

Publication of an 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 231/12)

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⁾.

SINGLE DOCUMENT

COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 510/2006

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

'YORKSHIRE WENSLEYDALE'

EC No: UK-PGI-0005-0652-08.10.2007

PGI (X) PDO ()

1. Name

'Yorkshire Wensleydale'

2. Member State or Third Country

United Kingdom

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 point 1 applies

'Yorkshire Wensleydale' cheese is a pressed cheese made from cow's milk. It can be made with either fresh raw milk, or pasteurised milk.

'Yorkshire Wensleydale' is moulded into traditional truckles/cylinders ranging in weight from 500 g to 21 kg and also into 20 kg blocks shaped moulds. The cheese can be sold as a young cheese at 2 weeks old but can also be aged for up to 12 months depending on the level of maturity required.

The physico-chemical properties of the cheese are:

- pH: 4,4 to 5,4,
- dry matter: minimum 54 %,
- fat content: minimum 48 % of the dry matter,
- sodium chloride: maximum 2,2 %.

Characteristics of the cheese:

- consistency: firm, slightly compact and flaky,
- colour: from white to ivory-yellow,
- aroma: lactic, slightly acidic, developing strong notes and long overall persistence in cheeses that have been well aged,
- flavour: slightly acidic, mellow and honeyed after taste becoming strong and flavoursome, in cheeses that have been well aged. Pleasant and distinctive aftertaste,
- appearance: milky white and slightly open,
- texture: firm but slightly crumbly and flaky.

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 343, 14.12.2012, p. 1.

⁽²⁾ Replaced by Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012.

The microbiological limits are as follows:

- *Escherichia coli*: < 100 colonies/gram,
- *Staphylococcus aureus*: < 100 colonies/gram,
- salmonella species: absence in 25 grams.

3.3. *Raw materials (for processed products only)*

The specific starter cultures are developed from a commercially available primary culture. The mother cultures are 'woken up' from their freeze-dried state and grown as individuals to the point they get into the milk to do their job of souring the milk. So typically, 18 mother cultures run on a 3-day cycle, in 3 groups of 6. The best three from their respective group are identified daily on the basis of their age and vitality. These are then grown in large tanks which will then be blended together immediately before cheese making and used as the starter culture on that particular day.

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

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

The following production stages must take place in the geographical area of Wensleydale as described at Section 4 below:

- if appropriate, pasteurisation of the milk,
- the milk is transferred into cheese vats, and bulk starter culture is added and stirred during the ripening period,
- the rennet is added and the milk is allowed to coagulate,
- the coagulum is cut to release the curds from the whey. The curds and whey are 'scalded' (with heat from the sides of the vat to firm up the curd particles and to drive out more moisture) and stirred until the point at which the curds can be settled and the whey drained,
- cutting, turning and stirring of the curd to achieve the desired texture and moisture content of the curd,
- salting of the curd by hand,
- mould filling,
- pressing,
- bandaging (where applicable) and primary packing,
- initial ripening stage for a minimum of one week.

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

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3.7. *Specific rules concerning labelling*

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4. **Concise definition of the geographical area**

Wensleydale, in North Yorkshire, with the market town of Hawes at its centre. This area is defined by (and inclusive of) Sedbergh to the west and Bedale to the east. To the south, the dale is bordered by Wharfedale, Nidderdale, Ribblesdale and Ripon, and Swaledale to the north.

The area defined above is synonymous with the manufacture of 'Yorkshire Wensleydale' cheese and is based on the traditional and historical area for the making of 'Yorkshire Wensleydale' cheese over the centuries. Today, there are only two sites that are still making 'Yorkshire Wensleydale' — the creameries at Hawes and Kirkby Malzeard.

5. Link with the geographical area

5.1. Specificity of the geographical area

The application is based on a specific quality and reputation attributable to the geographical origin.

The historical tradition of cheesemaking in the area dates back through centuries. The cheese was first made in the area by French Cistercian monks who settled in the 11th and 12th centuries. Evidence suggests that the monks of Wensleydale became proficient farmers and were skilled in animal husbandry, and cheese making from the milk became a valuable source of food. It is acknowledged that the early monastic cheese was made from sheep's milk, but cow's milk became the dominant source of milk following the dissolution of the monasteries in the 16th century.

Following the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII in the mid-1500's the cheese making skills were passed to local farmers, who made cheese as a way of preserving surplus milk. This tradition continued well into the 20th century with Kit Calvert ('The Complete Dalesman' and father figure of Yorkshire Wensleydale from 1933 to 1966) stating in his book *Kit Calvert of Wensleydale*, that '... when the 2nd World War was declared (1939), 173 farmers wives were making Wensleydale cheese in Wensleydale and the surrounding area.'

