

Publication of an 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 308/14)

This publication confers the right to object to the application in accordance with Article 7 of Council Regulation (EC) No 510/2006. Statements of objection must reach the Commission within six months of the date of this publication.

SUMMARY

COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 510/2006

‘PEMENTO DE HERBÓN’

EC No: ES-PDO-0005-0509-15.11.2005

PDO (X) PGI ()

This summary sets out the main elements of the product specification for information purposes.

1. Responsible department in the Member State:

Name: Subdirección General de Calidad Agroalimentaria y Agricultura Ecológica — Dirección General de Industrias y Mercados Agroalimentarios — Secretaría General de Medio Rural del Ministerio de Medio Ambiente, y Medio Rural y Marino de España
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2. Group:

Name: S.A.T. PIMERBÓN y otro
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Tel. +34 981810803
Fax —
E-mail: —
Composition: Producers/processors (X) Other ()

3. Type of product:

Class 1.6 — Fruit, vegetables and cereals, fresh or processed

4. Specification:

(summary of requirements under Article 4(2) of Regulation (EC) No 510/2006)

4.1. Name:

‘Pemento de Herbón’

4.2. Description:

The peppers covered by the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) ‘Pemento de Herbón’ are the fruit of the species *Capsicum annuum* L belonging to the local ecotypes of the ‘Padrón’ variety, grown on farms listed in the corresponding register, which is managed by the inspection body. The fruit is picked while still only partially ripe (commercial size) in order to be sold fresh, and has the following characteristics:

Physical and organoleptic properties

— Shape: short (type C4 on the Pochard classification), elongated with three or four lobes at the apex,

— Approximate weight: between 3,5 g and 4,5 g each,

- Approximate length of fruit: between 3,5 cm and 5,5 cm,
- Maximum diameter (width): between 1,5 cm and 2 cm,
- Apex: sunken,
- Fruit length: between 3,5 cm and 6 cm,
- Skin: smooth and shiny, light green in colour,
- Thickness of the wall or flesh: thin, approximately 1,5 mm thick,
- Longitudinal section: trapezoidal,
- Ratio of the weight of the fruit to the weight of the seed: 3,2 (on average),
- Flavour: aroma of moderate intensity, sweet taste, sometimes mildly spicy.

One of the most marked organoleptic characteristics of the 'Pemento de Herbón' is that they are only occasionally spicy ('some are spicy, others are not', to quote a well-known saying that refers to this product) and when they are, it is a mild spicy flavour, since the producers take considerable trouble to eliminate those plants and those fruit that have a more intense spicy flavour. The manner in which it has been possible to achieve this, starting from a variety that was originally spicy, is perhaps the most important demonstration of the link between the product and the know-how of the producers in the region (see point 4.6 — Link).

Chemical properties (average values)

- Expressed in g/100 g of dry weight: water (91), glucose (0,85), fructose (0,75), sucrose (not detected), starch (0,81), fibre (2,2), pectins (0,73).
- Expressed in mg/100 g of dry weight: citric acid (28), fumaric acid (1,1), malic acid (208), oxalic acid (140), vitamin C (24), chlorophyll a (7,9), chlorophyll b (3,4), lutein (1,6), β -keratins (0,92)

4.3. Geographical area:

Peppers covered by the PDO 'Pemento de Herbón' are produced, processed and packaged in the same geographical area which comprises the following municipalities: Padrón, Dodro and Rois, in the district of O Sar in the south of the province of A Coruña, and Pontecesures and Valga, in the district of Caldas, in the north of the province of Pontevedra.

This area of Galicia's Atlantic coast is made up of a series of low-lying valleys enclosed by the rivers Ulla and Sar and protected by several mountain ranges and the Barbanza peninsular, all of which isolate the area and provide soil and climate conditions that are very well-suited to this crop. It constitutes, as can be seen from Abel Bouhler's description in *La Galice: Essai géographique d'analyse et d'interprétation d'un vieux complexe agraire* (La Roche-sur-Yon, 1979, Vol. I), a small Atlantic-style open-field system in which the original structure of terraces and fields for crops had, in 1960, already moved a long way away from compulsory crop rotation and towards a system of specialised production. The name of the designation, 'Herbón' is the name of the parish (a standard municipal subdivision in Galicia) of the municipality of Padrón in which the Convent of San Antonio de Herbón is located. The Convent is linked to the introduction of this pepper from America.

