

AGRICULTURE AND TOURISM



GRINDELWALD 

EIGER



There were 148 farming operations, run as main or sideline agricultural enterprises, counted in Grindelwald in 2018. They cover an area of approximately 1490 hectares (3681 acres). A total of 3.6% of the local population operate these businesses as secondary income (compared to 60% to 70% working in farming around 1900). In order to supplement their income, farmers will often find additional employment with the mountain rail- and cableways, the hospitality sector, or in handicraft and alpine farming jobs.

In the past number of years, many farms have ceased their activities. Larger operations have been created and continue to use the same areas of land. Lands both owned and leased comprise of small agricultural plots scattered among

the municipal district. This often causes long transportation routes and time-consuming conveyance of winterfeed, manure and liquid manure. For improved economic efficiency, larger barn facilities are constructed. These larger facilities provide increased animal-friendliness, which complies with the federal animal protection law and water pollution control regulations.

In 2018, Grindelwald counted: 847 dairy cows, 44 suckler cows, 492 heifers, 143 calves, 389 starter calves, 25 horses, 77 dairy ewes, 449 sheep, 474 goats, 43 lamas (for a total of 1043 small animals including sheep, goats and lamas), 103 hens, and 112 bee hives. Records dating back from 1812 registered 1416 cows, 417 heifers, 413 calves and 3734 small animals (goats, sheep, and pigs).

The yearly totals for milk production are: 2680000 L cow's milk (179000 L organic), 35000 L goat's milk (7000 L organic), and 26000 L sheep's milk (all organic). 179000 L of organic cow's milk is shipped to the collection station outside of the valley. 1653000 L are processed by the local dairy plant Eigermilch. One million litres are used for making «Grindelwalder Bergkäse» (Grindelwalder mountain cheese).

Eigermilch also produces cave-ripened mountain cheese, Raclette cheese, and several other cheeses, as well as yogurt and pasteurised milk. All of the milk produced during the month of May cannot be processed and so, the excess is therefore sold. However, when the cows are upon the alpine grazing land in the summertime, production down in the valley continues and requires the purchase of milk from other local producers and neighbouring alpine farms.

An array of goat's milk «Mutschli» and goat's milk cream cheese are produced by Eigermilch and the Molki Meiringen dairies. The sheep's milk is processed at a private dairy farm into soft, semi-hard and hard cheeses.



748 600 litres of cow's milk are sourced on alpine meadow farms. 668 600 L of this is processed into «Alpkäse» and «Alpmutschli»; 80 000 L are delivered to the Eigermilch (this amount is increasing over time). 15 700 L of goat's milk are used for producing «Mutschli» cheeses (2018 statements).



THE ALPINE DISTRICTS «BERGSCHAFTEN»

Grindelwald is divided in 7 «Bergschaften», known as alpine farming districts. These alpine farming districts exist today, by law, as public corporations. When acquiring parcels of land located in the valley, the associated mountain rights (so called animal entitlements) are also acquired at the same time, regardless of whether it was discussed when concluding the trade. This means that mountain rights are tied to the property, entered in the official Land Registry, and cannot be sold. A district member entitled to vote is one who (or their legal partner) owns at least one-eighth of allotted

bovine entitlement, and as a legal person either has the right to vote in the municipality of Grindelwald, or as a corporate entity has a seat in Grindelwald. (Under the new super ordinate law, one-quarter prevails, however the existing rights of one-eighth remain valid.)

A district occupant («Besetzer») is defined as someone who summers his animals in the district's alpine pastures. All those who occupy the alp in the same year, form the occupant community («Besetzerschaft») for that specific year. The occupant community is responsible for regulating and controlling the alpine





farming operations. The overseer («Pfander» or «Alpvogt») and the fence manager («Hagpfander») sit on the board of district members.

Each alpine farming district has an alp with a corresponding name, which is cooperatively farmed. The nature of these cooperatives is at its core more than 500 years old. (Valley Unification Letter «Taleinungsbrief», from the years 1404/1538. Its latest version dated from 25.3.2002). Over the centuries, this type of farming operation has proven its worth and still prevails today.

The first recorded regulation regarding the alps dates from 1404 from the provost of the monastery in Interlaken. Per allotted «mountain entitlement», fences must be annually set up on the alp. Every 20 years, through the drawing of lots, the areas to fence are newly divided up

in between district members. The fences separate the private land (mid-altitude «Vorsass») from the alp, stake out each camp, and prevent grazing on dangerous terrain.

