The Milk

- [ ] Is my dairy animal healthy?
- [ ] Do a mastitis Test.
- [ ] Am I using clean milking technique?

The Environment

- [ ] Take a toothbrush to all rivets and seals.
- [ ] Sterilize all equipment.
- [ ] Use a milk stone remover for milking machine
- [ ] Place plastic wrap between jar lids and milk
- [ ] How quickly am I getting milk from the barn into the house?

The Kitchen

- [ ] Place other ferments like sourdough starters on the other side of the kitchen.
- [ ] Bake bread on a different day than cheesemaking
- [ ] If your kitchen smells, don't make cheese. That means anything from a pleasant freshly baked bread smell to a mold smell. Take care of the source and then make cheese once the source and the smell is gone.
- [ ] If you use absorbent or difficult to clean materials for baking bread, example wooden spoons, plastic measuring cups, don't use them for your cheese. I like to use glass mason jars for measuring anything to do with cheese as they are easy to sterilize in the dishwasher.
- [ ] Your water matters, remember that chlorinated water should never be used for cheesemaking, as well if you are on well water, be especially diligent when making washed rind cheeses. If you are having a bad run of contamination, consider boiling your water before adding it into washed rind cheeses.
- [ ] Change all linen in the kitchen before making cheese. I don't make cheese in a sterile environment, but I do change all of my linen in the kitchen before making cheese. It is very easy to accidentally wipe your hands on a contaminated towel before putting that hand in the cheese pot.
- [ ] If you have pin pointed contamination to your kitchen, or you feel that it is a probable cause, culture your milk as soon as it goes into the cheese pot. This means add your culture in before you even heat your milk. This will allow your culture a chance to start working earlier and will up your bacterias chances of taking the majority vote in that milk.
- [ ] Sources of cross contamination can be other ferments such as sourdough and kombucha, but they can also be environmental, a open window, seed starts, wood brought in for the wood stove. Remember the golden rule of, if your kitchen smells, don't make cheese!

The Starter Culture

- [ ] A strong starter culture means a strong cheese. Remember the cheese, at least for a little while anyway, becomes the starter culture. If you have a well taken care of clabber culture, you use that to culture your cheese and you do nothing else to that milk until it thickens, that milk is essentially clabber. If you have a yeasty clabber culture that has over fermented, your milk will become its mother.

- [ ] If you are using freeze dried cultures, what is the expiration date and has it been stored properly in the freezer. Freeze dried cultures will expire and if they are not stored properly their bacterias activity will diminish. An interesting tid bit that I learned at the cheesemaking weekend with David Asher was that the reason that a lot of cheese recipes have the hour wait time between adding the culture and adding the rennet, is to actually make sure that the culture is working. The commercial cheesemaker will test the ph of the milk after that hour to make sure that the acidity is indeed falling. If it is not, that means that the culture was a dud, or has been attacked by a virus (something that is common in commercial cheesemaking) and instead of ruining the whole batch of cheese, the cheesemaker has an opportunity to restart. If you are wondering if your culture is a dud, especially if you are having a bad contamination run, try testing your milk with a ph strip or making a naturally acidified mozzarella, if you can't get it into the stretching window, you know you have something going on with your culture.

- [ ] Are you using kefir as a starter culture? I have very little experience when it comes to natural cultures, but I'm learning! One huge difference I have noticed between kefir and clabber, is that kefir almost always has a yeasty taste. If you have been starting all of your cheeses with kefir, try switching to clabber for a natural alternative. This is just an observation I have made by keeping both cultures going the last few months. I could be wrong, but if you feel like you are at a dead end road, give it a try!

The Cheesemaking Process

- [ ] Things like heating your pot too high, thus killing or weakening the culture.

- [ ] Yeast contamination can come from salt brines. Be sure if you are having a bad yeast run, to boil your salt brine or start a fresh one. Keep your saturated (20%) salt brines healthy by replenishing them after every use, and using water rather than whey.