



C/2024/4492

12.7.2024

Publication of an approved standard amendment to a product specification of a protected designation of origin or protected geographical indication in the agricultural products and foodstuffs sector, as referred to in Article 6b(2) and (3) of Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 664/2014

(C/2024/4492)

This communication is published in accordance with Article 6b(5) of Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 664/2014 ⁽¹⁾.

COMMUNICATING THE APPROVAL OF A STANDARD AMENDMENT TO THE PRODUCT SPECIFICATION OF A PROTECTED DESIGNATION OF ORIGIN OR PROTECTED GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATION ORIGINATING IN A MEMBER STATE

(Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012)

‘Sel de Salies-de-Béarn’

EU No: PGI-FR-01311-AM01 - 26.4.2024

PDO () PGI (X)

1. Name of product

‘Sel de Salies-de-Béarn’

2. Member State to which the geographical area belongs

France

3. Member State authority communicating the standard amendment

Ministry of Agriculture and Food Sovereignty

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4. Description of the approved amendment(s)

Explanation that the amendment(s) fall under the definition of the standard amendment as provided for in Article 53(2) of Regulation (EU) 1151/2012:

The application for amendment to the ‘Sel de Salies-de-Béarn’ PGI does not involve any of the three situations constituting a Union amendment, specifically:

- a) it does not include a change in the name of the protected designation of origin;
- b) it would not potentially void the link with the geographical environment;
- c) it does not entail further restrictions on the marketing of the product.

The French authorities therefore consider that the application is for a standard amendment.

1. DESCRIPTION OF PRODUCT

Descriptors that characterise the colour, such as ‘milky appearance, hints of yellow and pink, naturally’ have been deleted.

A density value has been added for the coarse salt of 0,800 kg/L or more.

The grain size target value initially defined for the coarse salt and fine salt of 0,5 mm has been increased to 1 mm.

The insolubles level of less than 1 % is now less than 0,5 %

The amendment affects the single document.

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 179, 19.6.2014, p. 17.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE METHOD OF PRODUCTION

A harvest season has been added: 'The harvest period is exclusively from 1 April to 30 November each year.'

The provision that requires the saltmaker to decide the right moment to package the salt according to atmospheric conditions has been removed as moisture control and tactile testing is considered sufficient.

The qualification of additives as 'technological' has been deleted. The use of any additive is prohibited.

The amendment does not affect the single document.

3. LINK WITH THE GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

The section has been rewritten to bring it into line with the European Commission's requirements (shortened history section, rearrangement of some parts to make it more consistent).

The amendment affects the single document.

4. NATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Density and moisture checks by means of testing have been added.

The use of technological additives is prohibited in order to be consistent with the method of production.

The amendment does not affect the single document.

SINGLE DOCUMENT

'Sel de Salies-de-Béarn'

EU No: PGI-FR-01311-AM01 - 26.4.2024

PDO () PGI (X)

1. Name(s) [of the PDO or PGI]

'Sel de Salies-de-Béarn'

2. Member State or Third Country

France

3. Description of the agricultural product or foodstuff

3.1. Type of product [as listed in Annex XI]

Class 2.6. Salt

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

'Sel de Salies-de-Béarn' is produced from natural brine, i.e. the salty spring water extracted from the Triassic salt deposits of the Salies-de-Béarn region. The salty spring water results from rock salt being naturally dissolved by groundwater.

'Sel de Salies-de-Béarn' is formed by crystallisation during the evaporation of salty spring water, using an ancient method of heating the brine in salt pans, in the open air.

'Sel de Salies-de-Béarn' is an edible salt. It is neither refined nor washed after harvesting, and is produced without the addition of additives.

'Sel de Salies-de-Béarn' comes in the form of fine salt or coarse salt.

3.3. Feed (for products of animal origin only) and raw materials (for processed products only)

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

The processes that must take place in this geographical area are:

- Drilling
- Pumping of salty spring water
- Production of salt
- Drying – (milling) – (sifting)
- Packaging

3.5. *Specific rules concerning slicing, grating, packaging, etc. of the product the registered name refers to*

Local workshops have special know-how. Because of their good knowledge of the product, its fragility and brittleness, they pay special attention to storage and packaging. When ‘Sel de Salies-de-Béarn’ has reached the level of moisture content set out in this specification, the saltmaker decides, according to the feel of the salt, the right moment to package it. ‘Sel de Salies-de-Béarn’ should not stick to the fingers.

Saltmakers take care not to crush the product, keeping handling to a minimum. The goal is to preserve the white colour, prevent the clustering of ‘Sel de Salies-de-Béarn’ salt crystals and avoid breaking the grains, which destroys the fluid inclusions.

Packaging ‘Sel de Salies-de-Béarn’ in the geographical area also helps to improve traceability of the product and to ensure there is no mixing with other salts.

