Publication of an amendment application pursuant to Article 6(2) of Council Regulation (EC) No 510/2006 on the protection of geographical indications and designations of origin for agricultural products and foodstuffs

(2009/C 87/07)

This publication confers the right to object to the amendment application pursuant to Article 7 of Council Regulation (EC) No 510/2006 (1). Statements of objections must reach the Commission within six months of the date of this publication.

AMENDMENT APPLICATION
COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 510/2006
Amendment application according to Article 9
‘BITTO’
EC No: IT-PDO-117-1502-02.08.2006
PGI ( ) PDO ( X )

1. Heading in the product specification affected by the amendment:
   — □ Name of product
   — □ Description of product
   — □ Geographical area
   — □ Proof of origin
   — □ Method of production
   — □ Link
   — □ Labelling
   — □ National requirements
   — □ Other (to be specified)

2. Type of amendment:
   — □ Amendment to single document or summary sheet
   — □ Amendment to specification of registered PDO or PGI for which neither the single document nor summary sheet has been published
   — □ Amendment to specification that requires no amendment to the published single document (Article 9(3) of Regulation (EC) No 510/2006)
   — □ Temporary amendment to specification resulting from imposition of obligatory sanitary or phytosanitary measures by public authorities (Article 9(4) of Regulation (EC) No 510/2006)

3. Amendment(s):

3.1. Description

In Article 3, it has been considered appropriate to detail the diet of the cows at pasture and to supplement it with a maximum of 3 kg of dry matter per day, in addition to salt and 'reinforcement' feed based on permanent pasture hay. It became necessary to supplement the diet in this manner in order to meet the needs of producers, who faced difficulties owing to the changed conditions of the mountain pastures and the genetic characteristics of the livestock in summer pasture. Indeed, grazing alone is not always sufficient to guarantee proper animal welfare. In the same article, it is made clear that that milk used is raw milk. This is a formal change only, since the current specification does not provide for the milk to be processed in any way after milking, i.e. the milk is already 'raw milk'.

Furthermore, the maximum height of the cheese is being increased from 10 to 12 cm. This increase is justified by the production methods, which, as they are strongly linked to traditional processes, allow the production of cheeses that are not perfectly uniform, but rather vary within certain defined limits. It should also be made clear that the height range set for the heel of Bitto cheeses (8-12 cm) is in line with the information contained in the historical documents, which indeed envisage a maximum height of 12 cm.

3.2. Geographical area

With regard to the area of origin, the requested amendment involves adding the three mountain pastures named Varrone, Artino and Lareggio, located in the provinces of Bergamo and Lecco, to the milk production area. These mountain pastures were left out of the original draft by mistake. The increase in size of the production area is minimal, since it represents less than 1% of the current production area. The geographical uniformity is guaranteed by the fact that the lithological characteristics, altitude and exposure of the added mountain pastures are the same as for the areas already included in the production area. Accordingly, the pasture vegetation tends to be absolutely similar to that in the production area indicated originally.

3.3. Method of production

With the amendment, the intention is to introduce the possibility of using indigenous starter cultures. This technologically innovative practice makes it possible to improve the cheese making process, reduce the incidence of defects, ensure the safety of the product and, at the same time, ensure that the typical characteristics that express the link with the land are maintained. Indeed, of the factors that are part of the cheese making process, microbiological ones play an essential role in production and maturing of the cheese. The use of raw milk in production is an asset for Bitto and traditional cheeses in general. However, it can become a liability if the microbiological quality of the milk is poor, owing to either the scarcity of lactic acid bacteria or the presence of organisms inhibiting cheese production. The reasons for the scarcity of enzymes in the milk can be sought in the greater cleanliness and hygiene of the various production stages (milking, transport of the milk, recipients and processing premises) and the use of metal or plastic recipients and utensils rather than wooden ones. Indeed, while these practices resolve problems of a hygiene/health variety, they also strip the milk of bacteria that aid cheese production by reducing the number of microorganisms in it. The presence of microbial flora that inhibit cheese production, which is sometimes noted in mountain milk, is the result of difficult production conditions, particularly in the case of very rainy summers. For cheese made with raw milk, the use of the inoculum helps to ‘regulate’ the fermentation processes in cheese making, thereby reducing the incidence of defects in the cheese. This ensures correct conditions for acidification and draining of the curd (without which, too much whey would remain in the cheese, leading to the formation of holes and unpleasant or undesirable smells). At the same time, it allows the balanced development of the various microbial species that aid cheese production which are present in the raw material (which act during the maturing process, guaranteeing the characteristic nature of the product). For traditional cheeses, the use of starter cultures isolated and selected from the characteristic microflora of each cheese is of significant interest. In this way it is possible to preserve the valuable traditional characteristics of these products and improve their quality, avoiding the risk of reducing them to standardised but anonymous products, with a flat taste and no individual characteristics. Since 1999, together with the CNR-ISPA (National Research Council – Food Science Institute) in Milan, the Protection Association (Consorzio di Tutela) has organised research aimed at gaining further knowledge.
about the microflora that characterises Bitto cheese, maintaining the microbial biodiversity and characteristics which this determines in the product and improving quality. Since then, strains of lactic acid bacteria and Enterococci have been isolated and studied. Further tests have been carried out on some of the strains identified in order to assess their physiological, biochemical and metabolic characteristics and their influence on cheese making. Selected inoculums have been obtained from mass reproduction of the indigenous strains. When inoculated in the raw milk, these do not repress the spontaneous microflora present in the milk, but rather create more favourable conditions for its development, thus ensuring that the sensorial characteristics are maintained.

