

OTHER ACTS

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Publication of an application for registration of a name 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

(2019/C 225/05)

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⁾ within three months from the date of this publication.

SINGLE DOCUMENT

'Paški sir'**EU No: PDO-HR-02397 — 10.4.2018****PDO (X) PGI ()****1. Name(s)**

'Paški sir'

2. Member State or Third Country

Croatia

3. Description of the agricultural product or foodstuff**3.1. Type of product**

Class 1.3. Cheeses

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

'Paški sir' is a hard sheep's cheese produced from whole sheep's milk from the island of Pag's native breed of sheep. The product is matured for at least 60 days before being marketed and has the following physico-chemical and organoleptic characteristics:

— shape: cylindrical, with a flat base and a flat or slightly convex upper surface;

— size: diameter of 18 cm to 24 cm, height of 7 cm to 13 cm;

— weight: from 1,8 kg to 3,5 kg depending on the size of the cheese;

— dry matter: at least 55 %;

— fat in dry matter: at least 45 %;

— rind: smooth and hard, with a golden yellow to pale reddish-brown colour;

— paste: compact, weakly elastic, easy to cut, dense texture, with no or very few small irregular holes, pale yellow in colour; it loses elasticity as it matures and the colour becomes darker in tone;

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 343, 14.12.2012, p. 1.

— taste: slightly sharp and sweet, becoming sharper as it matures;

— aroma: typical of sheep's cheeses with hints of aromatic herbs.

'Paški sir' cheese may also be smaller than the standard size; in this case it is matured for at least 60 days before being marketed and has the following physical and organoleptic characteristics:

— size: diameter of 9 cm to 14 cm, height of 6 cm to 12 cm;

— weight: from 0,6 kg to 1,2 kg;

— the other characteristics are the same as those of the standard cheese.

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

Feed

The sheep spend the whole year on pastures where they graze or feed on coarse fodder produced in the 'Paški sir' production area. In both summer and winter, in the event that the sheep cannot satisfy all their nutritional needs by grazing and feeding on coarse fodder produced in the 'Paški sir' production area, their diet is supplemented with coarse fodder and concentrated feed produced outside this area. The quantity of feed produced outside the area may not exceed 50 % of the dry matter consumed by the sheep over the year.

The sheep's daily feed ration during the milking period, which lasts around 130 days, consists mainly of coarse fodder (herbage and hay) and may also contain concentrated feed (wheat, barley, maize, soya) and compounds thereof. Coarse fodder provides at least 83 % of the total dry matter in the ration and, where concentrated feed is added, the latter makes up a maximum of 17 % of the dry matter in the ration. At least 65 % of the total coarse fodder in the ration must come from the 'Paški sir' geographical production area, which corresponds to 54 % of the total dry matter in the daily ration; the remaining 35 % may be obtained from outside the 'Paški sir' geographical production area. Concentrated feed (wheat, barley, maize, soya) and compounds thereof are all sourced outside the 'Paški sir' geographical production area.

Only well-dried hay of meadow grass, perennial legumes or clover/grass mixture, not older than one year and with well-preserved foliage, may be used as the coarse fodder obtained from outside the 'Paški sir' geographical production area.

It is forbidden to use ensiled feed and brewer's spent grain.

The need to obtain feed from outside the 'Paški sir' geographical production area first arose in the second half of the last century. In the 1960s, due to the reputation that 'Paški sir' already had even then, farmers began selectively breeding sheep for milk. The focus of breeding Pag sheep was on increasing the quantity and quality of the milk, i.e. boosting milk yield, which led to an increased need for feed during the 1980s; due to the limited pasture and meadow areas available on the island of Pag, this could not be produced entirely in the production area. Feed shortages occurred particularly in years of drought. As a result, Pag sheep farmers first started to purchase coarse fodder from neighbouring mainland areas and, as milk production grew, gradually introduced concentrated feed into the ration during the lactation period.

Raw material

'Paški sir' is made from raw or heat-treated whole sheep's milk from the island of Pag's native breed of sheep, animal rennet or other coagulating enzymes of microbiological origin and sea salt produced in the production area. The use of milk starter cultures, lysozyme and calcium chloride is also permitted.

Milk which is not processed within six hours of milking is cooled to a temperature below 6 °C and processed within 48 hours of milking.

