C/2025/4514

11.8.2025

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

(C/2025/4514)

Following this publication, the authorities of a Member State or of a third country, or a natural or legal person having a legitimate interest and established or resident in a third country, may lodge, in accordance with Article 17 of Regulation (EU) 2024/1143 of the European Parliament and of the Council [1] an opposition with the Commission within three months from the date of this publication.

SINGLE DOCUMENT

'Istarski ovčji sir / Istrski ovčji sir'

EU No: PDO-HR+SI-02859 – 4.8.2022

PDO (X) PGI ( )

1. **Name(s) (PDO)**

'Istarski ovčji sir / Istrski ovčji sir'

2. **Member State or Third Country**

Croatia and Slovenia

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

3.1. *Type of product*

Class 1.3. Cheeses

Combined Nomenclature code

— 04 – DAIRY PRODUCE; BIRDS' EGGS; NATURAL HONEY; EDIBLE PRODUCTS OF ANIMAL ORIGIN, NOT ELSEWHERE SPECIFIED OR INCLUDED

0406 – Cheese and curd

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

'Istarski ovčji sir / Istrski ovčji sir' is a hard, full-fat cheese obtained through the coagulation of raw or pasteurised sheep's milk using rennet, with the separation of the whey.

It may be placed on the market after at least 60 days of ripening, but no later than after 12 months of ripening, provided that it has the following characteristics:

— Dry matter: minimum 60 %.

— Fat in dry matter: minimum 45 %.

— Shape: cylindrical.

— Measurements: cylinder with a diameter of 16 cm to 22 cm and a height of 6 cm to 9 cm.

— Weight: between 1,8 kg and 4,5 kg, depending on the size of the cheese.

[1] Regulation (EU) 2024/1143 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024 on geographical indications for wine, spirit drinks and agricultural products, as well as traditional specialities guaranteed and optional quality terms for agricultural products, amending Regulations (EU) No 1308/2013, (EU) 2019/787 and (EU) 2019/1753 and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012 (OJ L, 2024/1143, 23.4.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1143/oj).

— Rind: smooth, with a yellow-brown to brown, uniform colour. It may be protected using a colourless polymer coating for cheese.

— Texture: slightly elastic but sliceable, to slightly crumbly.

— Cross-section: ivory to straw-coloured, generally closed, but may also have evenly distributed, irregular openings of up to 4 mm in size.

— Flavour and odour: a full flavour that provides a feeling of nutritiousness (fullness); salty and spicy, with a pronounced fragrant note of sheep's milk and the plant species on which the sheep feed. The long-aged cheeses melt in the mouth when consumed, and the flavours become stronger. With longer ageing, the cheese takes on a typically spicy, full and nutritious flavour, and the cheese's fragrant impression of sheep's milk is reinforced during ripening as a result of lipolysis and the release of short-chain fatty acids that are typical of sheep's milk and later of the cheese itself.

The cheese is best consumed within 12 months of being placed on the market.

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

Animal feed

The sheep feed by grazing on pastures, with a possible supplement of dehydrated clover, hay, a concentrated feed mix for dairy sheep, and cereals and meal. The use of a vitamin-mineral supplement is also permitted in feeding. The maximum proportion of concentrated feed mix allowed in the sheep's ration is 20 % of the total daily ration expressed in dry matter. Feed for the sheep may also be produced outside the production area, but only up to a maximum of 40 % of the total daily ration expressed in dry matter. The coarse part of the daily ration produced outside the area defined in point 4 may amount to a maximum of 20 % of the dry matter of the total daily ration, and may be used only in periods when there is a lack of coarse fodder due to bad weather conditions. This restriction ensures a sufficient representation of the local flora in the daily ration, which will give the product a characteristic aroma. It also allows sheep farmers to procure coarse fodder outside the production area in periods when bad weather conditions prevent them from producing sufficient feed for the animals.

It is forbidden to feed the sheep ensilaged fodder.

Raw materials

'Istarski ovčji sir / Istrski ovčji sir' is produced using raw or pasteurised milk obtained from sheep of any breed, provided that they are reared exclusively in the geographical area referred to in point 4.

Salt and rennet are also used in the production of the cheese; lysozyme and starter cultures may also be used.

The milk must be processed within 48 hours of milking and be cooled to a temperature of not more than 6 °C within a maximum of 2 hours.

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

All stages in the production of 'Istarski ovčji sir / Istrski ovčji sir' 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*

The traceability of each individual cheese wheel is based on a serial number entered on the casein mark, which is destroyed when the cheese is cut up, sliced or grated, breaking the traceability of the product and making it impossible to determine its origin. The producers themselves must therefore carry out the portioning, grating and packaging of the cheese, keeping the prescribed records to maintain and guarantee the traceability of the product and minimise the possibility of misuse of the protected designation of origin 'Istarski ovčji sir / Istrski ovčji sir'.

The portioning, grating and packaging of 'Istarski ovčji sir / strski ovčji sir' must take place within the geographical area referred to in point 4 in order to ensure the traceability and quality of the product, which is no longer in its original, complete form.

