

Publication of an amendment 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

(2010/C 123/09)

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

AMENDMENT APPLICATION

COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 510/2006

Amendment application according to Article 9

'FONTINA'

EC No: IT-PDO-0117-0008-17.02.2005

PGI () PDO (X)

1. Heading in the product specification affected by the amendment:

- Name of product
- Description of product
- Geographical area
- Proof of origin
- Method of production
- Link
- Labelling
- National requirements
- Other (Feed)

2. Type of amendment(s):

- Amendment to Single Document or Summary Sheet
- Amendment to specification of registered PDO or PGI for which neither the Single Document nor Summary has been published

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 93, 31.3.2006, p. 12.

- Amendment to Specification that requires no amendment to the published Single Document (Article 9(3) of Regulation (EC) No 510/2006)
- Temporary amendment to Specification resulting from imposition of obligatory sanitary or phytosanitary measures by public authorities (Article 9(4) of Regulation (EC) No 510/2006)

3. Amendment(s):

3.1. Description of product:

The characteristics of the finished product are now described in greater detail. In particular:

- the diameter of the wheels has been increased by 5 cm in order to facilitate automatic cutting. The change to the diameter of the cheese does not affect the typical characteristics and commercial recognition of the finished product,
- the statement of the thickness of the rind being 'less than 2 mm' has been removed, as the thin rind is difficult to measure precisely,
- the term 'raw milk' has been included, but this is only a drafting amendment and does not affect on the characteristics of the finished product. 'Fontina' has always been produced from raw milk, as can be seen from the production technique, which does not involve pasteurisation or thermisation. This makes it possible to obtain a product in which the characteristics of the milk used are maintained unchanged, which helps give rise to the specific organoleptic characteristics of 'Fontina'.

3.2. Proof of origin:

Without prejudice to the elements demonstrating that 'Fontina' originates in the Valle d'Aosta region, as indicated in the documentation sent in 1993, some elements concerning proof of origin have been added such as:

- (a) The requirement for a casein label to be affixed to each wheel produced, containing an alpha-numeric code and a stylised image of a mountain, which unambiguously identify each Fontina wheel.
- (b) The use of identification stamps containing the abbreviation 'CTF' (*Consorzio Tutela Fontina*) and a numerical identification code for the producer. These are applied to one of the flat sides during the pressing stage. These stamps are provided by the CTF to all parties who operate in accordance with the product specification for 'Fontina' PDO.

3.3. Method of production:

The description of the method of production has been expanded. In particular:

- The specification provides for the use of cultures of indigenous enzymes. This is now standard practice and became necessary following the progressive reduction in the level of total microbial flora — and thus also of milk microbial flora — in the milk, a problem which is widely recognised at European level. The reduction of the total bacterial load is the result of technological and sanitary modernisation of the premises (cattle sheds, milk processing buildings). While this has brought about a welcome improvement in the hygiene standards of the milk, it has also reduced the presence of microbial flora which is useful in the cheese-making process). The enzymes used are carefully selected indigenous cultures of lactic acid bacteria that were previously naturally present in milk from Valle d'Aosta and in Fontina. Collection, selection and use of these enzymes began in the 1970s. Research was restarted and updated in 1992 and 2003 in the light of modern selection and freeze-drying techniques. While these indigenous milk enzymes

are not starters capable of substantially changing the milk coagulation processes, their use can help the cheese-making process without adversely affecting the typical characteristics of the product.

- It has been noted that the 1993 text did not correctly describe the pickling process. Therefore, to remove any possible doubt, some of the details of this operation have been clarified. Pickling may be carried out only within 24 hours of the cheese leaving the press and for a maximum period of 12 hours. The use of this technique, which is the final stage of processing, enables the initial microbiological stabilisation of the cheese to take place. It in no way adversely affects the final characteristics of the product, since the period for which the cheese remains in brine is extremely short and dry curing occurs in the next stage of ripening. Article 4(e) of the text sent in 1993 states that dry curing begins 'several days after the product has been worked', thereby confirming that the use of pickling as described above is an operation which is part of the processing stage.
- Point (f) of the document that gave rise to registration of the designation has been reworded. The purpose of the paragraph beginning 'Other elements that link "Fontina" with the geographical environment' was to give additional information so as to provide an image of the region aimed at highlighting a special connection with the culture of a people, the local cheese and the relevant geographical area, with historical references that in some cases still form part of the production method. This image could have created the impression that 'Fontina' is ripened exclusively in caves dug into the granitic rock, but this is not actually the case. Indeed, even before the denomination was registered, use was also made of ripening premises which, as their interior temperature and moisture conditions were the same as the ordinary caves, never interfered with the traditional production methods or the characteristics of the finished product.
- The use of these premises, where technologies are employed to create and maintain the ideal ripening conditions, is thus a consolidated practice which went hand in hand with the need to modernise the processing technology and does not adversely affect the other elements that have historically characterised the link between the area, the environment and the product, such as the milk and the cheese-making methods. The milk, which is produced in Valle d'Aosta only from cattle of the Valdostana breed, is enriched with essences and flavours from the pastures and forage of the geographical area and is then processed into 'Fontina' in full compliance with the traditional production methods and parameters.
- Slicing and packaging must take place in the production area so that the product retains its characteristics until it reaches the final consumer. 'Fontina' has a moist rind and a level of moisture of the flesh which are such that warehousing, storing and packaging are extremely delicate stages to be carried out within a short timescale, maintaining the ideal environmental conditions (temperature and moisture) and paying particular attention to how workers handle the wheels. Rapidly carrying out the various stages makes it possible to minimise the risk of mould developing on the crust or inside the cheese itself. Lastly, the development of mould, as well as discolouration of the rind as a result of the development of fungal mycelia, can easily undermine the integrity of the thin rind, thereby adversely affecting the properties of the cheese itself by leading to discoloration and a strong, unpleasant taste. These characteristics are not appreciated by consumers.

