Publication of an application for registration pursuant to Article 6(2) of Regulation (EEC) No 2081/92 on the protection of geographical indications and designations of origin

(2003/C 206/02)

This publication confers the right to object to the application pursuant to Articles 7 and 12d of the abovementioned Regulation. Any objection to this application must be submitted via the competent authority in a Member State, in a WTO member country or in a third country recognised in accordance with Article 12(3) within a time limit of six months from the date of this publication. The arguments for publication are set out below, in particular under 4.6, and are considered to justify the application within the meaning of Regulation (EEC) No 2081/92.

COUNCIL REGULATION (EEC) No 2081/92
APPLICATION FOR REGISTRATION: ART. 5

PDO ( )  PGI (x)

1. Responsible department in the Member State

Name: Ministère de l'agriculture, de l'alimentation, de la pêche et des affaires rurales
Direction des politiques économique et internationale
Bureau des signes de qualité et de l'agriculture biologique

Address: 3, rue Barbet-de-Jouy — F-75349 Paris 07 SP

Tel. (33-1) 49 55 58 59
Fax (33-1) 49 55 57 85

2. Applicant group

2.1. Name: Alsace Qualité — Groupe Choucroutiers

2.2. Address: Espace européen de l'entreprise
2, rue de Rome
F-67309 Schiltigheim Cedex

Tel. (33-3) 88 19 16 78
Fax (33-3) 88 18 90 42

2.3. Composition: producer/processor (x)  other ( )

3. Type of product: Chapter 20 — vegetable preparations

4. Specification

(Summary of requirements under Article 4(2))

4.1. Name: Choucroute d'Alsace

4.2. Description: Alsatian sauerkraut takes the form of thin strips obtained by cutting white cabbage grown in Alsace, which are then salted and fermented. It is white in colour and has the characteristic vinegary taste produced by lactic fermentation.

It is sold either raw (in packets or tubs) or cooked (in packets, plastic tubs, cans or glass jars).
4.3. Geographical area: Alsatian sauerkraut is made exclusively from cabbage grown in Alsace (namely the départements Bas-Rhin and Haut-Rhin) and processed locally in small factories. This is the traditional production area for Alsatian sauerkraut.

4.4. Proof of origin: Documentary evidence of the practice of fermenting grated cabbage in Alsace goes back as far as the 15th century (cf. historical study on Alsatian sauerkraut by Roland Oberle). However, it is highly probable that this method of conserving cabbage predates even that period.

The term ‘choucroute’ appeared at the end of the 17th century at the time Alsace became part of France. It is derived from a phonetic gallicisation of the word SURKRUT, meaning ‘sour cabbage’ in Alsatian.

Consumption of sauerkraut, limited for a long time to the Germanic regions of France, spread to the rest of the country with the flight of large numbers of Alsatians to France when Alsace was annexed by Germany in 1870.

In consumers’ minds, sauerkraut is synonymous with the Alsace — this is reinforced by a system in which every batch of sauerkraut is numbered to enable it to be traced back from the point of sale all the way to the growers of the original cabbage.

4.5. Method of production: Alsatian sauerkraut is produced from cabbage planted in soil that has the appropriate physical and chemical properties. The volume of fertiliser used is adjusted to meet the needs of the cabbage and to the mineral content of the soil, measured by analysis. After observing the state of the plants, phytosanitary treatments are carried out, using only products that figure on a positive list. The cabbage are harvested at maturity, which is defined as an average weight of 3 kg (except where climatic conditions preclude this) and based on an assessment of colour, firmness and the presence of at least 3 slightly green leaves on the head of the plant after removal of the wrapper leaves.

The cabbage then has its stalk removed and is prepared in such a way that white sauerkraut can be produced with no portions of stalk and no green leaves. It is then cut into fine slices. These are salted and placed in a vat in anaerobic conditions to promote lactic fermentation. The product is removed from the vat when its lactic acid content has risen above 1 %. Sauerkraut can be sold either raw or cooked. Cooking takes place after de-acidification (the lactic acid content must be between 0.4 and 1 %) and according to traditional recipes known only to each producer and using only authorised ingredients.

4.6. Link

4.6.1. Particular characteristics

The organoleptic characteristics of sauerkraut are due mainly to the selection of suitably mature cabbage and the use of natural fermentation methods. The maturity of the cabbage depends both on being grown in a region with deep and rich soil and on a difference in temperatures between day and night. Alsatian sauerkraut is produced exclusively by small family firms that hand their trade secrets down through the generations.

4.6.2. Reputation

Since the Middle Ages there has been evidence of the existence of a form of sauerkraut heavily spiced with juniper berries, elderberries, dill, sage, savory or fennel. There is a whole body of literature and iconography surrounding the ‘cabbage cutter’ (Sürkrüt schneider), who, in the autumn, would pass from farmstead to farmstead, cutting cabbages with a special grater — the sliced cabbage would then be placed in large Betchdorf stoneware jars to which salt and other ingredients were added. It was with the advent of the French Revolution and the higher profile of Alsatian politicians and generals in Paris that sauerkraut began to shrug off its provincial character. During the Second Empire a number of small sauerkraut factories began to spring up around Strasbourg, producing for the Parisian market. And sauerkraut was on show at the Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1867.
Today there seems no limit to the number of village sauerkraut festivals held on autumn Sundays throughout Alsace. To meet tourist demand, a ‘sauerkraut route’ has even been created, where visitors can take a tour to find out all they ever wanted to know about this culinary phenomenon, from the cultivation of the cabbages, and their processing, to the final product, which can be sampled in one of the many participating restaurants that line the route. Like all products with roots in a particular tradition and locale, sauerkraut has its own trade association to defend its values and traditional recipes.

4.7. Inspection body

Name: Certiqual

Address: Espace européen de l’entreprise
2, rue de Rome
F-67309 Schiltigheim Cedex

Tel. (33-3) 88 16 16 79
Fax (33-3) 88 18 90 42

4.8. Labelling: All sauerkraut packaging bears the name: ‘choucroute d’Alsace crue ou cuite’, as well as the following information:

— For raw sauerkraut
  — cabbage grown in Alsace according to systematic and controlled methods
  — processed in Alsace in accordance with traditional methods
  — traceable from field to fork

— For cooked sauerkraut
  — cabbage grown in Alsace according to systematic and controlled methods
  — processed in Alsace in accordance with traditional methods
  — traceable from field to fork

Optionally: sauerkraut prepared with: lard, goose fat, Alsatian white wine, etc. (depending on ingredients added).

4.9. National requirements: —


Date full application received: 19.12.2003.