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

Before being placed on the market, the ripened cheese must be labelled with the product name 'Istarski ovčji sir' or 'Istrski ovčji sir', the graphic representation of which must be displayed more clearly in terms of the size, type and colour of the letters than any other inscription. The height of the letters of the other inscriptions must not exceed 70 % of the height of the letters of the product name.

In addition to the protected name, the product must also bear the common symbol shown below.



Only where the cheese is made exclusively from milk from the native breed of sheep of the geographical area of production, Istriana ('Istarska ovca' in Croatian, 'Istrska pramenka' in Slovenian), is it permitted to affix to the product the Croatian inscription '100 % mlijeko istarske ovce' or the Slovenian inscription '100 % mleko istrske pramenke' (both '100 % milk from Istriana sheep').

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

The geographical area of production of 'Istarski ovčji sir / Istrski ovčji sir' begins at the port of Preluk, on the border between the towns of Rijeka and Opatija. The boundary runs along the western administrative border of the towns of Opatija and Kastav and continues to the tripoint between Kastav, Matulji and Klana. The boundary continues along the border of the municipality of Matulji before reaching the Rupa-Novokračine road. It continues along the road towards Novokračine, passing through Zabiče to reach Podgraje. There, it leaves the road and continues northwards to Rakitni Hill (1 220 m), where it turns north-west and crosses trig point 1036 before arriving north of the village of Jurišće, which it bypasses to the north before reaching the Jurišće-Pivka road. It follows this road until just before the village of Palčje, which it bypasses to the north, returning to the road towards Pivka, which it continues along until it reaches the village of Klenik. At Klenik, it turns onto the road for Trnje, which it follows until it reaches Slovenska vas, which it bypasses to the north, before reaching the Pivka river in a north-westerly direction, following the river as far as Prestranek. At Prestranek, it reaches the road and follows it as far as Razdrto. From Razdrto, it continues along the road, passing through Senožeče, and before Divača turns south-west off the road, bypassing Divača to the south-west. After Divača, the boundary returns to the road, and when the road approaches the railway line, the boundary follows the railway line and crosses Kozina as far as the bend after Črnotiče railway station. From there, it continues west as far as the road for Osp. It follows the road through Osp as far as the Slovenian-Italian border.

The boundary continues west along the international border as far as the coastline, which it follows south back to the starting point at the port of Preluk.

The geographical area of production of 'Istarski ovčji sir / Istrski ovčji sir' also includes the following islands: Cres, Lošinj, V. Čutin, Trstenik, V. Orijule, M. Orijule, Sveti Petar, Ilovik, Susak, Koludrac, V. Srakane, M. Srakane, Unije, Zeča, Veruda, Veliki Brijun, Mali Brijun and Krasnica (Vanga).

5. **Link with the geographical area**

The specific characteristics and quality of 'Istarski ovčji sir / Istrski ovčji sir' are the result of the semi-extensive way in which the sheep are reared, the composition of the milk of the native Istriana (Istarska ovca/Istrska pramenka) breed of sheep, and the long tradition and skill of making sheep's cheese.

A common characteristic of the geographical area of production of 'Istarski ovčji sir / Istrski ovčji sir' is the karst geomorphology. Most of the area is covered by karst that developed on calcareous-dolomitic rocks, on which mainly shallow, poorly developed soils of poor to medium fertility were formed. In terms of climate, this area, with the exception of its pre-mountainous and mountainous part, is characterised by a mild sub-Mediterranean climate of hot, dry summers with average air temperatures in the two main summer months (July and August) above 21 °C. Mean annual precipitation ranges from 700 mm in the western coastal part to 1 000 mm on the islands and 1 400 mm in the pre-mountainous and mountainous part (State Meteorological and Hydrological Service, *Climate Atlas of Croatia 1971–2000*, Zagreb, pp. 37 and 52; Archive of Meteorological Data of the Slovenian Environment Agency).

In terms of relief, soil, geomorphology and climate, this area is covered with forests, arable land with a shallow, fertile layer of soil, but also natural grasslands with limited yields and a specific botanical composition comprising a large number of aromatic Mediterranean wild species. The specificity of the Istrian pastures lies in their 100 plants (91 species and 9 subspecies) from 80 genera and 24 families. Most of these plants belong to the families of sub-Mediterranean aromatic flowering plants *Gramineae* (19 %), *Compositae* (16 %) and *Leguminosae* (16 %), which are suitable for the semi-extensive rearing and grazing of sheep with combined production features (for their meat and milk) but have insufficient yields for rearing cattle with the same production features and purpose.

In the Istria area, cattle rather than horses were traditionally used to cultivate the land, and as a result they provided little milk and were not milked. To produce cheese, farmers therefore bred sheep, which yielded much higher quantities of milk due to the area's production conditions. Over time, the traditional propensity of Istrian farmers to produce sheep's milk resulted in the selection of the native breed of sheep that yields the most milk in Croatia and Slovenia: Istriana ('Istarska ovca' in Croatia, 'Istrska pramenka' in Slovenia).