The area used for alpine farming includes approximately 60 km² out of 171 km² total for the municipality. Excluding the non-productive mountain areas (glaciers, rocks, etc.), that area is equivalent to about two-thirds of the usable land.

Alp huts are predominantly privately owned and are not registered in the Land Registry; however, the land itself belongs to the alpine farming district. These huts may not be used for any other purpose. The respective alpine farming district always has the right of first refusal. Even today, alpine regulations are largely subject to the «Valley Unification Letter».

ANNUAL CYCLE

Spring

In addition to caring for the animals, work in the fields begins; specifically, that of clearing storm-damaged trees, leaves, and other debris, as well as removing unwanted saplings to prevent an excessive encroachment of shrubs. Meadows are fertilized with manure and liquid manure, which is not so easy with the existing environmental water protection measures. From the end of April, the animals graze on the lush pastures of the valley. Then, in mid-May they are led to mid-altitude grazing lands around the «Vorsass» before being driven up to the higher alps in June. Before the annual procession up to the alps, the fences must first be repaired.

Summer

During the summer months, the focus is put on the procurement of feed, comprised of dry fodder and silage taken mainly from the steep slopes of the valley farms and «Vorsass». In addition, it is also important to complete the “Tagwann” so called collective alpine chores. (The amount of time required for general work adds up to 10 hours per head of cattle).

Autumn

With the alp-descent towards the end of September, the grazing period in the «Vorsass» begins once again, before ending in the valley. The traditional «Chästeilet», cheese-dividing ceremony, is celebrated, followed by small and large livestock exhibitions, and the fences must be taken down. The land is cleared of foliage, and machines are washed, lubricated, and serviced. The meadows are once again fertilized with manure and liquid manure. Wood is felled for heating and to be used for repairs.

Winter

In late October, the winter-feeding begins, which for the most part, takes place on the farmer's premises. Only non-lactating dairy cattle is kept in «Vorsass» and smaller stables. During the winter feeding, regular exercise and access to the outdoors must be ensured for the animals.





THE 7 «BERGSCHAFTEN» IN T

Single private alp: Pfingstegg

Bussalp

Bovine entitlements: 432 | Number of alpine dairy farms: 1 | Camps/altitude in meters: Unterläger 1545, Mit Oberläger 2020 | Milking parlour for 3 farms «Hilf» | Cheese making at Mittelläger and Oberläger | No dairy cattle isolated for the whole summer | To shareholding for Bergrestaurant Bussalp

Holzmatten www.alp-holzmatten.ch

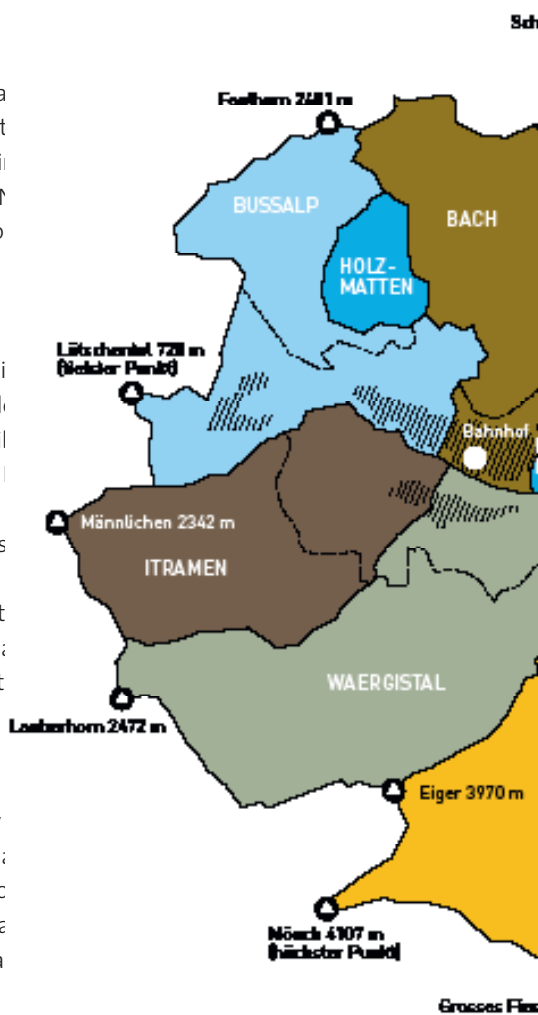
Bovine entitlements: 99 | Number of alpine dairy farms: 1 cow dairy, 1 goat dairy | Camps/altitude in meters: Spätenboden 1636, Läger 1660, Steessil 1822 (goat dairy and milking parlour for cows), 2130 (highest located camp for cheese making on Grindelwald municipal district) | Cow cheese production in Läger and Feld, goat cheese in Steessiboden | Non-lactating dairy cattle isolated for the whole summer | Sheep in Reeti | Holzmatten is the only alpine district having neither tourist facilities nor financial returns.