3.4. Labelling

In order to provide more precise information to consumers and, at the same time, to make the product more instantly recognisable, it has been deemed appropriate to describe the identifying label of the PDO in question, which was simply annexed to the specification in force, and to provide for affixing of a paper disc. In addition to the word 'Bitto' repeated several times in a ray formation, this disc contains the Community logo and the names of the establishments, holdings, farms, company names and private marks, which must not be laudatory or mislead consumers. The possibility of indicating the name of the mountain pasture where the cheese was produced has been introduced in order to raise the profile of the cheese produced by producers who, in conditions which are already difficult, like those of the mountain pastures in the Bitto production area (road/access conditions to and on the pasture, which are not always easy; modest rural buildings; traditional equipment; strong influence of atmospheric conditions on cattle raising and the cheese making process) voluntarily apply a production method which entails greater risks and possible losses of product. Raising the profile of the product can offset the greater risks taken by producers.

SINGLE DOCUMENT

COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 510/2006

‘BITTO’

EC No: IT-PDO-117-1502-02.08.2006

PGI ( ) PDO ( X )

1. Name:

'Bitto'

2. Member State or Third Country:

Italy

3. Description of the agricultural product or foodstuff:

3.1. Type of product (Annex II)

Class 1.3 — Cheeses

3.2. Description of the product to which the name in (1) applies

Cheese made of raw, whole cow’s milk produced from traditional local breeds, possibly supplemented by raw goat’s milk up to a maximum of 10 %. The cheese is matured for a medium to long period, has a regular cylindrical shape with an even surface, concave heel and sharp edges. The faces are between 30 and 50 cm in diameter and the heel is 8 to 12 cm high. The cheese weighs between 8 and 25 kg. The rind is pale yellow, tending to darken with age, and between 2 and 4 mm thick. The cheese is compact, with occasional small holes. When cut, the colour ranges from white to pale yellow, depending on its age. The cheese has a sweet, delicate taste, which gains in strength as it matures. If goat’s milk is added, the characteristic aroma is stronger. Fat content in dry matter is no less than 45 % and water content at 70 days is on average 38 %. The cheese is produced according to traditional methods linked to environmental conditions, during the period from 1 June to 30 September.
3.3. **Raw materials (for processed products only)**

Cow’s milk, raw goat’s milk not exceeding 10 %, calf rennet, salt, indigenous enzymes.

3.4. **Feed (for products of animal origin only)**

The cows are fed on mountain pasture grass in the area defined under point 4. In order to maintain the correct level of animal welfare, dairy cows’ pasture diet may be supplemented by up to a maximum of 3 kg of dry matter per day, consisting of the following feedingstuffs: maize, barley, wheat, soya, with molasses up to a maximum of 3 %. The cows may be given a salt lick. Also permitted is a reinforcement diet based on permanent pasture hay, for no more than 5 %, in the event of exceptional weather conditions that do not allow grazing (such as snow or hail), limited to the time needed for normal conditions to be restored.

3.5. **Specific steps in production that must take place in the identified geographical area**

Production and processing of the milk and maturing of the Bitto cheese must be carried out within the production area as defined in point 4.

