C/2024/1480

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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

(C/2024/1480)

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

'Странджански билков чай / Strandzhanski bilkov chay'

EU No: PDO-BG-02851 – 7.6.2022

PDO (X) PGI ( )

1. **Name(s) [of PDO or PGI]**

'Странджански билков чай / Strandzhanski bilkov chay'

2. **Member State or Third Country**

Bulgaria

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

3.1. *Type of product*

Class 1.8. Other products of Annex I of the Treaty (spices etc.)

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

'Странджански билков чай / Strandzhanski bilkov chay' is a species of tea which is obtained from the leaves and flowers of the plant with the botanical name Sideritis syriaca, of the Lamiaceae family, grown in the Strandzha mountain massif. The species is included in the National Red List, volume 1, for Bulgaria, in the critically endangered category. It is cultivated from seedlings produced in the Strandzha Nature Park.

The herb grows in dome-shaped clumps which steadily expand after the first year of planting and develop tree-like root systems. The leaves and flower stalks grow out of the root formations at ground level. The clumps grow to 100 cm and more in diameter, and 30-35 cm in height. They have up to 120 flower stems, which grow and flower from May to October. The flower stems grow from the ground-level branching formations, at intervals of 7-9 cm. They have 2 or 4 symmetrically located, elliptical leaves. On the upper part of the flower stems are the heart-shaped leaves. This is where the flowers are found located on the plant. The flower stems of cultivated plants are 5-25 cm in length, a little longer where rainfall is frequent. The leaves and flower stems are soft and pliable, but when dried in the shade they are thicker and firm.

The leaves and stems of the plant are whitish-green, with fine grey-white hairs. Each inflorescence is formed of pale yellow flowers and 8-12 fine black seeds.

Chemical parameters: phytochemical analyses demonstrate the presence of a wide variety of bio-active substances. Of the 33 phenolic compounds identified, for example, the quantity in Sideritis syriaca samples from the Strandzha floristic region is rather high: 16,65-18 mg/g caffeic acid equivalents (CAE) of total phenolics, and 2,79-5,73 mg/g RE flavonoids in cultivated plants.

([1]) OJ L 343, 14.12.2012, p. 1.

The dried tea plant has a moisture content of no more than 9-10 %. Its colour is of medium intensity: 12-18 units EBC (under the European Brewery Convention).

The leaves and flowers of the plant are boiled to prepare the tea for drinking. It has a slight sweetness without the addition of honey or sugar. The tea is yellow to yellowish-red in colour, with a subtle bouquet of aromas delicately combining lime flowers and basil, mint, lemon balm and dried fruit. The specific aroma is persistent. It is apparent when the herb is drunk, and also when it is harvested and dried. The aroma is preserved in the packaging when the herb is properly stored in dry and dark conditions.

The antioxidant activity of the tea as a drink is not less than 1 990 mmol/l.

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

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

All cultivation practices prior to harvest are entirely manual and take place in the geographical area.

Stage 1. Producing seedlings for cultivating the herb

Stage 2. Growing the plant

Stage 3. Picking and drying of the flower stems

Stage 4. Retrieving from the dryer and packaging.

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

Producers package the dried product in situ using various types of packaging: for example, cardboard boxes of 40/30/13 cm; paper bags with a net weight of 250 g per unit - for longer conservation and further processing into other products; white paper envelopes with a minimum size of 16/22 cm, and a capacity of 25-50 g; and other types of packaging as necessary.

The finished products are sorted by size and purpose. The stalks must reach consumers intact. Once the stalks are broken, the specific fragrant aroma is stronger. Packaging in situ on the holding immediately after retrieval from the dryer is a better way of ensuring that the flowering stems remain intact. It also protects the organoleptic properties and characteristics.

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

In addition to the standard requirements, the label includes the producer's logo with the registration number and batch number. In the middle is the main wording 'Странджански билков чай' [Strandzhanski bilkov chay]. Above or below it are the words 'Protected Designation of Origin'. The labels are placed in the middle of the lid, on both sides of the bag. They are small or large depending on the packaging.

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

The geographical area of Strandzha includes the settlements in all five municipalities: Malko Tarnovo, Primorsko, Sozopol, Sredets and Tsarevo. Cultivation should only take place on land with appropriate exposure and soil types (alkaline soils, which may also surround limestone rocks) as close as possible to the floristic characteristics of the native areas of *Sideritis syriaca*.

5. **Link with the geographical area**

5.1. *Specificity of the geographical area*

The specific climate and geographical location of the Strandzha mountain massif are the reason why, in the geographical area, a large number of Tertiary relict species were preserved and survived after the ice age. Some are endemic in the region, such as the bilberry and cowberry, *Rhododendron ponticum* , Strandzha soapwort and a further 53 plant species. Among these is the plant *Sideritis syriaca,* from which 'Странджански билков чай / Strandzhanski bilkov chay' is obtained. It grows on selected soils of the geographical area. Autumnal and early spring frosts, and

even harsh but short-lived freezes, are less damaging to the cultivated tea plants specifically. They have considerably more evident survival and regenerative properties. On dry summer days, the morning dew and mists rapidly evaporate, even with low levels of sunshine. They are also a favourable factor. Through their hairy stems and highly developed foliage, the plants absorb only useful moisture, changing their colours to dark green or pale yellow.

