

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

(2007/C 268/14)

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

SUMMARY

COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 510/2006

'AFUEGA'L PITU'

EC No: ES/PDO/005/0307/20.08.2003

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 Industria Agroalimentaria y Alimentación. Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación de España

Address: Infanta Isabel, 1
E-28071 Madrid

Tel. (34) 91 347 53 94

Fax (34) 91 347 54 10

E-mail: sgcaproagro@mapya.es

2. *Group:*

Name: Quesería La Borbolla, C.B. y otros

Address: La Borbolla, 9
E-33820 Grado

Tel. (34) 985 75 08 10

Fax (34) 985 75 08 10

E-mail: queserialaborbolla@hotmail.com

Composition: Producers/processors (X) Other ()

3. *Type of product:*

Class: 1.3 — Cheese

4. *Specification:*

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

4.1. Name: 'Afuega'l Pitu'

4.2. Description: This is a high-fat cheese which may be either fresh or mature and is made from whole pasteurised cow's milk by means of lactic acid coagulation. The paste is white or reddish-orange, depending on whether paprika is added. However, it is not absolutely necessary that the milk be pasteurised if the cheeses mature for 60 days.

⁽¹⁾ OJL 93, 31.3.2006, p. 12.

The resulting product is a cheese shaped like a truncated cone or courgette which weighs between 200 and 600 grams, has a height of between approximately 5 and 12 cm, a diameter of between 8 and 14 cm measured at the base, and a natural rind of variable consistency, depending on its maturation period and whether paprika is added.

Four traditional names are used, although the final characteristics are similar:

- *Atroncau blancu*: unkneced, truncated-cone shape, white.
- *Atroncau roxu*: kneaded, truncated-cone shape, reddish-orange.
- *Trapu blancu*: kneaded, courgette-shaped, white.
- *Trapu roxu*: kneaded, courgette-shaped, reddish-orange.

As regards chemical characteristics, the cheese has a minimum dry matter content of 30 %, a minimum fat and protein content in the dry matter of 45 % and 35 % respectively, and a pH of between 4,1 and 5.

As to organoleptic characteristics, the cheese is white in colour, tending to yellow as it matures, or reddish-orange if paprika is added. The taste is mildly acidic, non-salty or slightly salty, creamy and fairly dry, with the red cheeses being stronger and more piquant. It has a mild aroma which becomes more pronounced as it matures; the paste has a more or less soft consistency, losing that quality as the cheese matures.

- 4.3. **Geographical area:** The defined geographical area of the 'Afuega'l Pitu' Protected Designation of Origin covers the municipalities of Morcín, Riosa, Santo Adriano, Grado, Salas, Pravia, Tineo, Belmonte, Cudillero, Candamo, Las Regueras, Muros del Nalón and Soto del Barco. All the cheese-making stages take place in this area, including maturation and production of the milk used as raw material.
- 4.4. **Proof of origin:** The certification process will involve visual and documentary checks and product sampling. In accordance with all the aforementioned requirements, the 'Afuega'l Pitu' Protected Designation of Origin may only be used for cheeses which have been produced from milk obtained from registered stock farms and have been processed in dairies registered with the Regulatory Council in accordance with the rules laid down in this document, in the PDO rules and in the Quality and Procedures Manual, and which have been checked and certified by the Regulatory Council's technical staff in accordance with the procedures applicable.

Cheeses qualifying for the certification will carry numbered secondary labels — supplied by the Regulatory Council — bearing the logo of the 'Afuega'l Pitu' Protected Designation of Origin.

- 4.5. **Method of production:** The milk used to make the protected cheeses will be obtained, under hygienic conditions from healthy cows of Friesian and *Asturiana de los Valles* breeds and their cross-breeds, in accordance with applicable legislation.

The livestock's diet will follow traditional practices based on dairy herds being pastured throughout the year, and given a supplement of fresh grass, hay and silage obtained on the farms themselves.

The livestock is essentially managed on a semi-stabling basis. This involves the animals spending most of the day in pastures, being rounded up at dusk for milking, and remaining stabled until the next morning after following the same procedure. During milking, their ration is supplemented with fresh fodder, hay and silage obtained on the farm itself and (exceptionally, when there are adverse weather conditions) with small quantities of cereal and legume concentrates.

