

Publication of an application for registration pursuant to Article 50(2)(b) of Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council on quality schemes for agricultural products and foodstuffs

(2015/C 156/08)

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⁾.

PRODUCT SPECIFICATION OF A TRADITIONAL SPECIALITY GUARANTEED

‘HOLLANDSE MAATJESHARING’/‘HOLLANDSE NIEUWE’/‘HOLLÄNDISCHER MATJES’

EC No: NL-TSG-0007-01178 — 06.11.2013

1. Name(s) to be registered

Registration is sought for the following names: ‘Hollandse maatjesharing’/‘Hollandse Nieuwe’.

Registration is also sought for the name ‘Holländischer Matjes’ in German.

2. Type of product

Class 1.7. Fresh fish, molluscs and crustaceans and products derived therefrom

3. Grounds for registration

3.1. Whether the product

- ☒ results from a mode of production, processing or composition corresponding to traditional practice for that product or foodstuff
- ☐ is produced from raw materials or ingredients that are those traditionally used.

3.2. Whether the name

- ☒ has been traditionally used to refer to the specific product
- ☐ identifies the traditional character or specific character of the product

The name ‘Hollandse maatjesharing’ is regarded as a collective name under which the traditional product caught during the period from 1 May to 31 August, i.e. the fishing season, is protected. ‘Hollandse maatjesharing’/‘Holländischer Matjes’ may be sold under that name either before or after 31 August of the fishing season.

The term ‘Hollandse Nieuwe’ is an established concept in the Netherlands and is an old traditional name which may be used only for the traditional product that is both caught and sold in the period from 1 May to 31 August of the current calendar year.

These names express the specific character of the product. They are used for maatjes (young immature) herring which has been gibbed or headed and then brined or dry-salted in the traditional Dutch way, as it has for centuries, and can be consumed after natural enzymatic ripening has taken place. The term ‘maatjesharing’ refers to the stage which the herring has reached in its biological development and denotes herring caught during the period from 1 May to 31 August of the current calendar year. ‘Maatje’ is a corruption of ‘maagdje’ (virgin): no roe or milt has formed by the time the herring is caught. The term ‘maatjesharing’ on its own therefore refers only to the raw material. The term ‘Hollandse’ refers to the traditional method of production associated with it, as maatjes herring may also be processed in other ways.

4. Description

4.1. Description of the product to which the name under point 1 applies, including its main physical, chemical, microbiological or organoleptic characteristics showing the product’s specific character (Article 7(2) of this Regulation)

‘Hollandse maatjesharing’ is the name used for herring (*Clupea harengus*) which is at least three years old. It is a slim, rather small fish with one short fin on its deep blue back. Its bones are soft. Other characteristics of this herring are as follows:

- small reproductive organs (3-8 mm in length),
- roe or milt not visible to the naked eye,

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 343, 14.12.2012, p. 1.

- bright red ovaries; reddish/grey testes,
- translucent white fatty layer,
- white flesh,
- fresh, salty, more or less ripe smell,
- meat of tender and fatty consistency,
- creamy, slightly salty, delicate taste.

Specificity

The specificity of 'Hollandse maatjesharing'/'Hollandse nieuwe'/'Holländischer Matjes' derives from a number of its characteristic features, namely:

- the specific character of the maatjes herring used as the raw material,
- the traditional Dutch way of gibbing or heading the fish and brining and ripening it.

'Hollandse maatjesharing'/'Hollandse nieuwe'/'Holländischer Matjes' owes its specific characteristics to the combination of the raw material used and the traditional processing method.

'Hollandse maatjesharing'/'Hollandse nieuwe'/'Holländischer Matjes' differs from buckling in that the latter is made from whole herring which contains milt or roe and is smoked and salted. Buckling is brined or salted and then dried and smoked. The herring is smoked at a temperature of not more than 25 °C, whereas in the case of 'Hollandse maatjesharing'/'Hollandse nieuwe'/'Holländischer Matjes' it is gibbed or headed and then brined and frozen. The milt and roe present in buckling is a real delicacy for connoisseurs. The maatjes herring used for 'Hollandse maatjesharing'/'Hollandse nieuwe'/'Holländischer Matjes' contains negligible amounts of milt or roe.

'Hollandse maatjesharing'/'Hollandse nieuwe'/'Holländischer Matjes' differs from pickled herring or rollmops in that the latter are made from herring which have spent their milt or laid their eggs and are too small to be made into 'Hollandse maatjesharing'/'Hollandse nieuwe'/'Holländischer Matjes'. A rollmop is a filleted pickled herring rolled up around a gherkin and small onions, this being held together by a small skewer.

4.2. Description of the production method of the product to which the name under point 1 applies that the producers must follow including, where appropriate, the nature and characteristics of the raw materials or ingredients used, and the method by which the product is prepared (Article 7(2) of this Regulation)

As stated in point 4.1, 'Hollandse maatjesharing'/'Hollandse nieuwe'/'Holländischer Matjes' is caught at the beginning of the fishing season (May to August) and is processed using one of the methods described below.