In 1897, local corn and provisions merchant, Edward Chapman became the first commercial cheesemaker in the area when he opened the first creamery in Hawes. He bought milk from local farms and made Wensleydale cheese. Edward Chapman's dairy faced closure during the depression of the 1930's, but was rescued by Kit Calvert, who rallied the creditors and persuaded them to support him to run the Hawes Creamery. For the next 30 years, Kit Calvert built a thriving cheese business with operations at Hawes, Kirkby Malzeard, Masham and Coverham. Kit sold his business to the Milk Marketing Board in 1966.

'Yorkshire Wensleydale' cheese continues to be made to a recipe which has changed little in the last 115 years since commercial cheesemaking began in 1897 in Hawes. The recipe used today closely replicates those used in farm houses for generations too. Much of the cheesemaking process is done by hand as it has been for many generations and the cheese is made using bulk starter cultures which are sub-cultured and propagated specifically for 'Yorkshire Wensleydale' cheese. So the skills needed to make a product meeting the required description and quality standards for this cheese continue to be as relevant today as in the past. Photographic evidence from the early days of commercial cheese illustrate that methods have changed little over the years.

5.2. Specificity of the product

'Yorkshire Wensleydale' cheese has a creamy-white colour with a firm but forgiving, flaky, open textured appearance. The outside of the cheese is more yellow in colour. This is the hallmark of a handmade 'Yorkshire Wensleydale' cheese (particularly in cloth-bound cheeses). 'Yorkshire Wensleydale' differs from Wensleydale cheese made outside the designated area in that it has a softer and creamier texture and a creamier, sweeter and less acidic flavour than standard Wensleydale. The flavour of 'Yorkshire Wensleydale' is more complex due to the unique starter cultures that are used in the cheesemaking process. The unique bulk starter cultures are selected for their ability to produce excellent and complex lactic flavours as well as a consistent and predictable rate of acid development. Because of the unique recipe of 'Yorkshire Wensleydale', it can be eaten as a young and fresh cheese or it can be matured carefully for many months to develop a rich and full flavour.

The starter cultures used in the cheesemaking process for 'Yorkshire Wensleydale' are an important factor in the quality of the finished cheese. The starter cultures used are grown from mesophilic aromatic cultures, which can be either sub-cultured daily from traditional mother cultures and grown overnight in bulk starter media or grown from deep-frozen or freeze-dried cultures — again grown overnight in the same bulk starter media — typically reconstituted skimmed milk.

The primary cultures are commercially available but are sub-cultured for months. The mother cultures are 'woken up' from their freeze-dried state and grown and run as individual cultures for their life cycle. Groups of 18 mother cultures run on a 3-day cycle, forming 3 groups of 6. On a daily basis the best three cultures from their respective group are identified and grown in large tanks which will then be blended together immediately before cheese making and used as the starter culture for the days make.

The individual cultures are grown as individuals to the point they get into the milk to do their job of souring the milk. The three cultures are chosen on the basis of their age and vitality on the day and usually consist of a young culture, another of medium age and a third more mature culture. As the older ones lose their vitality and performance, they are thrown out and a new culture is 'woken up' and introduced to the team. However, after being woken up, it may be weeks or months before they actually get used for cheesemaking. By running these cultures as separate mother cultures, they gain individual characteristics and strengths and build up immunity to phage. This is a unique and complex system which has been used in the production of 'Yorkshire Wensleydale' cheese for a long time.

The quality and consistency of these starter cultures contribute to many aspects of the cheesemaking process and hence the final quality of the cheese. The addition of the specific starter to the pasteurised milk contributes to the initial acidity of the milk and helps with the coagulation of the milk after the addition of rennet.

These specific starter cultures are fundamentally responsible for the consistent acid development throughout the cheesemaking process from rennet addition through to salting. These cultures which are a mixture of acid producing bacteria and flavour producing bacteria are one of the two key contributors to the flavour and texture of the finished cheese. The quality of the milk is the other key contributor to the finished cheese flavour. Also, the action of the starter cultures goes on long after the cheese has been made in the cheese room. The cultures go on working throughout the cheese maturation process to affect flavour, texture and appearance.

The cheesemaking process requires every vat of cheese to be closely monitored with recorded times, temperatures and acidity levels all being documented. The skill, experience and intuition of the cheesemakers and technical personnel are essential to ensure 'Yorkshire Wensleydale' cheese is of a consistent quality as is the need to be able to identify the various factors that affect the cheese making process on a day-to-day and vat-to-vat basis. These include seasonal variations in milk quality — spring, summer or winter milk; performance of the starter cultures — how and when to exclude or introduce new cultures; the effects of the weather. When working with living cultures and a naturally varying milk quality, no one day may be the same as the next; the make may be fast or slow and therefore to ensure that a consistent cheese is made, the process relies on the skill, experience and savoir faire of the cheesemakers who have been specifically trained.

