

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 308/10)

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

‘SLOVENSKÝ OŠTIEPOK’

EC No: SK/PGI/005/0549/30.03.2006

PDO () PGI (X)

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

1. Responsible department in the Member State:

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2. Group:

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Composition: Producers/processors (X) Other ()

3. Type of product:

Class 1.3: Cheeses

4. Specification:

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

4.1. Name: ‘Slovenský oštiepok’

4.2. Description: ‘Slovenský oštiepok’ is a half-fat semi-hard cheese, which may be steamed or unsteamed and smoked or unsmoked. The basic raw material used to produce ‘Slovenský oštiepok’ is sheep’s milk, a mixture of sheep’s and cow’s milk or cow’s milk. ‘Slovenský oštiepok’ is produced either directly at a *salaš* (small-scale mountainside sheep farm), using the traditional on-farm method of production, or at dairies, using the industrial method.

‘Slovenský oštiepok’ is characterised by its special shape, that of a large egg, pine cone or ellipsoid with decoration.

⁽¹⁾ OJL 93, 31.3.2006, p. 12.

Characteristics

Colour: golden-yellow to golden-brown on the outside after smoking, white to buttery-yellow on the inside.

Consistency: solid, firm, slightly fragile, with minor cracks and cavities appearing when cut.

Aroma and flavour: savoury, pleasant distinctive cheese flavour, mildly piquant to sour, moderately salty, with a typical smoky aroma resulting from the smoking process; must not be overly acidic, yeasty, tallowy, soapy, rancid, putrid, sharp, spicy or bitter or have other strange flavours.

Composition

- depends on the raw material used and the method of production,
- a minimum of 48 % dry matter by weight,
- a minimum of 38,0 % fat in dry matter by weight.

Microbiological requirements

'Slovenský oštiepok' is a half-fat semi-hard cheese which may or may not be steamed and may be smoked or unsmoked. It is produced by adding an original culture comprising lactic acid bacteria of the genus *Lactococcus*, which gives 'Slovenský oštiepok' its characteristic and specific properties. This culture was isolated from raw sheep's milk and sheep's cheese produced on Slovak *salaš* sheep farms.

- 4.3. *Geographical area:* The geographical area comprises the mountainous part of the Slovak Republic, the Western perimeter of which is formed by the Western slopes of the range comprising the White Carpathian, Považský Inovec, Trábeč, Vtáčnik and Štiavnica mountains and the Krupina highlands.

The Southern slopes of the Krupina and Cerová highlands, Stolica mountains, Slovak Karst and Volovec and Slanec mountains make up the Southern perimeter.

The Eastern perimeter is formed by the slopes of the range comprising the Vihorlat mountains, Popriečín, Beskidian Piedmont, the Bukovec mountains and the border with Ukraine.

The Northern perimeter is formed by the border with Poland, the slopes of the range comprising the Laborec, Ondava and Lubovňa highlands, the Pieniny mountains, Spiš Magura, the Tatra and Skorušina mountains, the Sub-Beskydian highlands, Orava Beskids and Kysuce Beskids, the border with the Czech Republic, the slopes of the range comprising the Turzovka highlands and the Javorníky and White Carpathian mountains, and the Skalica border crossing.

The application includes the country's name, since the delimited geographical area concerned accounts for more than 80 % of the territory of the Slovak Republic, the total area of which is 49 035 km², making it one of the smallest EU Member States and one whose area is comparable to that of certain individual regions in other Member States. 'Slovenský oštiepok' is produced in the same way throughout this delimited area, where the same breeds of sheep, i.e. *Wallachian*, *Improved Wallachian* and *Tsigai*, and of cows, i.e. the Slovakian Simmental, Black Pied, Red Pied and Pinzgau, are grazed on pastureland with the same flora of red fescue, tall fescue, Kentucky bluegrass and golden oatgrass and under the same climatic conditions, with the result that the quality of the basic raw ingredient of sheep's and cow's milk is uniform.

The production of 'Slovenský oštiepok' is historically linked to this area.