Selection of maatjes herring

After being caught, the herring is checked to verify the characteristics specified in point 4.1. The fatty layer is checked to verify that it is translucent white. In order to check the colour of the reproductive organs, the herring has to be cut open.

If the sample does not provide sufficient evidence of being a suitable maatjes herring, the herring is used for some other purpose.

Processing

All processing, comprising gibbing, brining and ripening, is carried out in the traditional Dutch manner:

After being caught, maatjes herring must be gibbed or headed. This may be done at sea or onshore.

Gibbing involves removing the herring's gills and its viscera, except for the pancreas. Gibbing is increasingly being automated but may also still be carried out using a special knife. This allows the blood to drain from the fish effectively, and ensures that its flesh is white. The pancreas produces an enzyme which aids the herring's digestion. After the herring dies, the enzyme causes the proteins in the fish to change, thus setting in motion the enzymatic ripening which gives 'Hollandse maatjesharing' its very particular taste, smell and texture. Ripening entails autolytic conversion of fatty fish meat by pancreatic enzymes.

Heading produces the same result. This involves cutting off the whole head, whereas, when a herring is gibbed, the head is left attached to the fish.

Both techniques are equally effective in terms of the ripening process.

Ripening process

Gibbed or headed herrings are ripened in brine. This may be done in the following ways:

dry salt is scattered over the fish, drawing moisture and blood from it, thus forming a natural brine;

salt is dissolved in water to make brine, into which maatjes herring is then placed. Seawater with added salt may also be used as a saline solution.

The salt does not need to meet any special requirements. Brining marks the start of the ripening process. In order to obtain the final product, the maatjes herrings ripen for between four hours and four days, depending on the size, weight and fat content of the fish, in vats, pails or tubs of brine in line with market preferences, with large herrings remaining in the brine for longer than small herrings. The salt slows down the ripening, so that 'Hollandse maatjesharing'/'Hollandse nieuwe'/'Holländischer Matjes' can be kept for long periods without its properties (taste) changing.

There are three different processing methods:

1. gibbing at sea, the herring being gibbed and brined/salted at sea in order to start the ripening period immediately. The herring is then frozen;
2. onshore gibbing, the herring being kept cool in sea water and landed immediately after being caught, after which it is gibbed/headed and brined/salted, ripened and frozen;
3. the herring is first frozen (without any processing or grading) and then thawed onshore in order to be gibbed/headed and brined or dry-salted, after which the ripening period begins.

All these methods yield good 'Hollandse maatjesharing'/'Hollandse nieuwe'/'Holländischer Matjes'.

The freezing of the herring is mandatory pursuant to Regulation (EC) No 853/2004.

'Hollandse maatjesharing'/'Hollandse nieuwe'/'Holländischer Matjes' may be sold either filleted or unfilleted. 'Hollandse maatjesharing'/'Hollandse nieuwe'/'Holländischer Matjes' may be filleted either by hand or by machine after a ripening process lasting between one and seven days at a temperature of 0–4 °C. In the case of gibbed fish, ripening may take place before and/or after freezing.

Checks

Fishmongers traditionally carry out the following checks on (ripened) 'Hollandse maatjesharing'/'Hollandse nieuwe'/'Holländischer Matjes':

1. smelling the 'Hollandse maatjesharing'/'Hollandse nieuwe'/'Holländischer Matjes' (which are generally in a pail); the fish must smell fresh, not rancid;
2. the brine must be of a good colour and clarity. The brine must be tasted. The salt and ripened product must not have an off taste;
3. feeling the 'Hollandse maatjesharing'/'Hollandse nieuwe'/'Holländischer Matjes'. This is done by moving the herring backwards and forwards between the fingers. The herring must have a firm structure yet feel tender;
4. one or two specimens are carefully removed from the pail, to be assessed by means of filleting. Their stomach contents are examined for plankton and the subcutaneous fat has to be assessed.

It is traditional for an assessment of the new catch to be demonstrated before the first vat is auctioned. But all fish merchants still assess their purchases of 'Hollandse maatjesharing'/'Hollandse nieuwe'/'Holländischer Matjes' in the same way.

In addition, spot checks are carried to verify that:

1. the name is being used correctly;
2. the catch date falls during the period from May to August;
3. the product has been gibbed/headed, brined and ripened.