4.4. Proof of origin:

The traceability of the product is ensured by its identification at each stage of production and marketing.

In order to check that the requirements of the product specification have been fulfilled, the inspection body will manage two registers, which will be continually updated: one for producers and farms and another for warehouses and packaging facilities.

Only peppers grown in accordance with the conditions set out in the product specification and other additional rules, on farms and by producers listed in the appropriate register, may be covered by the 'Pemento de Herbón'. Likewise, only peppers that have been handled and packaged in facilities listed in the appropriate register may be covered by the PDO 'Pemento de Herbón'.

Registered producers are further required to declare the quantity of PDO peppers actually produced and sold by means of entries in registers set up for this purpose. The inspection body checks that the quantities sold by the packers correspond to the production of the farmers who supply them and that that production corresponds to the yield of the registered farms.

All legal and natural persons holding goods or properties entered in the registers — farms, storage units, packaging facilities and products — will be subject to inspections and checks carried out by the inspection body with a view to verifying that the protected products fulfil the requirements of the product specification and other additional rules. The checks comprise inspection of the farms, storage units and packaging facilities, verification of documentation and checking of compliance with the physical parameters (weight and length of the fruit, thickness of the flesh ...) described in Section 4.2 of this document; in addition to checks to ensure that the peppers picked are whole, healthy, clean, undamaged and unbruised. In addition, multi-residual analyses may be carried out to check that the levels of pesticides are below the maximum residue limits (MRL) set for the crop by current legislation.

All the peppers produced will be sold in packaging bearing the PDO numbered identification label.

The peppers must be packaged in the defined geographical area. This is essential for protecting the particular characteristics and quality of PDO Herbón peppers. The reason for this is that they have a thin wall that is very sensitive to dehydration. They must therefore be packed and sold soon after they are picked. Usually, packaging and subsequent commercial distribution take place within 24 hours, and rarely more than 48 hours, after the peppers are picked. Avoiding unnecessary transport and storage time is essential to guaranteeing the quality of the product.

Furthermore, the product is delicate and has to be handled and packed with extreme care. The peppers are packed in small bags (400 g) to avoid damage or any alteration of their organoleptic properties.

Another reason for packing the peppers in their place of origin is the post-harvest selection process. During the packaging process, the producers eliminate those peppers that, judging on the basis of their experience and traditional know-how, should not be sold under the designation of origin and, especially, those that might be too spicy. These can be recognised by their colour (which is less intense), feel (taut skin that tears when squeezed) and shape (more curved than usual). This practice, which is essential for safeguarding the quality of the product, can only be maintained if packaging takes place in the production area.

4.5. *Method of production:*

Among the practices that distinguish the Herbón pepper, the careful selection carried out by the area's farmers is particularly significant, for obtaining seeds and, most important of all, in order to be able to market a product of the highest possible quality.

The method of production is described below:

Propagation and planting out

Every marketing year, the farmers in the designated area, on the basis of their experience and know-how, select one-by-one the plants that will be used to produce seeds for the next season's crop. They first carry out a visual inspection, in which they apply various criteria for selecting the best plants (healthy and well structured with fruit with three lobes without deformities or marks). They then sample taste raw peppers from the plants that have passed the first selection, in order to test their spiciness (level of capsaicin) and obtain the desired mild flavour, accepting a few lightly spicy fruit, since this is one of the defining organoleptic properties of the Herbón pepper, in contrast to products from other areas, in which the proportion of capsaicin is much greater and is a more prominent feature of the product.

The peppers selected, once they are mature (having turned red), are picked and soaked in water, to detach the seeds from the placenta. The seeds obtained are dried quickly in order to prevent alterations in their ability to germinate. The seeds or seedlings come from farmers listed in the register of producers and farms. Seedbed preparation and sowing begins in October and continues in November, December and January.