3.6. *Specific rules concerning labelling of the product the registered name refers to*

The product label must include:

1. the name of the PGI: ‘Sel de Salies-de-Béarn’
2. the sales description:
3. Coarse salt
4. Fine salt

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

The geographical area comprises 13 municipalities in the New Aquitaine region:

- Department of Landes: Saint-Cricq-du-Gave and Sorde-l'Abbaye.
- Department of Pyrénées-Atlantiques: Auterive, Came, Carresse-Cassaber, Castagnède, Escos, Labastide-Villefranche, Lérén, Oraàs, Saint-Dos, Saint-Pé-de-Lérén and Salies-de-Béarn.

5. **Link with the geographical area**

The characteristics of ‘Sel de Salies-de-Béarn’, such as its whiteness or mineral composition, and its reputation, are the result of a combination of natural factors, particularly climate factors, and know-how used since the 11th century.

At the start of the Mesozoic era and during the Triassic period, the evaporation of sea water during two successive evaporation episodes in a dry climate created salt deposits in the ‘Sel de Salies-de-Béarn’ geographical area: evaporites made up of gypsum (calcium sulphate) and halite (sodium chloride), which form layers up to 900 m thick, 600 m of which is salt. At the end of the Cretaceous era, the Triassic massif of Salies-de-Béarn was subjected to significant tectonic pressure due to the formation of the Pyrenees.

The deep salt layers in the geographical area are less dense than the rock covering them. Their flexible nature led to the creation of sharp or dome-shaped salt protrusions called diapirs. A diapir can be found close to surface level in the geographic area's Triassic massif.

Seeping into the deep layers, the water becomes mineralised mainly from contact with the salt Triassic. Within the salt bloc, or from contact with it, the waters leach the salt and become loaded with sodium chloride. As these waters pass through the dolomite veins within the Triassic layers, they become enriched with mineral salts and trace elements.

The water flows in channels formed by the dissolution of Triassic rock (salt, limestone and dolomite).

Owing to the difference in elevation, these waters emerge at the surface, creating naturally salty resurgences in the geographical area.

As regards human factors, many remains of pots and ovens provide evidence of salt production as early as the Bronze Age in the Triassic massif of Salies-de-Béarn. In the Bronze Age (2200 BC to 800 BC) and during Antiquity (600 BC to 400 AD), salty spring-water was heated and evaporated in ceramic vessels, which were then broken to extract the salt.

In the Middle Ages (the 5th to the 15th centuries AD) a significant change occurred in the salt-production process: the emergence of the 'salt pan'. Water heated on wood fires was evaporated, and the salt precipitated at the bottom of the container was collected.

In the 16th century, the inhabitants of Salies-de-Béarn, clustered around this natural asset, decided to organise themselves:

- by creating the 'Corporation des Part-Prenants' (Stakeholders' Guild), an association of common interest;
- and by drawing up a regulation, the 'Règlement de la Fontaine Salée' (the Salty-Spring Regulation).

Five centuries after its creation, this organisation still exists.

Today, 'Sel de Salies-de-Béarn' is still produced using salty spring-water extracted from the geographical area. It is created by crystallisation during the evaporation of salty spring water, using the ancient method of heating the brine in salt pans in the open air.

'Sel de Salies-de-Béarn' has specific physical properties:

- its conformation: the coarse salt comes in the form of grains. It is made up of a framework of clusters of hollow pyramid-formations, which accumulate at the bottom of the salt pan, and which are formed by accretion. Because of the way they are produced, the hollow pyramid formations differ greatly in size and shape and may be whole or broken to various degrees. This results in 'Sel de Salies-de-Béarn' grains of very irregular sizes and shapes. Crystals of 'Sel de Salies-de-Béarn' come in different sizes, with a wide range of grain dimensions.
- the presence of fluid inclusions: 'Sel de Salies-de-Béarn' crystals have microscopic cavities due to the irregular way they are formed and bonded together. These microscopic cavities are filled with brine that stays trapped in the 'Sel de Salies-de-Béarn' crystals. These are called fluid inclusions.
- its colour: 'Sel de Salies-de-Béarn' is characterised by a white colour, which occurs without treatment or use of additives.

Because of its physical properties connected to its method of production, 'Sel de Salies-de-Béarn' is a brittle and fragile product.

Saltmakers monitor the storage, handling and packaging conditions in order to limit:

- the oxidation of grains at the surface, which can alter their colour;
- multiple and careless handling, which can damage the 'Sel de Salies-de-Béarn' salt grains and destroy the fluid inclusions present in the crystals.

A comparative study by D. Cussey-Geisler et M.H. Grimaldi (*Caractérisation du sel utilisé pour la salaison du Jambon de Bayonne* (Characterisation of the salt used for the salting of Bayonne ham), UPPA, July 1989) of several salts from different sources concluded that, from a geochemical point of view, 'Sel de Salies-de-Béarn' has a wide variety of trace elements, in particular calcium, potassium, magnesium, and different sulphates, that are characteristic of the Triassic evaporites. These trace elements are present in the spring water, which became very rich in minerals upon contact with the geological layers. They can be found in the fluid inclusions in 'Sel de Salies-de-Béarn' crystals.

