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(Announcements)

OTHER ACTS

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Publication of a registration 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

(2014/C 336/09)

This publication confers the right to oppose the registration 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⁾

'PECORINO DELLE BALZE VOLTERRANE'

EC No: IT-PDO-0005-01166 — 22.10.2013

PGI () PDO (X)

1. Name

'Pecorino delle Balze Volterrane'

2. Member State or Third Country

Italy

3. Description of the agricultural product or foodstuff

3.1. Product Type

Class 1.3. Cheeses

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

'Pecorino delle Balze Volterrane' is a cheese produced exclusively with vegetable rennet and raw, whole sheep's milk from flocks located within the geographical area. Four different types are sold, depending on the length of maturation: 'fresh', from 7 days to 44 days conservation; 'semi-mature', from 45 days to 6 months maturation; 'mature', from 6 to 12 months maturation; 'extra-mature', over 12 months maturation. Furthermore, 'Pecorino delle Balze Volterrane' has the following characteristics when it is released for consumption:

Physical characteristics: cylindrical form with flat ends and flat or slightly convex heel. End diameter: between 10 to 20 cm. Heel height: between 5 to 15 cm. Weight: from 600 g to 2 Kg, for 'fresh', 'semi-mature' and 'mature' cheese, and up to 7 Kg for 'extra-mature' cheese.

Chemical properties: Fat content of the dry matter: > 45 %; Protein (Nx6,25): > 20 %;

Organoleptic characteristics: Rind: ranges in colour from pale, straw yellow to deep yellow. After coating in olive oil and ash the cheese takes on a grey colour. Texture: compact structure and negligible friability, possibly with some holes irregularly dotted through the cheese. When cut, the colour ranges from white for the 'fresh' cheese to more or less intense straw yellow for the 'semi-mature', 'mature' and 'extra-mature' versions;

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 343, 14.12.2012, p. 1.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 93, 31.3.2006, p. 12. Replaced by Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012.

Aroma: persistent reminiscent of milk and wild cardoon, with scents of aromatic plants and yellow flowers; Taste: initially mild, with scents of milk and flowers and a note of cardoon; an aftertaste that is long and persistent with fresh green echoes; a slightly spicy end note, a characteristic which becomes more intense the longer the cheese has been matured, accompanied by tastiness and a slightly astringent quality in the 'mature' and 'extra-mature' cheeses.

3.3. Raw materials (for processed products only)

Milk: raw, whole sheep's milk, produced from flocks of the Sarda breed, reared according to the semi-wild system.

Rennet: vegetable sourced from wild cardoon or artichoke inflorescences (*Cynaria cardunculus*).

Salt: Fine.

3.4. Feed (for products of animal origin only)

At least 2/3 of the sheep's feed must be provided by grazing in the geographical area of origin. Fodder and cereals containing grains (barley, oats, beans) are administered in quantities varying from 100 g/head/day to 800 g/head/day depending on the period of the year, with larger quantities in the winter months and less in the summer months. The sheep may not be fed with genetically modified products (OGM).

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

Farming of the animals, cheese production and maturing of the cheese are the steps in production which must take place within the production area.

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

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3.7. Specific rules concerning labelling

When released for consumption, the product must bear a label on one of its two faces containing, in addition to the product logo and the symbol of the Union, the following information in clear lettering:

- 'Pecorino delle Balze Volterrane', followed either by the abbreviation (DOP) [PDO] or by the wording 'Denominazione di Origine Protetta' [Protected Designation of Origin] in full;
- the type of maturation ('fresh', 'semi-mature', 'mature' and 'extra-mature'),
- the name, company name and address of the producer, maturer and packager.

The product may be sold pre-wrapped, or vacuum-packed, whole and/or in portions. In order to avoid the portioning resulting in the loss of the product's identity, the wording 'Pecorino delle Balze Volterrane' must figure on the labelling accompanied by the product logo and repeated at least four times (at 90° distance). It is forbidden to add any description that is not expressly provided for.

However, the use of names, trade names or private marks is permitted, provided they have no laudatory purport and are not likely to mislead the consumer, as well as other truthful and documented references that are compatible with the legislation in force. The product logo consists, as can be seen below, of a circle at the centre of which is a stylised depiction of a wild artichoke (cardoon) and two curved lines that form the letter 'V', the leaves of the wild artichoke and the outline of two hills that appear in the distance with the sky above. Within the circle are the words 'Pecorino delle Balze Volterrane'. The size of the logo may be adapted in proportion to suit different sizes of packaging.



4. Concise definition of the geographical area

The sheep must be kept and the 'Pecorino delle Balze Volterrane' cheese produced and matured exclusively on land belonging to the municipalities of Volterra, Pomarance, Montecatini Val di Cecina and Castelnuovo Val di Cecina, Monte Verdi, all located in the province of Pisa.