Inside the curdling vat, a small amount of liquid rennet is added to the milk, as are lactic ferments if the milk is pasteurised. The temperature inside the vat varies between 22 and 32 °C. Coagulation takes 15 to 20 hours.

After the milk has coagulated, the curd is transferred to perforated moulds of food-quality plastic, where the whey drains off over approximately twelve hours.

After twelve hours, the partly drained curd is transferred to a smaller mould and the opportunity is taken to salt the surface of the cheese. After twelve hours, it is removed from the mould and placed on perforated trays to facilitate final draining. The cheese is then placed in the maturing room.

In the case of cheeses made from kneaded paste, the curd is drained in larger plastic containers, using gauze, and placed in the kneader after around 24 hours. During kneading, salt is added; approximately 1 % of paprika may be added, in which case the variety will be 'trapu roxu'. The kneaded paste, with or without paprika, is then placed in moulds and/or gauze, where it is left to drain for a further 24 hours.

Depending on the maturity of the cheeses, they are left in the maturing rooms for a period ranging from five days (fresh cheeses) to 60 days (mature cheeses).

The packaged cheeses, bearing labels on the authorised packaging, are kept in cold stores at between 4 °C and 10 °C until sale.

4.6. Link:

Historical link

There are written references to the cheese (referred to as *quesu de puñu* or *queso de Afueg'l Pitu*) dating back to at least the 18th century, where it is described as a currency for paying taxes (the practice until into the following century). At the end of the 19th century, Félix Aramburu y Zuloaga describes the cheese as 'the primitive *queso de puñu* or *de afuega el pitu* which is common in almost all the municipalities of Asturias'. More recently, in their work *Asturias*, Octavio Bellmunt and Fermín Canella again stress how widespread the cheeses are, describing them as 'those common everywhere and called *afuega el pitu* or other names'.

It is clear that, although these bibliographical references place the cheese in various Asturian municipalities, they are not specific and there is therefore no record of the defined boundaries at the time (possibly because a large group of municipalities is involved). In order to confirm that production is restricted to the defined geographical area, it is necessary to turn to more recent documents, popular wisdom and the register of the first businesses making the cheese.

The name given to this variety of cheese is fascinating because it is of uncertain origin. Translated literally, '*Afuega'l Pitu*' means 'choke the chicken' — a strange name for which numerous interpretations have been found. These range from the name's being a reference to strangling the neck of the bag (*fardela*) in which the cheese is drained, to the occasional difficulties encountered in swallowing the cheese, and even to its having traditionally been used as feed for chickens.

A range of cheeses with fairly similar characteristics in terms of shape, maturing times and flavour were known as *Afuega'l Pitu* in the municipalities along the Rivers Narcea and Nalón, where the cheeses are most commonly found.

The distinctive way of making the cheese became increasingly established, giving rise to a single product with four traditional names. The only difference between them is their colour (red or white, depending on whether paprika is added or not) and shape (truncated-cone shape or courgette-shaped, depending on the mould system used).

Natural link

The defined area has an ocean climate characterised by plentiful, persistent and gentle rainfall throughout the year, moderate sunshine and a high level of cloud. These affect the diet of the animals which provide the milk, and are hence reflected in the product, since:

- the climate encourages rapid growth of meadow species which are of excellent quality and are present in the area's abundant natural grasslands and pastures. This ensures a food supply on days when there are adverse weather conditions, in addition to providing a year-round source of food based on fresh fodder,
- it allows an annual utilisation plan to be created which is based on rotation of field use, involving grazing and/or mowing,
- it allows the animals to be kept outdoors almost all year.

All this results in the production of abundant high-quality milk with specific characteristics as to its composition, especially as regards fatty and organic acids. This gives the cheese its specific organoleptic characteristics, especially where smell and taste are concerned.

Climate also influences the product in terms of the preparation process. That influence relates to the product's exposure to local environmental conditions, especially during the draining and moulding stages (as manufacture is on a small scale). The high humidity and mild temperatures, combined with the expertise of cheese makers who have adapted the process to these climatic conditions, contributes to the product's special texture.

The terrain of the geographical area is generally characterised by steep slopes located within the short distance between the coast (very low levels) and the watershed (at very high levels). More than half the area is over 400 m above sea level, and more than a quarter is over 800 m above sea level.