To produce a consistently good 'Yorkshire Wensleydale' cheese, the cheesemaker may make adjustments throughout each stage of the process — for example 'ripening' times may be changed depending on whether the starters are fast or slow. Scald temperatures may be changed also to control the rate of acid development; the speed/rate that the whey is released and the size of the cut curd pieces, and the time at which the salt is added and the amount added are all dependent upon the rate of acid development during the make, again based upon whether the cultures are fast or slow.

All of the key cheesemaking parameters followed in the making of 'Yorkshire Wensleydale', including the quantity and type of starter cultures, the ripening periods, renneting time, scald time and temperatures and stirring time, together with the rate of acidity development and final salting acidity are unique to 'Yorkshire Wensleydale' and this style of cheese and are different to a more commercially available and mass produced Wensleydale made outside of the designated area.

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)*

When Cistercian monks settled in the valley of Wensleydale during the 11th and 12th centuries, they brought with them their cheesemaking skills, which were later passed on to local farmers. 'Yorkshire Wensleydale' cheese continues to be made to a recipe which has remained largely unchanged since commercial cheesemaking began in the area in 1897. The recipe used today closely replicates the handmade cheesemaking processes used for many generations. The specific starter cultures which are sub-cultured and propagated specifically for 'Yorkshire Wensleydale', together with the skills needed to make a product meeting the required description and quality standards for this cheese continue to be as relevant today as in the past.

The unique characteristics of flavour, texture and appearance of 'Yorkshire Wensleydale', with its sweet, milky and lactic flavour, with crumbly and flaky texture are all the result of the unique starter cultures and the atmosphere of the creamery and the knowledge and skill of the cheesemakers and their skill to craft a cheese of such consistent quality.

In addition to the skill and labour involved with the cheesemaking process, it is the reputation of the product that has the greatest influence on the specificity of the product. The reputation of 'Yorkshire Wensleydale' cheese is based upon quality, consistency, provenance and authenticity.

The reputation of 'Yorkshire Wensleydale' is significant. Wensleydale cheese originated in the designated area during the 11th and 12th centuries and has continued its evolution ever since. Wensleydale cheese was exclusively made in the designated area up until well into the 20th century, when its style and name were copied by cheesemakers up and down the country and it became a more generic style of cheese called Wensleydale. However, the tradition of cheesemaking to a time honoured recipe has continued throughout in the designated areas. The fortunes of cheesemakers in the designated area have seen highs and lows. Indeed, cheesemaking nearly ended in Wensleydale during the depression of the 1930's, but was rescued by Kit Calvert. Disaster was averted in 1992, when Dairy Crest finally agreed to sell the Hawes Creamery to a management team after the creamery was closed. Family farms in Wensleydale have supplied milk for cheesemaking for generations and successive generations of cheesemakers have converted this milk into award winning and sought after cheese.

Today, 'Yorkshire Wensleydale' can be bought in all of the major UK retailers, independent delicatessens and throughout the food service sector. 'Yorkshire Wensleydale' also finds increasing support in many export markets such as the USA and Canada where it is recognised as a top quality added value cheese with true roots of provenance and authenticity.

Many awards and accolades for 'Yorkshire Wensleydale' have been won over the years. Examples of such awards include Best Territorial Cheese and Reserve Supreme Champion at the Nantwich International Cheese Show in 2000 and Best British Cheese and a Gold award at the 2004 World Cheese awards.

The link between 'Yorkshire Wensleydale' cheese and the geographical area is strongly associated in consumers' minds. The product is featured in numerous tourist guides aimed at visitors to the area and this has helped its reputation both within the immediate geographical area but also beyond with the product sought after as a premium cheese in all kinds of retail outlets and also in restaurants. There are many references to the cheese in cookery books, history books and in literature.

'Yorkshire Wensleydale' is sold in the most prestigious cheese shops and delicatessens in major cities throughout the UK and overseas. Harrods, Fortnum & Mason and John Lewis in London stock this cheese as the genuine Wensleydale cheese with true provenance authenticity and overall eating quality. 'Yorkshire Wensleydale' may be bought in premium retailers in Manhattan and Hong Kong. Neals Yard Dairy in London, one of the UK's top cheese retailers and acknowledged authorities on UK artisan and hand crafted cheese sell 'Yorkshire Wensleydale' from Hawes as their only Wensleydale because of its distinctive qualities and authenticity.

Various highly acclaimed chefs including Jamie Oliver and Rosemary Shrager use 'Yorkshire Wensleydale' in their recipes and cheese boards.

Reference to publication of the specification

(Article 5(7) of Regulation (EC) No 510/2006 ⁽³⁾)

https://whitehall-admin.production.alpha.gov.co.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/193717/yorks-wensleydale-cheese-pgi.pdf

⁽³⁾ See footnote 2.