5. Link with the geographical area

5.1. Specificity of the geographical area

Located at the south-east border of the province of Pisa, the production area extends between the valleys of the rivers Era (to the north) and Cecina (to the south). Given its location inland but not too far from the sea, the area has a sub-coastal climate with rainy autumn and spring months. The geology of the area is extremely varied because of erosion caused by the weather combined with prolonged human activity (deforestation, using land for pasture); this has resulted in the formation of *biancane* (small clay cupolas), *calanchi* (a contiguous series of very steep small valleys in the shape of a horse shoe) and *balze* (gigantic chasms created by the erosive action of rainwater). In such environments the vegetation is subject to extreme selection. The tormented morphology, mobility and low permeability of the substrate, its low organic material content, richness in salts and the long periods of dryness have the effect of selecting vegetation which is saline tolerant and has developed specific survival mechanisms. The peaks of the *calanchi* (valleys) and ridges are taken up with grass meadows, in the areas with clay *sulla* clover flowers predominate, and at the foot of the *calanchi*, plants that can tolerate standing water. Thyme also grows in profusion as do plants used for grazing, such as genet. However, most importantly wild cardoon 'grows spontaneously in great profusion' (Amerighi, 1973). Processing the raw milk directly in cheese-making facilities annexed to the housing where the sheep are kept is furthermore the origin of the cottage-industry nature of this activity. Through using the local workforce and continuing to use time-honoured techniques, it has been possible to ensure that the tradition is being continued, with the resulting high levels of specialisation and expertise among the local producers that would be difficult to find in other areas.

5.2. Specificity of the product

The specificity of 'Pecorino delle Balze Volterrane' is due first and foremost to the specificities of its production method based as it is on the use of rennet derived from the flowers of the cardoon plant, which grows in abundance in the area. This fact and the morphology of the pasture land distinguishes 'Pecorino delle Balze Volterrane' from other sheep's milk cheeses, especially with regard to its organoleptic profile. Specifically, it stands out on account of its distinct taste, which is unexpectedly mild for a sheep's cheese, and scent, which is given by the cardoon as well as by the local grasses and flowers, the aromatic essences of which, thanks to the low processing temperature (< 40 °C), stay dissolved and characterise the finished product.

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 area's climate and geological formation foster the growth of local vegetation, which provides the sheep's main source of sustenance through grazing and which gives the milk the volatile aromas that give the cheese its distinctive organoleptic qualities. The local environment is also critical for providing the particular type of rennet produced from wild cardoon, which represents one of 'Pecorino delle Balze Volterrane's' main characteristics.

The remarkable rock erosion has led to the formation of caves of varying shapes and sizes, used by local shepherds in previous centuries, prior to the arrival of air-conditioned facilities, both for sheltering flocks and to preserve milk and cheese products naturally. In these caves humidity levels tend to be constant, with the result that the sheep's cheese matures gradually, thus contributing to the specificity of the product. Even today such conditions, which form part of the local know-how, are considered ideal not only by the producers who prefer the entire maturing process or the final stage of it to take place in caves, but also by those equipped with air-conditioned facilities. Such facilities reproduce the temperature and humidity conditions occurring naturally in caves, i.e. temperatures between 7 and 10 °C and 70-90 % humidity.

The human factor is of utmost importance also in the cheese's processing cycle, in particular during the following operations which are all carried out manually on the basis of traditional skills acquired locally: the addition of vegetable rennet, which requires particular skill given that it coagulates less easily than animal rennet; the cutting of the curd, which is carried out gently with the help of a pointed tool (the 'spino' whisk); and the moulding, obtained by applying just the right pressure to allow the whey to be properly drained. As regards the effects of the production process on the characteristics of the end product, it should be noted that the use of vegetable rennet in the production of 'Pecorino delle Balze Volterrane' results in the milk coagulating more slowly and delicately compared to coagulation achieved using animal rennet. This considerably affects the syneresis, i.e. the process by which the whey is drained from the curd, in that the moisture is pressed out more gently and at the same time more slowly than is the case for other cheeses. The result is a milder cheese which is not overly pungent even as far as the 'mature' and 'extra-mature' types are concerned.

In local cuisine 'Pecorino delle Balze Volterrane' is famed for its delicate flavour, is extremely sought after and features as an ingredient in many of the area's traditional dishes. This cheese is eaten on numerous occasions — as an hors d'oeuvre, with prepared meats and vegetables preserved in oil, grated on savoury dishes with meat sauces or and lastly, depending on its degree of maturation, as a table cheese or for grating into soups and filled oven-baked pasta dishes (such as for example '*ceci in magro*', a traditional meat-free chickpea dish).

Reference to publication of the specification

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

The Ministry launched the national objection procedure with the publication of the proposal for recognising 'Pecorino delle Balze Volterrane' PDO as a protected designation of origin in *Official Gazette of the Italian Republic* No 198 of 24.8.2013.

The full text of the product specification is available on the internet:

<http://www.politicheagricole.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/3335>

or alternatively:

by going direct to the homepage of the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policy (www.politicheagricole.it) and clicking on 'Qualità e sicurezza' (at the top right-hand side of the screen) and finally by clicking on 'Disciplinari di Produzione all'esame dell'UE'.

^(?) See footnote 2.