1.0 PURPOSE
Provide an overview of the proper maintenance, cleaning, and conditions of aging rooms/caves for cheese

2.0 SCOPE
This SOP applies to anyone who is using the aging/curing/drying rooms/caves to age, cure, and/or dry cheese

3.0 SAFETY & ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS
Cleaning chemicals must be used with caution; always follow the instructions provided by your supplier.

4.0 FREQUENCY
Cheese aging rooms/caves are used whenever cheese needs to be matured prior to sale. Rooms are to be thoroughly cleaned whenever there is a break in aging to allow it or when mold/soil is noticed on the walls or other surfaces. To thoroughly clean the aging room, cheese must be temporarily removed from the room until cleaning is complete. The floors of aging rooms should be rinsed and sanitized whenever they become soiled, or after each session of cheese washing/maintenance.

5.0 RESPONSIBILTY
- **TASK**
  Daily upkeep and cleaning of the cheese aging rooms is performed by any employees or cheese makers using the aging room for their cheese. Daily notes on aging of the cheese are to be kept by the individual responsible for the cheese. These notes also include any cleaning performed.

- **VERIFICATION**
  The processor using the facility will record all necessary information on an Aging Sheet. This information includes:
  - Aging room number
  - Date Cheese went into room
  - Style of Cheese/Cheese Company using the room
  - Target temperature and humidity
  - Deviations from the target temp/humidity and when corrected
  - Actions performed on the cheese (i.e. flipped, washed, etc.)
  - Cleaning or Sanitizing that is carried out

- **PAPERWORK REVIEW**
  The Plant Manager will weekly review Aging Sheets and inspect aging rooms to ensure they are being maintained for cleanliness. The Plant Manager will also work with the cheese makers to combat quality issues (i.e. temperature problems, blue mold presence)
6.0 SUPPLIES
- Stainless steel or food-grade plastic aging racks
- mesh cheese mats
- rack covers or drapes as required;
- disposable latex gloves or reusable rubber gloves;
- cleaning/sanitizing chemicals,
- water
- appropriate brushes
- stainless steels bowls as required
- cheese brushes as required

7.0 PROCEDURE

7.1 Procedure for Aging Room Cleaning

7.1.1 When no cheese is present in the aging room, scrub all surfaces, beginning with the ceiling, then walls, then floors. Use ___________ (chemical name and concentration) along with ________ brush (colors/types).

7.1.2 Rinse well with water and then sanitize using ___________ (sanitizer name and concentration/brush color/type). Allow to dry before returning cheese to aging room.

7.1.3 Re-inoculate walls/floors with cultures as needed after cleaning. Plant Manager will have instructions for this step.

7.1.4 As part of the plant environmental sampling plan, weekly (or monthly) testing will occur of aging room drains and other critical control points, as determined by the Plant Manager.

7.1.5 Records are to be kept of aging room activity, cleaning, and environmental sampling, in order to address quality and safety issues if they arise.

7.2 Temperature/Humidity Measurement

7.2.1 Temperature recording equipment will be used to keep a record of daily temperature highs and lows in the aging room. Humidity should also be measured, to ensure it stays within the desired range. If the temperature or humidity is noted to be outside of the desired range, Plant Manager/PPS should be notified immediately so corrective steps can be taken.

*For raw milk cheeses, keeping track of temperature daily is especially important.*

7.3 Cheese Aging Racks/Shelving

Racks/shelves used to age cheese should be washed, sanitized, and thoroughly dried after use and before being used for new cheeses.

**Washing Racks/Shelves**

7.3.1 Use ______________ (chemical name and concentration) with ________ temperature water and brush (type) to wash racks when they are dirty and before using for a new batch of cheese.
Sanitizing Racks

7.3.2 Using ____________(sanitizer name and concentration/contact time) with ____________temperature water and brush (type/spray bottle), sanitize racks and cheese mats and allow to dry before use.

7.4 Cheese Aging Equipment/Accessories

Certain styles of cheese require regular washing or scrubbing to maintain natural rinds. Tools for this procedure must be washed after use and sanitized before use, to prevent any contamination.

7.4.1 Washing Equipment
Use _______________(chemical name and concentration) to wash any stainless steel pails, carts or shelves used to hold tools, cheese brushes, and any other equipment used in washing cheeses immediately after use. Place on draining rack to air dry.

7.4.2 Sanitizing Equipment
Before use, sanitize any equipment to be used in aging, turning or washing cheese with ______________(sanitizer name and concentration) for contact time. Always wear disposable latex or clean, sanitized, reusable rubber gloves when handling cheese.

8.0 ATTACHMENT/DOCUMENTATION
8.1 Aging sheets
8.2 Cleaning logs
8.3 Temperature and humidity charts/logs

9.0 SIGNATURES AND APPROVALS

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