3.6. **Specific rules concerning slicing, grating, packaging, etc.**

The product may be used in grated form after at least one year of maturing.

3.7. **Specific rules concerning labelling**

The Bitto protected designation of origin cheese must bear a label on the heel affixed by heat at the end of the maturing process and before being released for consumption. The label is composed of the word **Bitto**, with the ‘B’ being partially legible and the rest of the letter being formed by a stylised picture of a cheese wheel with a slice cut out. The slice cut out of the cheese wheel forms the ‘V’ of Valtellina. The cheese wheel is a reference to the product. The ‘B’ is a picture, whilst the remaining letters ‘ITTO’ are in ‘Times Regular’ font, increased by 113.94 %.

To allow identification of the product, it is possible to affix a disc made of paper for food use onto one of the faces of whole wheels.

The diameter of the disc is approximately 30 cm. It is made up of an outer ring with a red background, the word ‘BITTO’ in yellow, repeated several times in a ray formation, and the Community logo for Protected Designations of Origin at an appropriate size and in the original colours and characters.

A yellow inner ring contiguous to the red ring may be used to indicate information provided for by the legislation in force and references to the names of establishments, holdings, farms, company names and private marks which must not be laudatory or mislead consumers.

Producers who, in accordance with the production specification, feed dairy cows only on mountain pasture grass in the area defined in point 4, without adding any supplements other than a salt lick and permanent pasture hay only as a reinforcement for no more than 20 %, who do not use enzymes for cheese production and who begin milk processing within thirty minutes after milking, may include a mark stating the name of the mountain pasture where the cheese is produced. This is affixed in bas-relief on the heel of the cheese during production, with the name of the mountain pasture in full in ‘Times’ font, alongside the above markings.
4. **Concise definition of the geographical area:**

The area of origin of the milk for processing and for production of Bitto cheese comprises the whole of Sondrio province and the mountain pastures in the adjacent areas in the following municipalities of the Alta Valle Brembana area in Bergamo province: Averara, Carona, Cusio, Foppolo, Mezzoldo, Piazatorre, Santa Brigida, Valleve and the mountain pastures named Varrone, Artino and Lareggio in the adjacent areas in the municipalities of Introbio and Premana in Lecco province.

5. **Link with the geographical area:**

5.1. **Specificity of the geographical area**

The production area for Bitto is a mountainous area (70% of it is above 1,500 metres, less than 8% is below 500 metres, the gradient of the valleys is high on average, and the slopes are uneven) located between the Rhaetian and Orobian Alps, running from east to west. This influences its climate and flora and has conditioned its social, cultural and economic development. The altitude range of the area under pasture is concentrated around an average value of 486 m, which is sufficiently high to guarantee rational use of the pasture. Indeed, the significant difference in height is the indispensible condition for exploiting the pasture at the correct stage of maturity. The varying configuration of the mountain pastures in the production area makes them suitable for the simultaneous raising of different categories of livestock (including dairy cattle and goats for Bitto production). Most of the time, exposure varies too and, together with position, altitude and winds, determines the climate of the mountain pastures, which, despite the variability, are characterised by wide temperature ranges, dry air, intense exposure to the sun's rays and plentiful summer precipitation. The pastures are almost all on acidic, not very deep soil standing on siliceous substrata of gneiss and micaceous, tulous and clayey schist. The most common botanic species are perennial and are characterised by a rapid reproductive phase, strong growth, a low and bunched growth form, accentuated development of the root system and leaves, rich perfumes and significant resistance to trampling and animal bites. A significant proportion of them belong to the Gramineae family, with those of secondary importance being Compositae, Leguminosae, Umbelliferae, Chenopodiaceae, Rosaceae, etc. With regard to how the area operates, the mountain pastures are traditionally subdivided into various stations, at increasing altitudes and different locations.

5.2. **Specificity of the product**

Bitto is a cheese produced exclusively in mountain pasture areas using raw milk from a single milking. The milk used comes from grazing cows and possibly goats. It is a full-fat, cooked cheese, of medium/large size, with a smooth surface and characteristic concave heel with sharp edges. The cheese is compact with occasional small holes. Its colour tends towards pale yellow (darkening with age). It is matured for a minimum of 70 days. However, it can be matured over the course of several years without its organoleptic and structural characteristics being adversely affected. In the year of production, Bitto has a sweet flavour and buttery, soluble texture. As it matures, its taste becomes more intense, its texture drier, and it becomes slightly grainy. Bitto has characteristic aromas which result from the grasses on which the dairy animals graze. If goat's milk is added, the characteristic aroma is stronger.

