

## IS IT LISTERIA HYSTERIA?

# Cheesemakers angered by recall

SUSAN SEMENAK  
THE GAZETTE

Just two months ago, Lucille Giroux was celebrating. Four of the sheep's milk cheeses she produces at La Moutonnière, her sheep farm in Ste. Hélène de Chester, near Victoriaville, picked up gold and silver medals from the American Cheese Society. Her fellow Quebec cheesemakers were rejoicing, too. In all, Quebec cheeses took home 18 prizes this year from one of the world's most influential contests for artisanal and farmstead cheesemakers.

"We have spent 10 or 15 years building up the quality and reputation of Quebec cheeses. We have made a name for ourselves around the world," Giroux said yesterday.

All that was put in jeopardy last week-end when a battalion of food inspectors armed with garbage bags and chlorine bottles descended on more than 300 cheese shops across the province, seizing and destroying tonnes of Brie and Camembert,



CANWEST NEWS SERVICE

About 400 types of cheese are made from goat's, cow's and sheep's milk in Quebec.

Emmenthal and other cheeses suspected to have been cross contaminated with the listeria bacterium that had been found in cheeses produced by two Quebec companies: Fromagerie Medard and Les Fromagerie de la Table Ronde.

Listeria has been linked to one death in Quebec and illnesses in 20 people, including four pregnant women. In a bid to stem the bacteria's spread, the provincial Agri-

culture Department last week launched a special investigation of all 44 Quebec dairy plants producing raw milk cheeses, which it said were more susceptible to listeria contamination. The government is expected to announce test results tomorrow and further recalls are possible.

Giroux's cheese farm was not affected by the recall. But she says all the negative publicity and the growing doubts over the safety of Quebec cheese could decimate the business.

"There's total panic now. This is a crisis like we've never seen. It's catastrophic for the two cheese plants that were closed, but also for the whole industry.

"Consumers are avoiding our cheese, retailers don't want to restock it for fear of a further recall. Cheese counters are empty. Our cheese isn't leaving the plant, even if no bacteria was ever found," lamented Giroux in a telephone interview yesterday.

Please see LISTERIA, Page D2