The crop can grow either in the open or under a protective covering. When seeds are planted under a protective covering, there is no artificial lighting or heating, since the only purpose of the covering is to protect the crop from frosts, should they occur, and to enable production to begin earlier in the year and go on for a few weeks longer at the beginning of autumn. This does not entail any noticeable alteration of the environmental conditions in which the crop naturally grows. When the seeds are planted under a covering they are always sown directly on the ground, in February and March, so that the peppers can be picked in May. In the open, they are planted in April and May and picking begins in June-July. The density at which they are planted under a covering is 2-4 plants per square metre. They are usually supported by raffia twine at different heights. In the open, the density is 3-5 plants per square metre.

Production restrictions

The PDO 'Pemento de Herbón' will cover both peppers grown in the open and those grown under a covering. The maximum yield permitted will be 3,5 kg/m² in the open and 6 kg/m² under a covering.

Cultivation

Irrigation has a twofold importance in Herbón pepper growing. Watering influences the physiological development of the crop and must be carried out at the foot of the plant to avoid damaging the flower or the fruit, if the latter has already appeared. It is also the key to avoiding water stress, since high temperatures combined with low levels of air and soil humidity can lead to a considerable increase in the presence of capsaicin in the fruit. Fertilisers will be used in the manner that best maintains a balance between the levels of nutrients in the soil and in the plant, taking account of what is extracted by the crop, the nutritional state of the plant, the fertility of the soil and the input from other sources (water, organic matter, etc.).

Possible pests and diseases are to be controlled using prevention methods such as the disinfection of seeds and the treatment of seedbeds. If plant-health products have to be employed, the active substances used are those that have less of an environmental impact, are more effective, less toxic, create fewer residue problems, have less of an effect on secondary fauna and less of a problem with resistance.

Harvesting

The peppers are harvested manually, on a daily basis in the weeks of greatest production. They are harvested by hand when the fruit has partially ripened and at the point when the experienced farmers of the region judge that it is ready for marketing, on the basis of the required physical characteristics listed in point 4.2. As many runs are made as required to obtain peppers of excellent quality, using the equipment (cutting tools, boxes, containers and so on) and workers needed to prevent any deterioration of the product.

Transport and storage

The peppers are transported in rigid containers to avoid crushing them. Unloading is carried out in such a way as to reduce the risk of the product falling. The storage units will be properly aerated, with environmental conditions that are close to the optimum conditions for conserving the product, i.e. between 7 °C and 13 °C and with relative humidity between 90 % and 95 %.

Post-harvest selection, packaging and marketing

Once again, it is through the experience of the farmers of the region that the peppers suitable for sale are selected and those that are unsuitable are set aside. This procedure, while it is carried out in part during the harvest, mainly occurs prior to packaging. The producers manually select only those peppers that meet the strictest requirements with regard to colour (they choose those whose colour is more intense), feel (they must not tear on being squeezed, the skin should not be too taut and those peppers that have a low seed weight/fruit weight ratio are excluded) or shape (the curvature should be minimal). Choosing the peppers one-by-one in accordance with these specifications, using the know-how passed on from one generation to the next, the farmers select those peppers that maintain the characteristics that make them unique. Those that do not comply with the required specifications will not be sold under the designation of origin.

The peppers are marketed in bags that hold approximately 400 g, made of materials authorised by current food legislation. Other forms of presentation may be introduced if it is shown that they do not adversely affect the quality of the product. The peppers are marketed between 1 May and 31 October, although that period may be modified when, owing to seasonal weather conditions, the characteristics of the product so require.

4.6. Link:

The growing of this pepper in Galicia can be traced back to seeds brought from the Mexican region of Tabasco by Franciscan monks to the Convent of Herbón, a locality in the municipality of Padrón, in the 17th century. The pepper was already being sold dried and ground in Herbón at the end of the 18th century, and was an important source of income (Archivo General de Simancas. Catastro de la Ensenada. Respuestas Generales. Provincia de Santiago. Libro 253, fol. 1). The varietal selection process and the cultivation practices of early harvesting started at that time. These practices were transmitted from the monastic community to farmers in their area of influence giving rise to a highly specialised system of production, in which the seed was transmitted as part of a dowry and never left the production area. In this way, the special geographical, soil and climate conditions of the area, the genetic isolation resulting from self-fertilisation and the special selection practices derived from the farmers' know-how, gave rise to a highly distinctive and commercially profitable product that was restricted to the geographical area for centuries, as noted by authors such as A. Bouhier (see above), who in the 1960s stressed 'the highly specialised and highly productive pepper-growing in the small area of Herbón-*Padrón*'.