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

All stages in the production of 'Paški sir', from production and renneting of the milk to moulding, pressing, salting and maturing of the cheese, must take place within the geographical area referred to in point 4.

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

'Paški sir' cheese is marketed whole or in portions packaged in a vacuum or in a modified atmosphere. Cheeses weighing less than 1,2 kg may only be marketed whole. 'Paški sir' that has been matured for more than 12 months is also marketed in grated form.

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

The finished product placed on the market must bear the name 'Paški sir', which must stand out more clearly than any other inscription in terms of the size, type and colour of the letters. Besides the name, the product must bear the common symbol of 'Paški sir', as shown below.



All users of the protected designation of origin 'Paški sir' who produce the product in accordance with its specification have the right to use the common symbol, under the same conditions.

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

'Paški sir' cheese is produced on the island of Pag and the two islets of Maun and Škrda.

5. **Link with the geographical area**

The specific characteristics and quality of 'Paški sir' are due to the specific environmental conditions in the production area, including the plant composition of pastures and the long tradition of sheep farming and production of sheep's cheese.

'Paški sir' cheese is produced on the island of Pag, which geologically falls within the karst area, where land is barely cultivable. The dominant karst relief and Mediterranean climate have influenced the characteristics of the plant cover and the development of sheep farming as the main agricultural activity. Pag has much less vegetation (in particular tall plants) than the other large Adriatic islands, so much of its land cover is dominated by karst pastures, which are very important for farming on the island as they account for 90 % of total agricultural land.

Recent floristic and phytocenological scientific research into the most common compositions of pastures on the island of Pag have identified 331 species of vascular flora, most of which belong to the Mediterranean floristic element. The specific natural conditions primarily favour the growth of the typical flora of Mediterranean grasslands. A large proportion of aromatic and medicinal plants can therefore be found on most of the island's pastures, such as yarrow (*Achillea millefolium* L.), wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium* L.), fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare* Mill.), immortelle (*Helichrysum italicum* Roth G. Don), St John's Wort (*Hypericum officinalis* L.), mint (*Mentha* sp.), rue (*Ruta graveolens* L.), thyme (*Thymus vulgaris* L.) and sage (*Salvia officinalis* L.).

Centuries of sheep selection on the island of Pag have created the native breed of sheep, Pag sheep, which is almost exclusively bred on the island of Pag and which is unmatched in its ability to exploit the scarce vegetation of the rocky pastures and fully adapted to the semi-extensive farming method, in which milk production is largely determined by environmental factors (Ivica Ljubičić et al., 'Florni sastav ovčarskih pašnjaka otoka Paga' [Floristic composition of the sheep pastures of the island of Pag], *Mljekarstvo* journal 62(4), Zagreb, 2012).

The specific method of rearing Pag sheep is based on the sheep spending the whole day on the pastures and consuming aromatic and medicinal plants; this is reflected not only in the quantity of milk produced but also in its chemical composition and processing properties (Neven Antunac et al., 'Utjecaj paragenetskih čimbenika na proizvodnju i kemijski sastav mlijeka paških ovaca' [Influence of paragenetic factors on production and chemical composition of Paška sheep milk], *Mljekarstvo* journal 61(3), Zagreb, 2011). Because the sheep are reared outdoors, the cheese never has a 'barnyard' aroma.

The tradition of producing 'Paški sir' is as long as that of breeding Pag sheep; it developed because of the harsh living conditions, which meant that the islanders needed to make use of surplus milk and preserve it for later use. For the inhabitants of the island of Pag, the cheese represented first and foremost a reserve of fats and proteins after the milking season, but also a valuable food product which could be traded. The first mention of sheep's cheese production on the island of Pag can be found in the *Nuovo dizionario geografico universale* [New universal geographical dictionary], printed in 1831 in Venice. However, it is considered that the production of 'Paški sir' as we know it today began around 1870. The first records of the method of producing 'Paški sir' on family farms date back to 1912 when Ljudevit Tejkal mentions it in the book *Sirarstvo u Dalmaciji* [Cheesemaking in Dalmatia]. In his book *Ovčje mlijeкарство* [Sheep milk production], 1947, Nikola Zdanovski states that: Pag sheep are widely known, not only for their excellent wool and the tasty meat of the lambs, but also for 'Paški sir'.

