OTHER ACTS

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Publication of an amendment application pursuant to Article 50(2)(a) of Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council on quality schemes for agricultural products and foodstuffs

(2013/C 316/09)

This publication confers the right to oppose the application pursuant to Article 51 of Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council (1).

AMENDMENT APPLICATION

COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 510/2006

on the protection of geographical indications and designations of origin for agricultural products and foodstuffs (2)

AMENDMENT APPLICATION IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLE 9

‘NEUFCHÂTEL’

EC No: FR-PDO-0117-01086-19.01.2013

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(s)

— □ Amendment to Single Document or Summary Sheet

— ☒ Amendment to Specification of registered PDO or PGI for which neither the Single Document nor the Summary Sheet has been published

3. Amendment(s)

3.1. Description

This point has been re-written in its entirety for the sake of clarity and precision.

The terms ‘lactic, supple, no tendency to collapse, firm but not excessively so, non-sticky, non-runny and non-grainy’ are added to describe the paste of the cheese in more detail.

Instead of reading ‘In accordance with custom, it can take the following form … 2.4 cm high’ read ‘ “Neufchâtel” takes the form of a cylindrical log, square, briquette, double log, heart or big heart according to the shapes and dimensions of the moulds described in Chapter 5.’

New: ‘At the end of the minimum ripening period laid down in Chapter 5 concerning the method of production’

The requirement for a minimum ripening period pursuant to Chapter 5 — the method of production is laid down in more detail by specifying that the weights and the minimum fat and dry matter contents apply to the finished product at the end of this period.

3.2. Proof of origin

This heading specifies the means of identifying all the operators and keeping registers and declarations enabling the registration of the operators’ practices and/or stock accounts for the products.

3.3. Method of production

This point has been re-written in its entirety for the sake of greater clarity and precision. The following amendments are required:

— New: ‘As from 1 June 2017, at least 60 % of the herd of each producer of milk intended for the production of “Neufchâtel” must consist of animals of the Normande breed. For the purpose of this specification, “herd” means the entire dairy herd of a holding composed of lactating cows, dry cows and replacement heifers’ and ‘Only milk from the previously defined herds may be introduced into the premises used for the production of “Neufchâtel”, from the delivery of the milk to the ripening of the cheeses.’

New conditions for the production of milk have been added. Their purpose is to ensure that a majority of the cows in the producers’ herds are cows of the local breed, the Normande breed. At the time when ‘Neufchâtel’ was recognised as a controlled designation of origin in 1969 the experts did not deem it necessary to include in their decree any mention of the use of the Normande breed and its mainly grass-based feed, as these practices were commonplace among breeders and did not risk being replaced by others. Over time new practices such as the use of maize silage and the Prim’Holstein breed were introduced and became more widespread, while producers became increasingly aware of the importance of the Normande breed and grass for the specific nature and the image of ‘Neufchâtel’. In order to stop this trend, re-establish the production conditions that existed when this product earned its reputation and thus strengthen the link between the product and its geographical area, the group wanted to specify the method of milk production by setting a minimum requirement for the proportion of cows of the Normande breed and of grassland used as pasture. These new provisions help the ‘Neufchâtel’ designation to strengthen its link with the product’s origin, taking into account the long relationship between the region’s breeders and the animal, the way the local breed has adapted to its surroundings and the special qualities of this breed’s milk that make it so well suited to cheese-making. An adjustment period of 5 years as from 1 June 2012 has been laid down for producers not yet complying with the stipulated proportion of cows of the Normande breed.
Furthermore, the group wanted to add replacement heifers to their definition of dairy herd.

— New: ‘The dairy cows graze for at least six months a year. During this period, grazing provides more than 50 % of the basic ration on a dry matter basis. (…)’

These provisions define the feeding conditions of dairy cows also for the purpose of strengthening the link between the cheese and its origin. It is specified that 80 % of the fodder for dairy cows, on a dry matter basis, comes from the holding. The grazing conditions of dairy cows and the load rules within each holding (minimum area of pasturable grassland per lactating cow, maximum area under maize silage production per dairy cow, management of grasslands) are also laid down. These provisions aim at preserving and increasing the proportion of grass in the feed of the dairy cows.

— New: ‘In milk production, milk may not be stored on the farm prior to collection for more than 48 hours from the first milking. (…) fresh cheese and cheese undergoing the ripening process may not be conserved under a modified atmosphere.’

All of the production conditions of the cheese have been set out in order to better preserve the characteristics of the product. Strict rules apply to the storage of milk on the farm prior to its use as well as to the renneting, draining and pressing of the curd. The moulding and processing of the paste obtained are defined in detail, as are the ripening conditions.

The use of treatments and additives in cheese-making used to be subject to general rules. However, new techniques, some of which concern treatments and additives, such as microfiltration, partial concentration of milk or enzymes for the ripening process, have a potential impact on the characteristics of cheeses with designations of origin. In particular, certain enzyme additives appear to be incompatible with preservation of the key characteristics of PDO products. It therefore became necessary to stipulate in the specification of each product with a designation of origin the current practices regarding the use of treatments and additives for milk and cheese production to prevent future practices not covered by the rules from undermining the characteristics of cheeses with designations of origin.