The terrain has favoured the trend towards livestock production as a means of exploiting the excellent natural resources of the steeper ground which is correspondingly less suited to agricultural activity, and making use of the extensive water meadows particularly to be found in the valleys carved by the rivers Nalón and Narcea and their tributaries.

It has also influenced the relevance of cheese-making as an activity, since the mountainous relief historically made communications difficult. This prompted earlier farmers to use surplus milk production by making cheese simply, by means of spontaneous acidification. However, whilst there is no denying the complex terrain, it is also true that villages have gradually managed to become less isolated over time. In turn, of course, this has influenced production, especially the marketing of the cheese, by enabling it to be transported to major population centres which, though always nearby, had been rendered remote through access difficulties.

The soil is another distinguishing feature. It is generally slightly acidic (pH 6,9-6,5) with a high content of organic materials, and tends to have a fairly balanced nitrogen, phosphorus, magnesium and potassium content. These soil conditions create a fairly specific, balanced mineral composition which may distinguish our pastures from those of other geographical areas.

The pastures contains a wide variety of flora which consist mainly of species of agricultural value (such as grasses, pulses and labiates), making it excellent for grazing cattle.

The fact that pasture areas are regularly and continuously grazed directly impacts both on the flora and on soil composition, favouring the content in terms of organic materials. This is due partly to the fact that the animals are almost constantly in the pastures.

Over time, the aforementioned meadow species have remained, due to the cycle of animals grazing and evacuating seeds in their droppings.

Human link

From ancient times, the farm structure in the area has been based on small units, the *caserías* (homesteads) which tried to be self-sufficient by using crops and products deriving from their cattle and sheep.

Milk surpluses were used to make these cheeses. The value of the latter relates to their distinctive texture and characteristic, unmistakable taste, whichever of the four traditional names applies. As Enric Canut, the great connoisseur of Spanish cheeses in general, said: 'If you say "Afuega'l Pitu" anywhere in Spain, either no one knows what it is or, if they do, no more adjectives are needed: it is an Asturian cheese'.

The craft tradition has been passed down from one generation to the next: from grandmothers to their daughters to their granddaughters, until reaching its current form (family dairies are involved, where it is mainly women who continue making the cheese, using traditional methods).

Once people were self-sufficient, markets were established where all the local cheeses were sent (that of Grado deserves a special mention). This, coupled with the gradual progress in communications, has allowed trade to expand beyond the borders of the production area and beyond Asturias.

In the latter half of the last century, Spanish legislation required milk to be pasteurised if cheese was marketed which had been matured for less than sixty days. A specific ferment was consequently developed which allowed the cheese to be made with pasteurised milk and gave it identical organoleptic and rheological characteristics to that traditionally made with unprocessed milk and, in addition, guaranteed hygiene quality.

The specific ferment has strains with a great capacity to produce diacetyl in the pasteurised milk. Indeed, the curd and cheese 'Afuega'l Pitu' has a characteristic diacetyl smell.

The 'Afuega'l Pitu' cheese competition, attended by all the local makers, has been held in the municipality of Morcín since 1981. It was set up on the initiative of a group of young people, supported by *Hermanidad de la Probe* (community group), in order to encourage production of this cheese variety. Although little known at the time, the cheese has grown from being a product which was restricted to personal use and to sale at Grado market of scarce surpluses, to being a product found on many of the tables and in many of the restaurants of Asturias and Spain. Indeed, it has crossed borders and can be found in other parts of the world.

4.7. Inspection body:

Name: Consejo Regulador de la DOP Afuega'l Pitu
Address: Polígono ind. Silvota, C/ Peñamayor, Par. 96
E-33192 Llanera
Tel. (34) 985 26 42 00
Fax (34) 985 26 56 82
E-mail: info@alcecalidad.com

The Regulatory Council, as certification body for agri-food products, will perform tasks in accordance with the criteria laid down in standard EN 45011.

- 4.8. Labelling: Cheeses intended for consumption and covered by the 'Afuega'l Pitu' Protected Designation of Origin will be identified by a label or secondary label which has been numbered, approved, inspected and supplied by the Regulatory Council, in accordance with the rules set out in the Quality Manual. The words *Denominación de Origen Protegida — 'Afuega'l Pitu'* must appear in clear lettering, plus the details and requirements laid down in the applicable legislation.
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