The low height above sea level, the protection provided by the mountain ranges that surround the valleys where the peppers are produced and the short distance to the coast provide distinctive climate conditions, with a high level of rainfall (average annual precipitation is around 1 500 mm), prevailing winds from the south-east and north, mild temperatures and moderate temperature variation, with average annual temperatures of 15 °C and rarely lower than 3 °C in the coldest months. This micro-climate is of great importance for obtaining the specific characteristics of the Herbón peppers.

The characteristics of the soil are conditioned by two factors, namely the original rock type and the climate, providing acidic soils produced both by the alteration in granitic rocks and alluvial deposits. The soil is also of considerable thickness, with low stone content at the surface, a light sand consistency and good drainage, which makes it very well suited to this crop.

The mild and consistent temperatures as well as the soils of the area and its traditional cultivation practices have a direct impact on the morphological and organoleptic characteristics of the pepper, in particular, its colour and the ratio of the weight of the fruit to that of the seed, which is on average 3,2, i.e. significantly less than in other areas of production. This, in turn, contributes to the low level of capsaicin in the flesh (0,114 mg of capsaicinoids/g of dry weight at the commercial stage). Various scientific studies attest to the ease with which Herbón peppers grown in the defined geographical area can be distinguished from others of the same variety grown in hotter climates (where it is now also produced), not only by its morphological and organoleptic characteristics, but also by the length of the fruit (between 3,5 cm and 5,5 cm) and the concentration of the sterol called stigmasterol, whose average value is 1,304 % for the '*Pemento de Herbón*' compared to an average value of 5,164 % in peppers of the Padrón commercial variety grown in the south of Spain. Determining the percentage of stigmasterol is a foolproof method for distinguishing Herbón peppers from those grown in other latitudes.

The traditional practices of local farmers, maintaining and selecting the best plants while adapting production techniques to local conditions, have resulted in a product with extremely strong ties to its environment and excellent culinary qualities. It is important to add that this constant preservation and selection has meant that the farmers in the defined geographical area use only seeds that they themselves have produced and do not use those of the 'Padrón' commercial variety, which is now grown in other geographical areas. This special selection, both of the seeds and of the fruit after harvesting, is what gives peppers covered by the PDO 'Pemento de Herbón' their distinctive character and quality. It is very interesting to note that a phenomenon has been observed in the 'Pemento de Herbón' that is very similar to what has happened with some varieties of grape: the registration of the 'Padrón' variety, which originally comes from the production area, has led to its being grown in other geographical areas very far away, but it has not maintained the special organoleptic characteristics of the peppers produced in the area of origin. As a result, the 'Pemento de Herbón' variety continues to be very highly sought after in the marketplace and fetches far higher prices, sometimes twice as much.

The fact that farmers in the area have been using covered structures for several decades is an example of the way in which they have adapted production techniques without entailing a loss of the interaction between the environment and the specific characteristics of the product. These structures consist of simple plastic tubes, which do not control the crop's environmental conditions. The crop remains essentially exposed to natural environmental factors, as these covered structures have no artificial heating or lighting and the crop grows directly on the soil.

4.7. *Inspection body:*

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INGACAL is a public body attached to the Consellería do Medio Rural de la Xunta de Galicia (Ministry of Rural Affairs of the Government of Galicia).

4.8. *Labelling:*

Peppers marketed under the Protected Designation of Origin 'Pemento de Herbón' must bear a commercial label bearing the brand name of each producer/packer and a label bearing a sequential alphanumeric code, authorised by the inspection body, with the Protected Designation of Origin logo. The words Denominación de Origen Protegida 'Pemento de Herbón' must appear on both the commercial label and the designation label. The commercial label will also indicate the variety of pepper, with the expression 'Padrón variety'.