Written records and the family records of old *bryndza* cheese producers testify that 'Slovenský oštiepok' was produced as far back as the beginning of the 18th century.

The foundations for mass industrial production of 'Slovenský oštiepok' using cow's milk were laid by the Galbavý family in Detva in 1921.

To this day 'Slovenský oštiepok' cheeses are produced on traditional *salaš* sheep farms as well as at other farms, the basic raw material being sheep's milk or a mixture of sheep's and cow's milk.

The industrial production methods used in dairies, where the production principle has been retained, were developed in the 60s and 70s, which is also when the use of cow's milk as a raw material began.

The specific and exceptional quality of 'Slovenský oštiepok' is evidenced by the fact that the name 'Slovenský oštiepok' has been listed since 22 November 1967 in the 'Lisbon Agreement for the Protection of Appellations of Origin and their International Registration' in the international register of the World Industrial Property Organisation (OMPI/WIPO), located in Geneva, and by the following bilateral agreements: the Treaty of 19 January 1976 between the Swiss Confederation and the Socialist Republic of Czechoslovakia on the protection of indications of source, appellations of origin and other geographic names, the Agreement between the Government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the Government of the Republic of Portugal of 18 May 1987 on the protection of designations of origin, data of origin and other geographical and analogous indications, and the Agreement between the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the Republic of Austria of 20 January 1981 on protection of designations of origin, data of origin and other indications of agricultural and industrial products.

At the time, Slovakia was part of Czechoslovakia, which split on 1 January 1993 to become two independent States: the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic.

It follows from the above that the use at the time of the name 'Slovenský oštiepok' had nothing to do with a country, but referred to a particular piece of territory that then became a country following the historic events leading up to 1 January 1993. Moreover, because this was a name that was already in use and one that is internationally registered and protected, protected at national level and universally known to consumers, the Slovak Republic is now applying to have the name 'Slovenský oštiepok' protected at European Community level as well.

Production continues and there has been no change in either the natural conditions or the geographical area originally delimited; the name now refers to a country in its own right, but the production conditions and principles remain the same.

- 4.4. *Proof of origin:* The sheep's and cow's milk used to make 'Slovenský oštiepok' is produced exclusively in the delimited mountainous area in the Slovak Republic. Small producers obtain sheep's and cow's milk from their own livestock. Dairies purchase sheep's and cow's milk in the regions surrounding them.

The production and purchase of sheep's and cow's milk is registered and controlled. Registration is required in accordance with not only the obligations under the GHP (good hygiene practice) and HACCP (hazard analysis and critical control points) systems, but also the legal obligation of every producer to prove the origin of any raw material used to produce foodstuffs.

The traceability of 'Slovenský oštiepok' constitutes one of the basic principles of the HACCP system, which must be established in all production units.

All stages of production take place within the delimited area.

Identification of the product is ensured by means of either the producer's name on the packaging or the data plate which every producer must affix to the product. The guarantee that the product originates in the delimited area is the fact that the producer's operations are located within the precisely delimited geographical area where 'Slovenský oštiepok' may be produced.

- 4.5. *Method of production:* The technique used to produce 'Slovenský oštiepok' within the delimited area in the Slovak Republic has developed dramatically between the time long ago, when it was produced by hand at a *salaš* or in the home, and now, with modern production in industrial dairies. The production principles and the guarantee of maintenance of traditional quality were established by the results of research carried out in the 60s and 70s.

'Slovenský oštiepok' is produced using sheep's milk obtained from grazing sheep, particularly the *Wallachian*, *Improved Wallachian* and *Tsigai* breeds. These breeds are reared and graze in mountainous areas on mountain slopes within the delimited area.

Small producers obtain cow's milk by hand or mechanically and process it immediately after milking.

On-farm production of 'Slovenský oštiepok' — at a *salaš*, the stages involved are as follows:

- curdling,
- shaping,
- salting,
- drying, smoking.

Industrial production of 'Slovenský oštiepok' — the stages involved are as follows:

- pasteurisation,
- addition of cultures,
- curdling,
- curd stretching, pressing, acidification,
- steaming, shaping,
- salting, drying, smoking.