3.4. Labelling:

- The words 'Prodotto di montagna' and 'Produit de montagne' ('Mountain product' in Italian and French) for use on the label of the packaged product have been added to the specification, in order to further exploit the value of the mountain area of origin.

3.5. Other:

Feed

A new article has been added to the specification laying down provisions on how the cattle are fed, stating that the basis for their diet is hay and grass produced in Valle d'Aosta. The purpose of introducing a specific article was to make the product specification more detailed, as the previous version was vague.

SUMMARY

COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 510/2006**'FONTINA'****EC No: IT-PDO-0117-0008-17.02.2005****PDO (X) PGI ()**

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:

Name: Consorzio Produttori e Tutela della DOP Fontina
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E-mail: info@consorzioproduttori-fontina.it
Composition: All 'Fontina' producers and/or ripeners.

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:

'Fontina'

4.2. Description:

When it is released for consumption, 'Fontina' has the following physical, chemical, microbiological and organoleptic characteristics:

1. Physical characteristics:

Shape

(a) cylindrical, typically flattened

(b) flat sides

(c) originally concave heel, not always noticeable after ripening

Size

- (a) diameter between 35 and 45 cm
- (b) height between 7 and 10 cm
- (c) weight between 7,5 and 12 kg

Rind

- (a) firm, ranging from light to dark brown depending on how mature it is and the duration of ripening
- (b) soft or semi-hard as it becomes ripier
- (c) thin

Flesh

- (a) springy and soft, varying according to the period of production
- (b) characteristic holes throughout the cheese wheel
- (c) colour ranging from ivory white to straw yellow of varying intensity

2. Chemical properties: the fat percentage must be at least 45 % of dry matter.
3. Microbiological properties: high content of live lactic cultures.
4. Organoleptic properties: the cheese melts in the mouth and has a characteristic sweet, delicate flavour that becomes stronger as the cheese ripens.

4.3. *Geographical area:*

The production, ripening and cutting area for 'Fontina' cheese is the entire territory of Valle d'Aosta.

4.4. *Proof of origin:*

The elements concerning proof of origin are as follows:

- (a) the requirement for a casein label to be affixed to each wheel produced, containing an alpha-numeric code and a stylised image of a mountain, which unambiguously identifies each Fontina wheel;
- (b) the use of identification stamps containing the abbreviation 'CTF' (*Consorzio Tutela Fontina*) and a numerical identification code for the producer. These are applied to one of the flat sides during the pressing stage.

These stamps are provided by the CTF to all parties who operate in accordance with the product specification for 'Fontina' PDO.

4.5. *Method of production:*

The milk that is processed to produce 'Fontina' must be produced in Valle d'Aosta and be raw, whole and come from a single milking of cattle from the Valdostana breed (Pezzata Rossa, Pezzata Nera, Castana).

The diet of the dairy cows must be made up of hay and grass produced in Valle d'Aosta. In addition to the grass and hay, feed concentrates may be used. The composition of the compound feedingstuffs must be essentially cereals and nucleus proteins. It is forbidden to use grass silage, fermented feed or other feed with characteristics that are not appropriate to 'Fontina' production (e.g. animal protein, animal and plant meal and oils, seeds, roots, vegetables, fruit, industrial by-products, nitrogen sources, antibiotics, hormones and/or stimulants, fermentation media, silica, chemically treated straw, fresh or dry bread).