The traditional method of nomadic sheep farming, with seasonal migrations of flocks from summer mountain pastures to coastal wintering grounds, survived in Istria until the 1960s, after which the semi-extensive farming system was gradually introduced that is still used today. By abandoning traditional agriculture and nomadic sheep farming owing to the rapid development of other economic activities – which led to significant social changes on the one hand, and to an increase in the milk yields of the Istriana sheep breed and the introduction of other dairy breeds, increasing the need for quality feed, on the other – Istria's sheep farmers have adapted the former system of sheep rearing to the new reality. The sheep still find a significant proportion of their coarse feed directly on the pastures, while the rest is obtained in the form of hay produced on meadows in the sheep-rearing area, ensuring that the feed is based on the local flora, which ultimately contributes to the specific aroma of 'Istarski ovčji sir / Istrski ovčji sir'. The sheep obtain the additional calories required for high milk production yields from the strictly limited amount of concentrated feed.

Sheep's milk is a very nutritious foodstuff, but it has a very short shelf life, and cheese production is the simplest way of 'preserving' its most valuable ingredients, particularly milk fat and milk proteins. Generally speaking, as a processed product, cheese has a much longer shelf life than milk, and the shelf life of the cheese itself depends on how it is produced and stored. Since Istria experiences predominantly hot and dry summers, throughout history Istria's sheep farmers have developed a method for producing a hard cheese that allows it to be stored and ripened for longer, at higher temperatures. The method for producing this type of cheese has been developed and refined by Istria's sheep farmers and cheesemakers over the generations, who have passed on their traditional know-how to the present day.

Cheesemakers generally carry out all stages of production themselves and have control over the entire production chain, from rearing the sheep, milking, and processing the milk, to ripening the cheese. The knowledge and skills of Istria's cheesemakers therefore go beyond those required just for processing the milk, and include those associated with sheep farming. Direct management of the milk production process, including feeding the sheep and ensuring they are in good condition and health, enables cheesemakers to provide high-quality raw materials for later use in the processing phase. While the sheep rearing and milk production phases were taken care of by male family members, the cheese was generally produced by the women, who used their experience over time to develop and

improve the technique for producing hard cheese. They paid particular attention to the process of cutting the curd into very small (pea-sized) pieces, which were then heated and dried. In olden times, before there were thermometers, when mixing the milk and curd by hand, the women would use their experience to determine the right temperature for removing the vat from the fire. They would then place the cheese grains, which were sufficiently chopped and dry, in moulds and subject them to pressing, the force and duration of which were also determined by experience, so as to separate the whey as soon as possible and begin the salting and ripening phases for production of the hard cheese.

To this day, 'Istarski ovčji sir / Istrski ovčji sir' is produced on the basis of experience gained by cheesemakers in the past. The size and dryness of the cheese grains are still evaluated empirically, and the pressing of the cheese is also carried out without the use of a pressure gauge.

Since there were no refrigerating appliances in the past, the cheese was traditionally stored in cellars that were well insulated from external temperature fluctuations and where a constant microclimate could be achieved. Under modern-day production conditions, 'Istarski ovčji sir / Istrski ovčji sir' may be stored and ripened for a lengthy period.

'Istarski ovčji sir / Istrski ovčji sir' is characterised by a high dry matter and salt content in the aqueous phase of the cheese, which means that it does not spoil even when stored at temperatures that are generally unsuitable for storing other types of cheese (up to 19 °C). The traditional storage of the cheese at higher temperatures leads to faster protein degradation into the final degradable products: free amino acids. As there is a link between the concentration of total free amino acids and the concentration of aromatic free amino acids in the cheese, it can be concluded that 'Istarski ovčji sir / Istrski ovčji sir' contains a significant concentration of free aromatic amino acids. The degradation of the free aromatic amino acids in the cheese during storage produces aromatic compounds (Paul McSweeney, Maria Sousa: *Biochemical pathways for the production of flavour compounds in cheeses during ripening: A review*. Le Lait, INRA Editions, 2000, 80 (3), pp. 293–324), while the high organic acid content gives the cheese a lower acidity, which additionally favours its durability and stability during storage. At the same time, there are no microbiological or biochemical changes that could result in the loss of desirable organoleptic properties of the cheese or endanger its wholesomeness (V. Magdić et al.: *A survey on hygienic and physicochemical properties of Istrian cheese*. Mljekarstvo, 63 (2), Zagreb, 2013, pp. 55–63).

For these reasons, 'Istarski ovčji sir / Istrski ovčji sir' has a very pronounced aroma as a result of the accumulation of aromatic compounds from the degradation of free aromatic amino acids, and a long shelf life as a result of the significant accumulation of organic acids. The pronounced aroma and specific quality of 'Istarski ovčji sir / Istrski ovčji sir' are evidenced by the numerous prizes and awards it has won in national competitions and fairs.

Reference to publication of the product specification

https://poljoprivreda.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/hrana/proizvodi_u_postupku_zastite-zoi-zozp-zts/Specifikacija%20Istarski%20sir_14_8_2024_1.pdf