There are over 20 bio-active substances synthesised in the plant. Along with the specific aroma, these are due to the plant's morphological characteristics and to the following abiotic and biotic factors:

1) The mineral and bacterial content of the area's loose karst soils.

2) The highest level of sunshine in the geographical area is > 1 500 kW/m^2 per year (national average 1 110-1 420 kW/m^2). Throughout the year, the sunshine is offset by warm, damp sea breezes from the east-south-east, and by the wind from the south-south-west traditionally known as the 'White Wind', filtering through the forests of Strandzha. These natural climate conditions, as well as the brief periods of rainfall in the warm autumn and mild winter, enable prolonged photosynthesis and give the species stability.

3) The drought characteristic of the region, specifically in the period when the flower stems bloom and ripen, from May to October. This is a favourable factor in synthesising the aromatic substances.

4) The large number of natural pollinators in plantations, including dozens of species of wild bees, fireflies, beetles etc., help in cross-pollination. Specifically, it is the flying insects that carry pollen from flower to flower as they feed and fertilise the seeds. This gives the species more vigorous progeny and genetic resistance. This is why combining production of the herb with bee colonies, vines and other crops is a favoured agri-environmental practice among local producers.

5.2. *Human factors*

Human effort in applying the proven good practice for cultivating the plant in conditions very close to its natural environment is a vitally important factor for the plant's conservation and reproduction. These practices consist of selecting the most suitable land and soils (alkaline) which are treated with more lime where necessary. It is also important to produce and plant quality seedlings, and to select seeds for direct sowing in prepared patches and rows. In addition, there is regular weeding of the tufts of vegetation and mowing between rows. The flowering stems are hand-picked on a weekly basis, once the dew has evaporated and they have fully bloomed (June to October). There is a special skill in breaking them at a specific point between the two leaves and the smaller flower stems developing from them. It is only by using their fingers that experienced producers feel the brittleness of the stems and ripeness of the stalks. This is when the flowers in the cupulate nodes at the top are fully opened and their tips have a rounded appearance. Scissors are inappropriate for cutting as their use would mean under-ripe stems being picked, leading to inferior organoleptic characteristics. It is also good practice to use solar or electric drying chambers. The prepared product is packaged in good time, within 1 to 5 days, with a residual moisture content of not more than 9-10 %. It is stored in dry and dark conditions. When exposed to light, the stalks lose their colour and their quality deteriorates.

All human efforts in cultivating the herb contribute to its better and longer physiological growth, as well as a higher yield and more prolonged synthesis of bio-active substances. This also results in higher values for the cultivated plants.

5.3. *Characteristics of the product*

'Странджански билков чай / Strandzhanski bilkov chay' has specific physical, chemical and organoleptic characteristics. The chemical parameters show that the percentage of bio-active substances is higher in cultivated plants than in those growing wild.

In spectrophotometric terms, its colour is of medium intensity: 12-18 units EBC (under the European Brewery Convention).

The herb has a high antioxidant activity, which is also present when it is drunk as tea.

When cultivated, 'Странджански билков чай / Strandzhanski bilkov chay' has a much more pronounced aroma than other similar herbs, and the tea has a milder and full flavour. This is because it grows at a lower altitude (up to 450 m) and synthesises sunlight and heat in greater quantities and for longer.

5.4. *Causal link between the geographical area and the quality or characteristics of the product (for PDO) or a specific quality, the reputation or other characteristic of the product (for PGI)*

Strandzha, the geographical area in which *Sideritis syriaca* is grown, is characterised by mild temperatures all year round. The highest levels of sunshine are offset throughout the year by warm, damp sea breezes. The alkaline soils in Strandzha help in the cultivation of this herb. The soils may surround mineral-rich limestone rocks, and slowly absorb and release heat from the sun and retain moisture. Early spring and late autumn frosts, as well as the morning dew and mists on dry summer days, contribute to viability and sustainability. The drought in this geographical area occurs during the period when the plant is in bloom, resulting in the accumulation of aromatic substances. The combination of these agri-climate conditions is essential for synthesising over 20 biologically active substances in the plant. As a result, there are higher values in the antioxidant activity of the tea.

Human skills in cultivating the herb also contribute to a more prolonged synthesis of bio-active substances, resulting in higher values in the cultivated plants. Established good practice and skills are involved in hand-picking the plant, and feeling for the brittleness of the stems and ripeness of the stalks. As a result, the tea has better organoleptic properties. Tea made from the cultivated *Sideritis syriaca* plant has a more pronounced aroma and a milder taste.

Reference to publication of the specification

https://www.mzh.government.bg/bg/politiki-i-programi/politiki-i-strategii/politiki-po-agrohranitelnata-veriga/zashiteni-naimenovaniya/strandzhanski-bilkov-chaj/