The characteristic composition of the pasture flora on the island of Pag influences the specific composition of the sheep's milk in terms of fat, protein, sugar and mineral content and other specific compounds which ultimately contribute to the cheese's typical aroma of Mediterranean aromatic herbs and its intense taste and sharpness. Also contributing to the rounded aroma and 'umami' flavour is succinic acid, which, of the ten sheep's cheeses from the wider region analysed, can only be found in 'Paški sir' and, in smaller quantities, in Travnik/Vlašić cheese (Jasmina Havranek et al., *Atlas ovčjih sireva zemalja zapadnog Balkana* [Atlas of sheep's cheeses in the Western Balkans], Zagreb, 2012).

Specific aromas are transferred from the local plants to 'Paški sir' mainly thanks to the sheep rearing and cheese-making skills that the local family farms have been perfecting and passing on from generation to generation from time immemorial. The persistence of the aromatic complexity, as well as many other characteristics of the cheese, depends on the traditional knowledge and skills of the island's cheesemakers during all stages of production.

The correct texture of 'Paški sir' depends largely on the temperature and duration of heating the chopped curds, which the master cheesemaker adjusts depending on the season, i.e. the temperature and relative humidity of the atmosphere when renneting takes place.

Given the relatively low weight of 'Paški sir', outside weather conditions have a large impact on the maturation process. In the past, it was not possible to control the conditions in the curing house and undesirable microflora would develop on the rind because of high humidity. As a result, cheesemakers occasionally washed the cheese manually and coated it with olive oil or some other vegetable oil. This process is still carried out to this day and substantially influences the characteristics of the cheese's rind, which is hard, smooth and golden yellow to pale reddish-brown in colour in mature cheeses. Oiling the cheese after washing, which the cheesemaker carries out at least four to six times during the maturation stage, also has a positive effect on the proper course of the enzymatic processes inside the cheese, as it reduces drying and prevents the proteolytic action of surface flora.

The texture and taste of 'Paški sir' depend on the length of the maturation period. Young cheese that has been matured for two months is weakly elastic, easy to cut and has no or very few sparsely distributed tiny round holes. The rind is soft enough to eat. Its taste is slightly sweet, moderately salty and pleasantly sharp, with the typical notes of sheep's cheeses. It has a pronounced and lasting aroma that is characteristic of the production area and reminiscent of Mediterranean aromatic and culinary herbs.

As it matures, 'Paški sir' gradually becomes sharper, its taste, aroma and colour increase in intensity and the paste becomes firmer in texture. Fully matured 'Paški sir' has been matured for 6 months or more; it has a fine granulated structure and breaks apart unevenly when cut. It has a sharp, harmoniously full taste and melts in the mouth, with 'crystals' perceived under the tongue.

The physical characteristics of 'Paški sir' are its relatively small size and weight (maximum 3,5 kg), reflecting the traditional production method that has historically been used on family farms with a relatively small number of sheep and thus with limited daily quantities of milk to be used to make cheese. Zdanovski states that 'Paški sir' was still being produced 'by hand', i.e. without the use of moulds, in the middle of the last century, leading to cheese of a smaller size.

Nowadays, 'Paški sir' is mainly produced by small family farms, which also rear the sheep. This ensures that the traditional method of production is passed down within families from generation to generation and that the specific identity of the cheese and its authenticity are guaranteed by a short production chain.

Many aspects of the traditional production method for 'Paški sir' were retained when it first started to be produced in a cheese dairy in 1971 and the process of pasteurising milk was introduced. This did not impair the specific taste and aroma of the cheese as the traditional production conditions of processing the curds and maturation were retained. There are no noticeable differences between cheese produced from raw milk and cheese produced from pasteurised milk, as the specific and distinctive taste and aroma of 'Paški sir' are determined by the composition of the Pag sheep's milk, which is determined by the natural environment in which the sheep live, i.e. the food they consume (Zdravko Barać et al., *Paška ovca — hrvatska izvorna pasmina* [Pag sheep - a native Croatian breed], Novalja, 2008). Three small cheese dairies that produce 'Paški sir' are continuing the tradition of a short production chain and, although they purchase some of the milk from local sheep farmers, they produce the rest using their own flock of sheep.

The many awards obtained at national and international exhibitions testify to the special quality of 'Paški sir'.

Reference to publication of the product specification

(the second subparagraph of Article 6(1) of this Regulation)

<https://poljoprivreda.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/arhiva/datastore/filestore/139/Specifikacija-Paski-sir.pdf>