The Triassic evaporite rocks form a diapir in the geographical area allowing them to rise to the surface in the Triassic massif of Salies-de-Béarn. The groundwater that passes through these layers becomes loaded with mineral salts and trace elements, and flows through to the salt springs. As early as the Bronze Age, the inhabitants of the Triassic massif of Salies-de-Béarn discovered the richness of these salty spring waters. Simply heating the water causes it to evaporate and the salt crystals to form. The heating process has evolved over the centuries, but its principle remains the same, i.e. the brine is not boiled and no chemical treatment is applied. This ancient know-how respects the intrinsic qualities of the spring water. This induced crystallisation, without any human intervention other than heating the water, allows it to retain all of its richness. The salt crystals, by their distinctive conformation, are rich in fluid inclusions. The mineral salts and trace elements present in the spring water and trapped in the fluid inclusions can be found in 'Sel de Salies-de-Béarn'. Since the 19th century, the mineral richness of the spring water and of 'Sel de Salies-de-Béarn', and the link between them has been highlighted in many medical works as part of studies looking into their benefits, in particular by Drs. R. Petit, B. de Larroque, J. Marsoo and C. Nogaret. The town of Salies-de-Béarn was built around the production of salt from the Triassic massif to such an extent that an organisation of common interest was created in the 16th century with the aim of protecting this natural asset. This organisation still exists today and its regulation, the 'Règlement de la Fontaine Salée' (Salty-Spring Regulation), is still applied.

'Sel de Salies-de-Béarn', the 'white gold' of the region, is a product of historic renown that is the subject of an ancestral trade and which plays a major economic role. Numerous historical accounts attest to its denomination and fame, such as *Mélanges historiques critiques de physique, de littérature et de poésie* (Assorted critical reviews of physics, literature, and poetry, 1768), in which the Marquis d'Orbessan described the production of 'Sel de Salies-de-Béarn'. He concluded his story with the following observation: 'There is nobody who does not know that one must bleach ordinary salt to remove its briny flavour and make it fit to be served on tables. Salies salt does not need to be treated in this way.' The qualities of 'Sel de Salies-de-Béarn' are also recognised by professionals, both by meat curers and restaurateurs. Thus, in Pierre Larousses's *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle* (Great Universal Dictionary of the 19th Century, 1866-1877), it is stated that 'The best hams are those from Bayonne, prepared with Salies salt.' In his book *Les merveilles de l'industrie ou Description des principales industries modernes* (The Wonders of Industry or Description of the Main Modern Industries, 1873-1877), Louis Figuier more broadly indicates that 'How long salt stays in shops depends on the season. In Villefranque and in Salies, there is almost no salt in stock during winter, i.e. during curing season. It is not uncommon to deliver the salt which has just come out of the pan to shops.' Indeed, 'Sel de Salies-de-Béarn' has been historically used to produce well-known products, such as the 'Jambon de Bayonne' PGI, 'Ossau-Iraty' PDO ewe's milk cheese, and the 'Canard à foie gras du Sud-Ouest' (Chalosse, Gascogne, Gers, Landes, Périgord, Quercy) PGI (foie gras, confits, etc.).

Many chefs offer dishes on their menu salted with 'Sel de Salies-de-Béarn', and some are especially renowned for their salt crust specialities, such as Yves Larrouture of the Auberge du Relais in Bérenx with his salt-crusted duck breast fillet or Christophe Canati of the Hôtel du Parc Beaumont in Pau with his salt-crusted *poularde* (fatted young hen).

'Sel de Salies-de-Béarn' is also a source of inspiration for some confectioners and chocolate-makers, who have been showcasing it in original delicacies for nearly 30 years, such as Franck Lavignasse with his 'Lou Saleys' caramels or ice cream.

Today, all professionals are proud to present the origin of the salt that they use, by mentioning it on their labels, websites and advertising leaflets, for instance.

Numerous national and international press articles (*Paris Match*, *Cheese Connoisseur* – United States, *Le Devoir* daily newspaper – Canada, etc.) and reports on broadcast media (*Journal de 13h*, the science report of *Télématin*, etc.) attest to the reputation and renown of 'Sel de Salies-de-Béarn', which owes its originality to its geographical area which imparts its geological characteristics on the salty spring water. Its ancient and continuous production throughout the ages has allowed traditional know-how to be preserved.

This ancient activity has maintained the local population which continues to pass on cultural elements linked to this production.

Today, salt still has a central role in the social and cultural life of the town of Salies-de-Béarn, which promotes salt through dedicated associations, artistic works, and cultural activities. The 'Jurade du sel' association has been organising the famous 'Hesta de la sau' (salt festival) every year for more than 30 years. This event brings together more than 10 000 people every year.

All year around, many tourists come to visit 'the city of salt'.

Reference to publication of the specification

https://info.agriculture.gouv.fr/gedei/site/bo-agri/document_administratif-d9b9c8e5-b2cf-454e-91ed-434ba57297a2