The formats of the moulds have also been specified in this paragraph. This amendment, which proposes substituting these more precise dimensions for the dimensions of the finished product included previously in the specification, follows an investigation by the group concerning the dimensions of the moulds used.

3.4. Link with the geographical area

This point is clarified and reorganised into 3 points. It discusses how to maintain the special characteristics of ‘Neufchâtel’ obtained through diversified authorised practices. The history of the Normande breed and its importance to the special characteristics of ‘Neufchâtel’ are explained (historical breed of Pays de Bray whose milk is exceptionally well suited to cheese-making owing to its high casein and fat content).

3.5. Labelling

The particulars that are compulsory on the labelling are set out. The obligation to use the INAO logo is waived.

Labels must bear the ‘AOP’ (PDO) logo of the European Union.

3.6. National requirements

The main points to be checked in the specification and the related assessment methods have been added.
1. **Name**
   'Neufchâtel'

2. **Member State or Third Country**
   France

3. **Description of the agricultural product or foodstuff**
   3.1. **Type of product**
   Class 1.3. Cheeses

   3.2. **Description of product to which the name in (1) applies**
   'Neufchâtel' is a cheese made exclusively from renneted cow’s milk the curds of which are taken out and pressed before moulding; it has a soft, lactic, slightly salty paste without holes that is supple, does not collapse, is firm but not excessively so, velvety and smooth, non-sticky, non-runny and non-grainy. It has a surface mould that is white in colour and the rind has no holes.

   'Neufchâtel' takes the following forms: cylindrical log, square, briquette, double log, heart, big heart.

   At the end of the minimum ripening period (at least 10 days calculated from the moulding date), a log, square or briquette of 'Neufchâtel' weighs at least 100 g; a heart or double log 200 g and a big heart 600 g.

   The cheese contains a minimum of 45 grams of fat per 100 grams of cheese when completely dry and 40 grams of dry matter per 100 grams of cheese.

3.3. **Raw materials (for processed products only)**
   'Neufchâtel' is made from cow's milk. The milk used for the production of 'Neufchâtel' comes from herds composed mainly of cows of the Normande breed (60 % as from 1 June 2017).

3.4. **Feed (for products of animal origin only)**
   The dairy cows graze for at least six months a year. During this period, grazing provides more than 50 % of the basic ration on a dry matter basis.

   The holding has at least 0,25 ha of pasturable grassland per lactating cow and not more than 0,25 ha of area under maize silage production for the herd per milk cow in the herd.

   A derogation from the above-mentioned provisions on grazing may be granted until 1 January 2015, provided that the holding has at least 0,5 ha of grazing land per milk cow in the herd.

   Pasturable grassland includes permanent and temporary grassland. They are accessible to lactating cows and adequate for feeding these animals.
Eighty per cent of the fodder for dairy cows, on a dry matter basis, comes from the holding. The fodder is composed of the following roughage in fresh or preserved form: grass, maize, straw, alfalfa, whole or pulped fodder beet.

The preserved grass and maize containing less than 50% of dry matter must not exceed 50% of the weight of the daily ration calculated on the basis of the dry matter.

The amount of complementary feed provided is restricted to 1 800 kg per dairy cow in the herd per calendar year. It is defined in accordance with a positive list.

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

The milk is produced and the cheese manufactured and ripened in the defined geographical area.

3.6. Specific rules on slicing, grating, packaging, etc.

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3.7. Specific rules concerning labelling

In addition to the regulatory information requirements applicable to all cheeses, each cheese with the designation of origin ‘Neufchâtel’ is marketed under an individual label containing the name of the designation of origin in characters at least two-thirds the size of the largest characters on the label.

The words ‘Appellation d’Origine Protégée’ and the EU PDO logo must be added to the label of cheeses with the Protected Designation of Origin ‘Neufchâtel’.

The name ‘Neufchâtel’ followed by the words ‘Appellation d’Origine Protégée’ or ‘AOP’ must appear on invoices and commercial documents.

4. Concise definition of the geographical area

Pays de Bray, covering part of the departments of Oise and Seine-Maritime.


5. Link with the geographical area

5.1. Specificity of the geographical area

Natural factors

Geomorphologically, Pays de Bray is located on an eroded chalk anticline of the Bassin parisien. Eaten away by erosion, its relief resembles an ‘eyelet’ surrounded by two cuestas facing each other. The
geographical production area of 'Neufchâtel' consists of this eylet, which is distinct from the loamy, open plateaux around Upper Normandy and Picardie that are home to cereals and industrial production by virtue of its hilliness, its extensive wooded pasture landscape, its dense river network and the extent of its grassland.

Owing to differential erosion, Pays de Bray brings together the usual formations of the Upper Cretaceous made up of different types of chalk (glauconitic chalk, marly, silex chalk), of the Lower Cretaceous and of the Upper Jurassic. This erosion affects the softest upper layers (chalk and clay), revealing harder terrains (sand and sandstone). Therefore Pays de Bray features a number of formations: soils that are suitable for ploughing, such as those on the glauconitic chalk on the western edge of the area and on the limestone of the Upper Portlandian; heavy, impermeable soils unsuitable for ploughing but suitable or even excellent for grassland, such as Gault clay and the marly and clays of the Upper Portlandian. It is these clayey and humid soils that are the most typical of Pays de Bray, and they also gave rise to the term 'Bray', which meant 'sludge' in the Celtic language.