5.3. **Causal link between the geographical area and the quality or characteristics of the product (for PDO) or a specific quality, the reputation or other characteristic of the product (for PGI)**

Among the various features of the area that play a significant role in the characteristics of Bitto, it is worth highlighting the floristic composition of the pasture, which depends on how it is managed and the natural environment (soil, climate). The pasture offers the animals very varied vegetation. The many plants present supply a large number of chemicals that play an important role in the animals' digestive and metabolic processes and thus in determining the quality characteristics of the product. The volatile compounds present in the fodder can be transferred to the milk/dairy products via the digestive system through direct absorption from the digestive tract or through the rumen gases and thus the circulatory system, thereby giving these products characteristic aromas and flavours. In particular, the concentration in the milk of some compounds, such as terpenes, seems to be strictly linked to the animals' diets. The natural mountain meadows, which are characterised by a wide variety of species and compounds, and in particular Magnoliopsida, have a greater number and abundance of terpenes.
Mountain cheeses are also richer in terpenes than lowland cheeses. Moreover, since the terpene profile varies depending on the plant species from which the fodder is made, the nature and quantity of the terpenes in the milk (and cheese) depend on the nature of the grasses consumed by the animals. Of the most common micronutrients in the pastures’ grasses, fatty acids have received particular attention from the world of research. Unsaturated fatty acids make up more than 70% of the total fatty acids in the grass. Of these, linoleic acid is transformed by certain rumen bacteria into cis and trans isomers, some of which are then transferred to the milk.

The livestock rearing system and processing techniques are further factors that link the product to the area. During the period of production of Bitto, from 1 June to 30 September, the animals are at pasture, at high altitudes, always in the open (there are only some pastures with facilities for bringing animals indoors in the event of adverse weather conditions). The quality of the milk reflects not only the characteristics of the fodder, but also the conditions in which the animals were raised and the environment in the broad sense. For example, the fat concentration is stimulated mainly by the notable crude fibre content of the grass, the advanced stage of lactation of the animals and the altitude. The latter two factors, together with the pasture’s richness in soluble nitrogen, are also responsible for the nitrogen increases. The levels of minerals and vitamins are also influenced not only by the plentiful availability of food, but also by the intense exposure to the sun’s rays. The milk is processed on site immediately after milking, without any processing of the raw milk, using traditional methods handed down from generation to generation and which remain craft methods to this day. In the past, immediately transforming the milk into a long-lasting cheese was the logical solution for ‘preserving’ the milk and its nutritional properties in the mountain pastures before transporting the cheeses to the bottom of the valley at the end of the summer season. Most of the steps – from filling the boiler to breaking, stirring and extracting the curd – are carried out by hand: the cheesemaker’s experience and skill are fundamentally important. The fermentation which occurs on the basis of the original microflora, together with the production technique, make it possible to obtain a unique and inimitable final product. The circular shape with a concave heel derives from the traditional moulds in which the curd is placed after extraction. Maturing begins in the mountain storehouses, where the cheese matures under natural conditions. These structures are often semi-underground in order to have a more constant temperature and the right level of humidity. During the entire maturing stage, the cheeses are periodically turned, cleaned and scraped.

Reference to publication of the specification:

The Government has launched the national objection procedure for the proposal to amend the Bitto protected designation of origin.

The full text of the product specification is available

— on the following web site:

www.politicheagricole.it/DocumentiPubblicazioni/Search_Documenti_Elenco.htm?txtTipoDocumento=Disciplinare%20in%20esame%20UE&txtDocArgomento=Prodotti%20di%20Qualità&txtTipo=Disciplinare

or

— by going directly to the home page of the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policy (www.politicheagricole.it) and clicking on ‘Prodotti di Qualità’ (on the left of the screen) and finally on ‘Disciplinari di Produzione all’esame dell’UE (Reg, CE 510/2006)’. 

— by going directly to the home page of the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policy (www.politicheagricole.it) and clicking on ‘Prodotti di Qualità’ (on the left of the screen) and finally on ‘Disciplinari di Produzione all’esame dell’UE (Reg, CE 510/2006)’. 