Before coagulation, the milk must not have been heated to a temperature exceeding 36 °C. Cultures of indigenous lactic acid bacteria (enzymes) — which are stored under the responsibility of the *Consorzio Produttori e Tutela dalla DOP Fontina*, which freely releases them to all 'Fontina' PDO producers — may be added to the milk.

The milk coagulates in copper or steel vats with the addition of calf rennet. The procedure must take place at a temperature between 34 °C and 36 °C and last at least 40 minutes. The curds are then broken, with the next stage being stirring over a fire at a temperature between 46 °C and 48 °C. After standing for a period of not less than 10 minutes, the cheese mass is extracted and wrapped in fabric cloths. The cheese mass must be placed in the typical concave heel moulds, which are then stacked and pressed. When they are turned over for the first time, a casein label must be applied. This must contain an identification code for the cheese wheel and the identifying logo for the product, so as to guarantee traceability and comprehensive monitoring of the origin of the product. Before the final pressing stage, the identification label giving the producer number assigned by the *Consorzio* must be applied. The pressing stage continues until the production stages. During the pressing stage, the cheese wheels must be turned over so as to facilitate the draining of the cheese. Within 24 hours of pressing being completed, the cheeses may be pickled for a maximum period of 12 hours by being placed in vats containing a salt water solution.

During the ripening process, the cheese wheels are taken off the shelf and turned over so that the side that was facing downwards can be salted with a light scattering of salt. Once the salt has dissolved, the cheese is taken out so that the side that had previously been salted and the heel can be rubbed down with brushes and a salt water solution. The cheese is then put back on the shelf in its original position.

Ripening must take place in store-rooms with a moisture level of at least 90 % and a temperature between 5 °C and 12 °C.

Lastly, it is important for the cutting and packaging stages to be carried out within the geographical area defined in point 4.3, so as to ensure that the product retains its characteristics until it reaches the final consumer. 'Fontina' has a moist rind and a level of moisture of the flesh which are such that warehousing, storing and packaging are extremely delicate procedures to be carried out within a short timescale, maintaining the ideal environmental conditions (temperature and moisture) and paying particular attention to how workers handle the wheels. Rapidly carrying out the various stages makes it possible to minimise the risk of mould developing on the crust or inside the cheese itself. Lastly, the development of mould, as well as discolouration of the rind as a result of the development of fungal mycelia, can easily undermine the integrity of the thin rind, thereby adversely affecting the properties of the cheese itself, leading to discoloration and a strong, unpleasant taste. These characteristics are not appreciated by consumers.

4.6. Link:

The geographical environment from which 'Fontina' originates and where it is produced is the unique mountain environment of the Valle d'Aosta, an Alpine valley with a specific climate, and with flora and fauna that are rarely found elsewhere. An indigenous breed of cattle, the Valdostana, is reared in this region. This breed has three characteristic features: its muscular and compact morphology which allows it to move to mountain pastures and directly consume the available forage, its capacity to make the most of the local hay forage and the fact that it produces ideal milk for traditional cheese production. The indigenous Valdostana breed thus makes it possible for the grass — the mountain area's abundant resource — to be transformed into an original cheese product. This interdependence is enhanced by the fact that the cattle all graze in mountainland in summer and in pastureland in autumn. The Valdostana breed and 'Fontina' cheese are a reflection of the environment that gave rise to them: the relationship between the three elements — environment, breed and cheese — is not hierarchical, but rather holistic. Indeed, the Valdostana breed and 'Fontina' are important guardians of the environment. The botanical

composition of the pastures and meadows (which is the result of the dry summer climate of this Alpine valley) and the biochemical uniqueness of the milk obtained from the Valdostana breed are thus the basis for 'Fontina' as a designation of origin.

Besides the hardiness of the indigenous breeds and the use of local forage, the link with the region is based on the following factors:

- the cheese-making techniques, which are part of the local tradition,
- the use of raw whole milk from a single milking (two milkings are carried out per day), to be delivered in as short a time as possible,
- the natural presence of bacterial flora and characteristic flavours (this is why the milk does not undergo thermisation during the initial cheese-making stages),
- the specific characteristics of the ripening process, which takes place at temperatures between 5 °C and 12 °C and relative humidity of at least 90 % up to saturation point.

4.7. *Inspection body:*

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4.8. *Labelling:*

The 'Fontina' logo is a circle in the centre of which is a stylised image of a mountain above the word 'Fontina'. Underneath this word is the abbreviation 'D.O.P.' inside an ellipse, while the circumference of the circle features the words 'Zona di produzione — Regione Autonoma Valle d'Aosta'.

When the product is sold in portions, the label must feature:

- the 'Fontina' logo, as described in above,
 - the Community logo,
 - the wordings 'Prodotto di montagna' and 'Produit de montagne'.
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