Welcome to Switzerland

The country, its politics and its agriculture

For Jersey officials and farmers from 13 countries



Switzerland at a Glance

41’285 km²

Area – about the size of the Netherlands

approx. 9 million

Inhabitants

26

Cantons, each with its own constitution

4

National languages: German, French, Italian, Romansh

Three Landscape Regions

Alps
approx. 60% of the area – mountain and alpine farming

Central Plateau
Densely populated – arable farming, vegetables, milk

Jura
High plateaus – pasture farming, cheese

Capital (federal city): Bern · Currency: Swiss franc (CHF)

Political System: Direct Democracy and Federalism



The People

Highest authority: elects Parliament and votes on issues about four times a year.



Parliament

Federal Assembly with 246 members: National Council (200) and Council of States (46).



Federal Council

7 equal members govern jointly (collegial principle) – the presidency rotates annually.

Three levels: Confederation, 26 cantons and around 2,100 municipalities. Whatever is not expressly assigned to the Confederation is regulated by the cantons – agriculture is implemented jointly.

Popular Rights

100’000

signatures for a popular initiative (18 months)

50’000

signatures for a referendum against a law (100 days)

Agriculture: Small-Scale and Multifunctional



46’270

Farms (2025), −1.7% vs. 2024

approx. 1M ha

Agricultural land – about a quarter of the country's area

approx. 22,5 ha

average farm size – mostly family farms

−29%

fewer people employed in agriculture than in 2000

Mandate under the Federal Constitution: secure food supply, preservation of natural resources, care of the cultural landscape and decentralised settlement.

Source: FSO, Farm Structure Survey 2025; areas and farm size rounded

What Is Produced Where?



Schematic illustration. Zones: valley, hill, mountain zones I–IV, summer pasture area

Central Plateau

Arable farming, vegetables, sugar beet, potatoes, fruit; pigs and poultry

Pre-Alps

Dairy and cattle farming, cheese (Emmental, Appenzeller)

Jura

Pasture farming, milk, Gruyère; horses

Alps

Alpine farming, summer pastures, sheep and goats

Vaud and Lake Geneva

Vines, cereals, vegetables

Valais and Ticino

Wine, apricots, apples, chestnuts

Key Products and Figures

approx. 3.5 million t

Milk per year – the most important production branch

approx. 210,000 t

Cheese per year, around 450 varieties

17’500 ha

Vegetable cultivation 2025 – record area

approx. 6,100 ha

Orchards 2025 (net), mainly apples, pears, cherries

approx. 14,500 ha

Vineyard area – wine mainly for the domestic market

42

protected designations of origin (PDO/PGI), as of 2025

Sources: FOAG data portal, Swissmilk; quantities rounded or approximate

The Direct Payment System

approx. CHF 2.8 bn (1.17 dairy)

Direct payments per year (approx.)

Principle: the Confederation pays for public-interest services – not for the volume of production.

Condition: Proof of Ecological Performance (PEP), checked by the cantons.

1	**Cultural landscape**	Keeping land open, slope and alpine areas
2	**Food security**	Maintaining production capacity
3	**Biodiversity**	Flower strips, extensive meadows, habitat networks
4	**Landscape quality**	Regional projects, hedges, orchards
5	**Production systems**	Organic, animal welfare (BTS/RAUS), grazing
6	**Transition payment**	Socially acceptable cushioning of structural change

Payment types simplified; total rounded

Livestock Breeding: Cattle Shape Swiss Farming



approx. 1.5 million

Cattle in Switzerland

approx. 524,400

Dairy cows (slightly declining)

Main Breeds

- **Holstein / Red Holstein**
- **Brown Swiss**
- **Swiss Fleckvieh / Simmental**
- **Eringer (Valais)**
- **Jersey**

Jersey in Switzerland: The SWISS JERSEY association was founded in 1999 to build up and promote Jersey breeding – small, but growing in importance thanks to high milk solids.

The Swiss Milk Market

1

Production

Around 17,000 dairy farms, many in the mountain and hill zones; grass-based feeding

2

Trade

Milk producer organisations negotiate with processors; industry indicative price

3

Processing

A large share of milk becomes cheese; also butter, yoghurt, milk powder

What Makes the Market Special

- High price level and the Suisse Garantie quality mark
- Industry standard Grüner Teppich for sustainable Swiss milk
- Cheese as the main export product; free trade with the EU in cheese

Figures rounded or approx.; source: Swissmilk, FOAG

Traditions: Alpine Ascent and Alpine Farming

Alpine Ascent

In early summer, cows with flower crowns and bells head up to the alpine pastures – a celebration for whole villages.

Alpine Summer

Around 100 days of grazing at up to 2,500 m above sea level, producing alpine cheese.

Descent and Cattle Show

In autumn the festive descent follows; farmers show their best animals.

Competitions and Festivals

Swiss wrestling, yodelling, alphorn blowing and Eringer cow fights shape rural customs.



Altitude and duration are indicative values

Switzerland in Three Thoughts

1

Participation

Direct democracy and federalism also shape agricultural policy.

2

Performance over Volume

Direct payments reward ecology, animal welfare and landscape care.

3

Tradition and Quality

From the alp to the cheese: origin and craftsmanship count.

Welcome – we look forward to your questions and the exchange!