Bach

Bovine entitlement: 263 | Number of alpine dairy farms: 1 | Camps/altitude in meters: Holenwang 1584, Nothalten 1698, Spillmatten 1809 | Cheese making in Holenwang and Bachläger | No dairy cattle held in Dirrenberg, Nothalten, Spillmatten and Bach | Tourist facilities: ownership of mountain restaurant

Grindel www.bergschaft-grindel.ch

Bovine entitlement: 475 | Number of alpine dairy farms: 1 | Camps/altitude in meters: Unterläger 1741, Oberläger 1875, Schreckfeld 2012 | Non lactating dairy cattle held in Stepfi 1809 and Widderfeld 2180 | Cheese production in Unterläger, Stiftern, Egriz, Bäreglegg, Oberläger and Schreckfeld | Sheep in Bäregg and Zäsenberg | Revenues from the transit rights of the Firstbahn cableway and other lift facilities | Tourist facilities: shareholding for mountain restaurants Schreckfeld and Bäregg and bars located on the ski slopes.



THE VALLEY OF GRINDELWALD



Scheidegg

Alpine dairy farms: 365 | Number of alpine dairy farms: 1 goat dairy counting 100 goats | Elevation in meters: Unterer Lauchbühl 1455, Alpigen 1690 with Bide 1705, Oberer Lauchbühl 1800, Oberlärger 1950 | Types of milk cheese making in all camps, cheese making only in Oberen Lauchbühl | Non lactating dairy cattle for the whole summer. Suckler cows also 3. | Sheep in Bäregg and Zäsenberg | Facilities: ownership of Hotel Wetterhorn, Hotel Grosse Scheidegg, shareholding for mountain restaurant Bäregg. www.bergschaft-scheidegg.ch

Wärgistal

Alpine entitlements: 190 | Number of alpine dairy farms: 3 | Camps/altitude in meters: Bide 1332, Alpigen 1608, Bettlen 1809, Bustiglen 1878 | Cheese making in all camps | Non lactating for the whole summer | Sheep in all facilities: ownership of restaurant Bettlen, Grindelwaldblick, and shareholding Eigernordwand Kleine Scheidegg

Ittamen

Alpine dairy farms: 55 | Number of alpine dairy farms: 8 | Elevation in meters: Raift 1523, Lärger 1801, Wasserlaugen 1801 | Cheese making in all camps | Milking parlour for 1 dairy in Männlichen 2236 | Heifers aged 1 to 2 year old held in Gummi and Unteren and Oberen Brand. Suckler cows fenced in | Tourist facilities: ownership of mountain restaurant Männlichen, shareholding GGM, Ski-slope bar Lärger.

ON THE ALP

Since time immemorial, in the summertime, alpine herdsmen and dairymen have been leading their livestock to the lush grazing pastures of the alpine meadows. For approximately 100 days, these grasslands reserves provide heavenly feeding grounds and invigorating physical exercise for hundreds of dairy and suckler cows, heifers, goats and sheep. While their livestock stays up on the mountain, farmers can focus on harvesting winterfeed down in the valley.

Livestock breeding and dairy farming are impossible things to carry out in alpine areas without summer alpine pasture farming. It is a primeval and natural way of ensuring livestock offspring renewal and the supply of high-quality food such as meat, milk, cheese, butter and further dairy products.

Through the centuries, this ancient method of alpine meadow farming has kept its specific course of actions and cultural traditions. Alpine meadows cover a large surface of the Swiss nation

territory. A significant part of it is found in the Bernese Oberland. These meadows are mostly used as cow grazing pastures. Milking occurs twice a day, mornings and evenings. The milk is either brought down to the valley or, like it is often the case in Grindelwald, directly processed by the alpine dairymen into «Berner Alpkäse» and «Hobelkäse» AOP* cheeses, butter and «Ziger».