The region has a cool climate (average annual temperature 9.8 °C) characterised by high atmospheric humidity and much harsher winters (67 days of frost/year) than in the grasslands of Lower Normandy. Average annual rainfall is close to 800 mm and fairly evenly distributed throughout the year.

**Human factors**

The origins of 'Neufchâtel' cheese date back to the 10th century. According to Ghislain Gaudefroy, 'Neufchâtel' is one of the oldest Normandy cheeses and it is related to the cheeses that are produced in Pays de Bray and mentioned for the first time in a charter dating from 1037. 'Neufchâtel' cheese is referred to by name for the first time in the accounts of the abbey of Saint-Amand in Rouen in 1543-1544: 'it is a large cheese from Neufchâtel.'

Since its development in the 18th century, breeding has been a part of the different types of farming practised in Pays de Bray. Pays de Bray has always been a region where cheese, butter and meat are produced. In order to meet the many objectives of meat and milk production, locals started increasing the number of wooded pastures well before the 19th century. At the same time, breeders in Pays de Bray wanted to produce a milk with a high fat and protein content and therefore they started using the Normande breed. This practice became established at the end of the 19th century and coincides with a strong growth in the production of 'Neufchâtel'. The Normande breed combines remarkable beef production traits and a high-fat milk that, owing to its protein content, is exceptionally well suited to cheese-making.

In this context, local breeders have developed and maintained a simple cheese-making technology, similar to the methods used to make fresh cheese, that is adapted to the volumes of milk and the materials available on farms and to their speed of working. Thanks to the know-how of Pays de Bray cheese-makers, in particular the method of draining and pressing the curd before moulding, 'Neufchâtel' has a unique place among soft cheeses with a surface mould. This cheese, which traditionally comes in different shapes, is always made by farm producers, who produce nearly half of the tonnage in close proximity to pasta manufacturers and dairy producers.

The most important steps in the production of 'Neufchâtel' are: the conditions for renneting, the seeding of the milk from lactic cultures that have been cultivated or bought, a long milk curdling process, draining and pressing of the curd to form a paste, moulding of the paste, dry salting, seeding with surface flora and a short minimum ripening period (10 days) in identical temperature and humidity conditions. In addition, the farm producers want to continue to maintain specific traditional practices, such as very rapid pressing of the milk without pre-heating and slow draining/pressing in a bag or in a cloth.

5.2. **Specificity of the product**

'Neufchâtel' is a cheese made exclusively from renneted cow's milk; it has a soft, lactic, slightly salty paste without holes that is supple, does not collapse, is firm but not excessively so, velvety and smooth, non-sticky, non-runny and non-grainy. It has a surface mould that is white in colour and the rind has no holes. This cheese has a short ripening period but it can be consumed regionally after a ripening period of over three months.
'Neufchâtel' takes the form of a cylindrical log, square, briquette, double log, heart or big heart and contains a minimum of 45 grams of fat per 100 grams of cheese when completely dry.

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)

The cheese’s link to its geographical area is based on the capacity of the area to enable milk production in grasslands from herds composed mainly of cows of the Normande breed whose milk is processed using simple cheese-making technology that is very well adapted to farm production. The capacity of the grasslands results principally from the existence of humid clay soils that are regularly replenished by frequent rainfall. These soils, which are often found in hilly regions, contribute to the presence and growth of grass while at the same time making ploughing difficult. In addition, the tight network of streams and rivers and the numerous ponds have always provided watering places for grazing herds. As the winters are long and rigorous, the stabling period is rather long and local breeders must stock large amounts of hay and grass, rendered possible by the extensive grassland areas. Furthermore, the presence of soils developed on the Cenomanian and Lower Portlandian limestone shelves, together with the grasslands, enable ploughing that promotes the self-sufficiency of dairy farms in roughage other than grass. This contributed to the development of important dairy farming know-how.

The Normande breed is the result of the selective breeding performed by farmers in Normandy. The animal is adapted to the production system used in Pays de Bray (grass and pasture) and produces a milk that has a high fat and protein content and is exceptionally well suited to the production of soft cheese. In particular, this milk makes it possible to obtain a lactic curd that, after draining and pressing, is suited to making a paste that will be moulded later. The succession of short phases (excluding moulding) separated from each other by periods of 6 to 24 hours determines the specific characteristics of 'Neufchâtel'. The development of this know-how marked by the rapidity of the ripening process owes a great deal to the geographical location of Pays de Bray, which has always fostered regular and rapid trade connections. This production method, typical of 'Neufchâtel', leaves enough time for other breeding work and is perfectly compatible with the production that is carried out in the numerous small farm workshops.

Reference to publication of the specification

(Article 5(7) of Regulation (EC) No 510/2006 (†))

https://www.inao.gouv.fr/fichier/CDCNeufchatel.pdf

(†) See footnote 3.