The Sour Milk School is a mobile educational project that collaborates with fermenters, chefs, dairy farmers, homesteaders, communities, and cheesemakers to offer workshops on methods of natural cheesemaking and milk fermentation. The focus is on working with fresh raw milk, its microbial ecology healthy and intact. By cultivating the microbes indigenous to this milk, starter cultures can be developed to make essentially any style of cheese. Milk for the demonstrations is ideally sourced onsite, or from a local producer of cow, sheep, or goat milk. Over 5 days, students will learn to make a clabber starter culture, and 5-6 cheeses which may vary based on available milk:

1. Fresh lactic - such as fresh goat cheese (chevre)
2. Feta - aged in a brine made from whey
3. Caciocavallo - an aged version of Mozzerella. If we have cow milk
4. Tomme - if we have goat and/or sheep milk
5. Halloumi (a grilling cheese)
6. Ricotta - with the whey left from Halloumi

The core technique involves making and maintaining a starter culture from raw milk.

- The starter is known as **Clabber**, the process of initiating this starter is also a test of the health of raw milk. Every day we will feed my premade starter, and we will also initiate a new one.

I have created this workshop after a decade spent as an artisan cheesemaker in the USA, working for small and large producers, while also living on farms and caring for livestock. From 2019 until the present I have been traveling and documenting the dairying, grazing, and cheesemaking practices of pastoral people in various countries including Mongolia, Tibet, Italy, Austria, Spain, Albania, Slovenia, and Georgia. I also spent a year in between these travels to work with various types of grazing systems on farms in Vermont and California. The first round of 8 workshops were held in 2023. Another round is in the works for March - October of 2024.

The teaching of the workshop will be a combination of approaches to learning, to convey the information in multiple ways.

1. Intellectual presentation - I will share how I learned about and adapted these methods, explain the basic chemistry and microbiology, and discuss how these processes can be carried out on a home or kitchen scale.

2. Hands-on demonstration - Students will watch the cheeses being made, and get to put their hands in the whey, onto the curd. The exact cheeses and dairy foods made may vary, depending on the type of milk available, and climate in which the course takes place.

3. Sensory evaluation - Tasting and smelling every step of the process, learning to identify the traits that tell you things are going right or wrong. This experiential learning is crucial, empowers students to reclaim and trust their senses, and teaches the value of exposure to novel sensory experiences.

What I hope to instill in students is that cheesemaking and other fermentations are craft as well as science, and that cheeses have methods rather than recipes. Once you understand the method, you tweak the make to create a custom process that works for your milk and desired goal, and adjust this process day to day as the variables shift. Good cheese milk tends to vary seasonally, and it is the task of the maker to predict these trends and find ways to compensate.

Underneath the science and concrete methods is a philosophy of how we choose to interact with microbes, and view our relationship with food, dairy livestock, and landscapes. This is inspired by a paradigm shift happening in microbiology and health, as it is revealed that microbial life is the basis of human health, as well as that of soils and ecosystems. By observing and steering the succession of organisms in and on cheeses, we are healing the wounds caused by the futile attempt to control or eradicate microbes. By working with and propagating milk microbes, we are learning to reclaim a relationship of participation with them, and with life in general.