The alps here in Grindelwald are subdivided in 3 to 4 camps called «Läger». In early June, the alp farming season starts in the lower camps at an altitude of 1500m. Depending on the grass growth, the livestock grazes on pastures reaching up to 2000m elevation. From end of August on, the cattle slowly comes down again. The final descent «Alpabzug» takes place at the end of September. Fauna and flora vary along with their geographic location (sunny or shady slope, elevation...); which can be tasted in the cheese, having various subtle flavours depending on which geographic area the milk comes from. For retailing «Berner Alpkäse» and



*AOP stands for «Appellation d'Origine Protégée» and means protected designation of origin. Products listed with this label are produced, processed and ripened within a clearly limited geographical area.

«Hobelkäse» AOP* cheeses, the manufacturing must comply with the Swiss Food Agency guidelines, which requires high financial investments in the facilities. Therefore, cheese making is only possible in few camps.

Non lactating dairy livestock (all dairy animals not yet producing milk) is also kept on the alp; that is, the younger ones like calves and heifers. One-year old heifers are called «Maischen» and the older ones, spending their second summer on the alp are called «Rinder». These are mature animals and will give birth to their first calf in the winter-time. They then become dairy cows.

A herd of suckler cows and their offspring is also spending the summer in the alp of Scheidegg and Itramen. They usually are kept together with non lactating dairy livestock, but within their own fenced paddock. Holzmatten and Scheidegg have each a flock of goats. The animals are kept on the alpine meadows during the day and locked in the stables at night. Milking happens mornings and evenings.

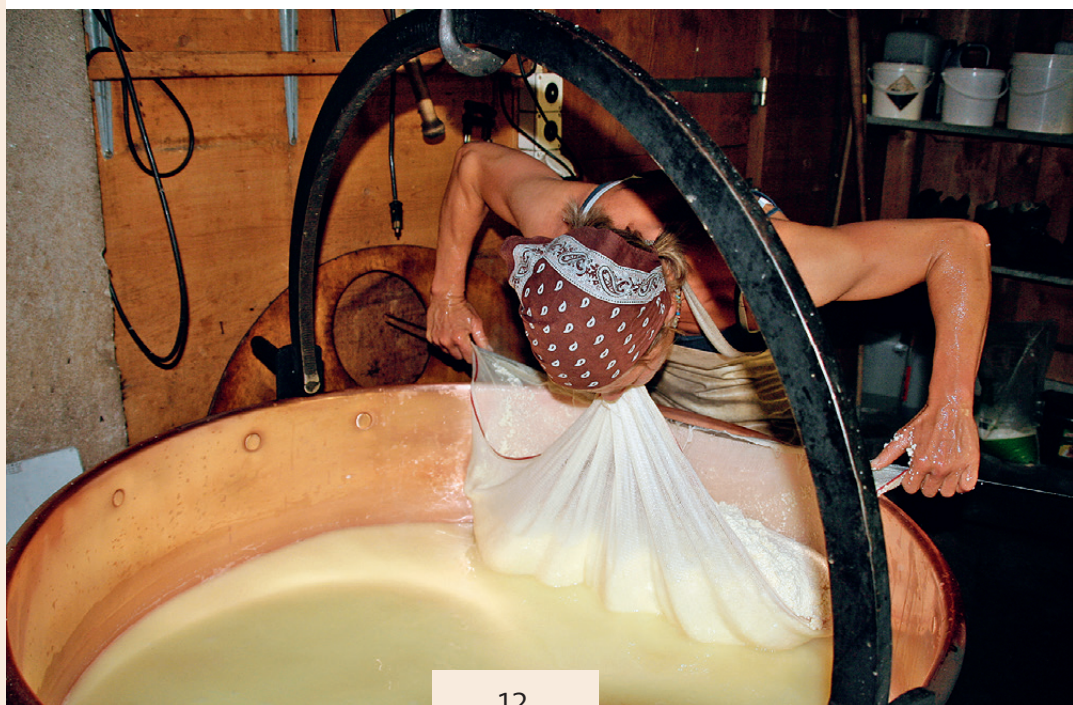
Around 60 dairy ewes are summering in Schreckfeld, in the Grindel alpine district. Their grazing grounds are fenced in.

Having to look after the livestock, to care for and protect it, is a great responsibility resting on a farmer's shoulders and his helpers'. In addition to stable work, tasks like milking, cheese making, manufacturing other dairy products and cheese care are highly time consuming.

A farmer's workday in the alp often starts at 4.00am, and including cheese making, lasts until 12noon. Cheese care follows in the afternoon, and then again, the livestock is gathered on the meadows and brought back to the stables for milking.

These working days are long and arduous, and anything but a holiday. The summer months spent on the mountain do have some pleasant sides too, but remain for the most part, hard working days, particularly under bad weather conditions or sometimes even snow.