4.3. Description of the key elements establishing the product's traditional character (Article 7(2) of this Regulation)

Traditional method of production

Historians are still debating whether it actually was Willem Beukelzoon of Biervliet who invented the herring gibbing process. Wierda, a historian who wrote a book about inventions and inventors, believed that it was, stating that:

The practice of salting herring and other fish was developed just 300 years ago by a fisherman, one Willem Beukelsen of Biervliet, [...] a town on the Flemish mainland. He would first gib the herring and then salt them in barrels, in which state they would be unloaded. He died in 1397 and had two gibbing knives in his coat of arms. He became famous and his grave is still pointed out by local residents. Emperor Charles V, who was partial to herring, [...] held the memory of this man in honour and so in 1556 did therefore make his way to Biervliet with his sister, Maria, Queen of Hungary, and the Queen of France to visit his grave and bless his soul.' (Wierda, Naauwkeurige Verhandelinge van de eerste Uytvindingen en Uytvindens, 1733)

Whether or not it really was Beukelzoon who invented the herring gibbing process, or whether it was developed by different people independently in various places, is irrelevant. In those days, nobody knew anything about enzymatic effects and so the value of the invention would not in fact have been understood. Gibbing used to take place mainly onshore (A. de Boer, W. Klootwijk. *Haring en zijn maatjes* 2004).

Herring fishing in the Middle Ages was initially dominated by the then Danish region of Scania (Skåne). The year 1384, however, marked a turning point in the history of the herring. On the annual Hansa Day, the Hanseatic cities refused to provide any more services to Dutch fishing boats. This resulted in successful herring fishing shifting to Holland. For Dutch herring fishermen, who were no longer welcome in Scania, or in England, the only alternative was to process herring on board their boats whilst at sea. The Dutch thus perfected their product, the quality of which eventually surpassed that of Scanian herrings:

The fact that the Dutch were forced by circumstances to clean and salt herring on board immediately after the fish had been caught is likely to have considerably improved its quality and durability.' (Stam, Haring een liefdesgeschiedenis 2011)

In his book, Stam stressed the importance of salting. Salt has the effect of inhibiting the growth of bacteria and has played a major role in enhancing the herring's keeping qualities. Salting meant that boats could stay longer at sea without the fish spoiling. It is the 'cleaning', or rather the gibbing, that ultimately makes 'Hollandse maatjesharing'/'Hollandse nieuwe'/'Holländischer Matjes' such a unique product. The Dutch word for gibbing is derived from a word that means 'gills', and 'gibbing' is the action of removing the viscera. What is special about gibbing is that the viscera are not removed completely, as happens in the case of gutting. This difference is crucial: in the case of 'Hollandse maatjesharing'/'Hollandse nieuwe'/'Holländischer Matjes', the key factor is that the pancreas is left in the fish. This digestive gland contains enzymes that break down proteins and help ripen the meat of the fish. In spring, maatjes herring is full of enzymes. The invention of gibbing, combined with salting, made it possible to use bigger boats and more distant fishing grounds became accessible. As a result, more fish could be caught and landed. This led to increased prosperity (Stam, 2011).

The renown of Dutch herring fishermen was due to their switching from onshore gibbing to gibbing at sea as a result of the ban imposed in 1384. When Dutch fishermen were no longer welcome in Scania, they gibbed herring at sea and this was then salted in barrels. Herring that is gibbed at sea drains of blood more effectively, which is a big advantage. Herring that is gibbed onshore drains of blood less effectively, as the blood has already clotted. Connoisseurs can always tell from a herring if it has been gibbed onshore or at sea. The gibbing of herring at sea marked a turning point in herring fishing and the Netherlands did very well out of it. From 1450 onwards, the industry was to develop into the 'buss fisheries', from 1567 known as the 'Great Fisheries', a large-scale commercial herring fishing enterprise (Stam 2011). For many decades, until 1857, Schiedam, Vlaardingen and Maas-luis (known as 'the three towns on the Maas') enjoyed a monopoly as far as gibbing was concerned.

Traditional raw material

In the late 1970s, falling stocks led to the introduction of a ban on fishing for North Sea herring. Wholesalers from the Netherlands then moved to Denmark. The Danes fished in the Skagerrak for a type of herring very similar to the North Sea maatjes herring. Gibbing and ripening was still unknown to the Danes at that time. The Dutch applied their own tried and tested treatment techniques to the herring in Jutland. Herring fishing in the North Sea was permitted again after 1983, albeit on a limited scale. However, the Dutch continued to buy and process Danish herring. It is still the same North Sea herring as that which used to be fished by so many Dutch boats. Some years later, Dutch herring traders extended their operations to Norway and, to a lesser degree, to Scotland. Flag Day (Vlaggetjesdag) is celebrated in the Netherlands. This used to be the day before the herring fleet left port; now it marks the arrival of 'Hollandse maatjesharing'/'Hollandse nieuwe'/'Holländischer Matjes'. The first publicity for Flag Day was issued in 1947. The departure of the fleet had a symbolic meaning and was a source of optimism for poorer sections of the population. The arrival of 'Hollandse maatjesharing'/'Hollandse nieuwe'/'Holländischer Matjes' signified the advent of better times, and Flag Day symbolised this.