Dispatch and packing

The cooled cheeses are placed in hygienic food packaging. They are packaged whole to ensure that their characteristic shape and decorations are retained (which would not be the case if they were cut and then packed) and that the quality is preserved, the product is not adulterated and consumers are not deceived. All stages of production take place within the delimited geographical area.

- 4.6. *Link*: 'Slovenský oštiepok' is a product whose special nature is determined in particular by the quality of the milk, the specific characteristics of the original culture and the natural microflora afforded by the soil and climatic conditions of the regions where the sheep are reared and grazed within the delimited area in the Slovak Republic.

Pastures provide the most natural and healthy feed. The best pastures available are the dry pastures in the high mountain locations. Sheep-grazing lasts from April until the end of October. Pastures within the delimited area are covered mainly with the following species of grass: red fescue, tall fescue, Kentucky bluegrass and golden oatgrass. In winter the sheep are fed with hay derived from the above-mentioned species of grass.

Both of the original Slovak cultures used to produce 'Slovenský oštiepok', which were isolated from sheep's milk and sheep's cheese from Slovak *salaš* sheep farms, are available to producers and may be obtained from the Dairy Research Institute in Žilina, which is the originator and owner of these original cultures.

Cows are also grazed and fed mainly on hay and cereals from the delimited area.

The grounds for the application for registration of a geographical indication for 'Slovenský oštiepok' lie in both its reputation, exceptional nature, specific quality, characteristics and remarkable shape, and the skill of its producers and the traditions behind it. The specific quality and characteristics of the product are imparted by the quality of the milk obtained from the *Wallachian*, *Improved Wallachian* and *Tsigai* breeds of sheep and from the Slovakian Simmental, Black Pied, Red Pied and Pinzgau breeds of cows that graze in mountainous areas on mountain slopes within the delimited area. The quality of the product is determined by the skills and expertise of the producers, which is also evidenced by the recognition of the product and its entry since 1967 in the international register of the World Industrial Property Organisation (OMPI/WIPO) located in Geneva and by the bilateral agreement comprising the Treaty of 19 January 1976 between the Swiss Confederation and the Socialist Republic of Czechoslovakia on the protection of indications of source, appellations of origin and other geographic names.

'Slovenský oštiepok' is characterised by its remarkable shape, that of a large egg, pine cone or ellipsoid, and is decorated according to the practices and with the typical designs of the individual area in which it is produced. The surface of 'Slovenský oštiepok' is firm, smooth and shiny. Subsequent smoking gives the product its typical colour, aroma and taste. This special process originated in and is carried out throughout the entire delimited area.

The export of 'Slovenský oštiepok' also has a significant impact on and boosts tourism. The cheeses and cheese products typical to the Slovak Republic are part of what makes Slovakia Slovak. The more discerning foreign visitor is turning away from standard travel agency packages in favour of something more unusual and distinctive.

Tourists have traditionally associated the Slovak Republic with traditional cheese products, which are good for the country's image; 'Slovenský oštiepok' and other cheese products are one of the reasons why tourists come back to the country and seek out shepherd-style restaurants and traditional *salaš* sheep farms.

'Slovenský oštiepok' is ever-present at the fairs (annual markets) that are organised each year in Slovak cities and towns.

- 4.7. *Inspection body*: Quality control and checks on compliance with the specification for 'Slovenský oštiepok' are carried out regularly by BEL/NOVAMANN International s.r.o., CERTEX certification body, accredited in accordance with EN 45011, under the authorisation of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Slovak Republic.

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- 4.8. *Labelling*: Any producer who makes 'Slovenský oštiepok' within the delimited area in accordance with this specification is entitled to use the name 'Slovenský oštiepok' when labelling, advertising and marketing the product. Labels affixed to the product must bear the name 'Slovenský oštiepok' prominently and state whether the product is hand-made or factory-made and, where appropriate, the percentage of sheep's and cow's milk.
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