On the other hand, tourists seek leisure and rest in the mountains. They are not often aware of the role farmers and their livestock play in overseeing the environmental preservation in a very natural way. Thus, contributing to the beauty of the scenery. By adopting an eco-friendly and responsible behaviour,



hikers, mountain bikers and paragliders can equally contribute to maintaining and conserving the alpine landscapes.

The cattle must abide specific rules for summering on alpine pastures. So, the alpine farmers invite tourists to follow **the guidelines** listed below.

Litter and waste: all litter and waste, including food scraps and leftovers, is of course to be packed in, taken away with you, and disposed in bins in the village. Inert material waste like bottles, tins and cans, plastics are not only ugly, but also do not rot away in nature. They are lethal for animals if they get wedged in hooves by stepping on it or ingested while grazing. Water fountains and troughs are vital for men and animals. They should not be polluted. Faucet settings and flow rate should not be manipulated.

Gates and fences must stay where they are. Do not remove or replace them. Carefully crawl under, step over or go around them! Gates must be closed after you go through. Fences are put up for protecting the livestock and preventing it from getting lost. Dogs must always be kept on leash.



Especially, if livestock or wildlife is in sight. Even if you know your furry friend well, you have no idea how the pasturing animals will react to your dog. Only the shepherd's dog knows his job and the animals are used to its presence.

Goats are looked after by a shepherdess in Holzmatten and Scheidegg. By adopting the right behaviour, you help making her herding day a success! Goats are by nature curious and easily get distracted. If you feed, pet or take pictures of them, they inevitably will follow you. Walking a firm step and looking straight forward helps. If goats follow you regardless, wait for the shepherdess instructions.

Suckler cows: Breeding by caring for species specific needs is gaining interest in Switzerland. That is why you will also find a few herds of suckler cows on the alp. (Suckler cows are raised for beef production together with their own calves)

1. Suckler cows have a strong protective maternal instinct of their offspring. Never touch or pet animals under any circumstances. **2.** Keep your distance. **3.** Never wave your arms or sticks in the air and keep quiet. **4.** Be aware of the cow's threatening behaviour: putting the head down, trampling and bawling are signs of danger. Keep calm and leave the pasture without rushing.

Generalities: Even if livestock is usually tame and curious, do not disturb the animals while they rest or graze. If a herd is led on a path, simply move to the side. Bells and chimes primarily help locate lost animals. Mountain huts are alpine farmers' summer residences. Visitors are not allowed, so keep off the premises. Stables are not public washrooms.



Paragliders: If spotting cattle on the hill slopes while in the air seeking for thermal winds, please, don't scare them with repeated overflights or screams.



BRAND & PRODUCTS

In the summer of 2003, 50 producers (farming businesses, butcher shops, dairies) got together to create the brand «Produkte aus Grindelwald» (products from Grindelwald). Their common purpose is to boost the production, processing and retailing of local farming products, mainly meat and cheese.



Eigerness

The association under this name promotes Grindelwald's uniqueness. Eigerness regroups crafts, agriculture and tourism, and praises the treasures of the «village of glaciers», Grindelwald's nickname. www.eigerness.ch



Eigermilch

For ages, local milk was on one hand conveyed out of the valley for processing, on the other hand, due to demand, dairy products were delivered to it. Wanting to process raw material at the source, a group of creative farmers founded the «Eigermilch Grindelwald AG» dairy. Production was launched in 2011, and keeps growing and processing milk from Grindelwald into delicious dairy products of all kinds. www.eigermilch.ch



SERVICES & EVENTS

At the **«Märthysi»**-market stalls – located at the « Bärplatz » parking, the alpine farming ladies of Grindelwald sell their products and merchandise on Saturdays from 8am to 12noon.

www.maertfrauen-grindelwald.ch



The last Sunday of August marks **«Buuresunntig»** or Farmers' Sunday in Grindelwald. The celebrations include a farmer's brunch, dance and folk music performances, market stall selling specialities from each mountain district, a petting zoo, demonstrations from various local artisans and young wrestlers.



Details on all upcoming activities and events are published in the Grindelwald Tourism Office Weekly Program. www.grindelwald.swiss

www.eigerness.ch/en/member/culinary-en/farmerproducer



DER LADEN

This store, located in the Eiger+ shopping centre, offers all matters of «Alpine Delicacies» and many local products. www.eigerness.ch/en/experience/eigerness-shop.html

