rennet additions, pH at each checkpoint, temperatures, cut and drain times, and any deviation from the recipe. If something changes, I write a short note so the next person knows what happened and what to watch. At handover, I brief the incoming cheesemaker on any batches that need attention. That way the next shift is not guessing and we can trace any issue back to a specific step."*

### **6. Why do you want to work as a cheesemaker here, and what do you know about our cheeses?**

#### **Why they ask**

This shows whether you have done your homework and whether you will stay and care about the product.

### **How to structure your answer**

Motivation and research: connect your interest to what the employer actually makes.

#### **Example answer**

*"I have always been interested in how milk becomes such different cheeses, and I want to work somewhere that takes maturation seriously. I have looked at your range and I am particularly interested in [add one genuine, specific detail about their cheeses or production, such as a style they make or a project you admire]. I like the idea of working in a team where the cheesemakers can see a batch through from vat to wheel, and I am keen to keep building my skills in that kind of environment."*