C/2025/608

27.1.2025

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/2025/608)

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 3 months from the date of this publication.

SINGLE DOCUMENT

'Sal de Rio Maior / Flor de Sal de Rio Maior'

EU No: PDO-PT-02589 – 24.9.2019

PDO (X) PGI ( )

1. **Name(s)**

'Sal de Rio Maior / Flor de Sal de Rio Maior'

2. **Member State or Third Country**

Portugal

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

3.1. *Type of product*

Class 2.6. Salt

Combined Nomenclature code

25.01.00 – Salt

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

'Sal de Rio Maior / Flor de Sal de Rio Maior' is salt from a saline spring, obtained through a natural process of precipitation from underground saline water by evaporation. It consists of water, sodium chloride and other mineral salts and trace elements derived exclusively from that water. It is an unrefined, additive-free salt that is harvested by hand and is not washed after harvesting.

Depending on the conditions under which it has formed and the harvesting method, it may take the following forms:

'Sal de Rio Maior'

'Sal de Rio Maior' is a white, shiny substance with a characteristic salty taste. The salt takes the form of cubic crystals of varying sizes, which group together to form an inverted pyramid. It is extracted from the water in the salt pans through crystallisation of the salt.

([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).

'Flor de Sal de Rio Maior'

'Flor de Sal de Rio Maior' is a thin film that forms on the surface of the water in the crystallising pools. It is the first product to form once the water has reached the saturation necessary for crystallisation to start. It consists of small sheets of tiny crystals which form during precipitation of the salts and float on the surface of the crystallising pool.

'Sal de Rio Maior' may be presented in its natural state or ground, and both 'Sal de Rio Maior' and 'Flor de Sal de Rio Maior' may be flavoured with blends of aromatic herbs and/or spices.

'Sal de Rio Maior', in its natural state or flavoured with blends of herbs and/or spices, may also be presented in a cylindrical form.

'Sal de Rio Maior' and 'Flor de Sal de Rio Maior' have a similar chemical composition, as they are both obtained following evaporation in the salt pan.

'Sal de Rio Maior / Flor de Sal de Rio Maior' consists of 97–99 % sodium chloride, < 0,02 % magnesium and < 0,1 mg/kg selenium.

The salt crystals have a grain size of 1–4 mm, and the maximum moisture content of the salt is 4 %.

The clear link between the magnesium concentration and the magnesium content of the final product is demonstrated by test report No 53339/2021, in which the magnesium content of the final product is shown to be < 50 mg/kg or 50 ppm, which is less than the 125 ppm in the brine.

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 stages, from extraction, evaporation, separation and crystallisation to harvesting, take place in the identified geographical area.

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

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

Whatever the form in which the product is presented for sale, the label must bear the words 'Sal de Rio Maior' – DOP ['Sal de Rio Maior' – PDO] or 'Flor de Sal de Rio Maior' – DOP ['Flor de Sal de Rio Maior' – PDO], depending on the product.

4. Concise definition of the geographical area

The natural salt pans of the Rio Maior are located in the foothills of the Serra dos Candeeiros mountain range, in the municipality of Rio Maior. The geographical coordinates of the heart of the salt-producing area are approximately 39° 21′ 15″ N and 8° 53′ 45″ W.

5. Link with the geographical area

The quality of 'Sal de Rio Maior / Flor de Sal de Rio Maior' is due exclusively to natural and human factors in the defined geographical area.

Produced in the salt pans of Rio Maior, 'Sal de Rio Maior / Flor de Sal de Rio Maior' has specific characteristics which can be attributed to the location and environment.

The geomorphological characteristics of the surrounding region, in particular the limestone massif of Estremadura and its network of underground watercourses, are among the factors that have determined the type of salt extraction that has taken place at this site for centuries.

One of the most notable characteristics of this mountainous region is the ease with which rainwater penetrates through the cracks in the limestone rock, which means that there are no visible watercourses, as they are hidden underground.

One of these watercourses becomes salty on passing through a rock-salt deposit and feeds a well at the heart of the salt pans, and 'Sal de Rio Maior / Flor de Sal de Rio Maior' is obtained by evaporating this subterranean salty water, through the heat of the sun and the action of the wind, in the traditional crystallising pools (or *talhos*) and collecting the salt by hand. The temperate Mediterranean climate, characterised by periods of high levels of sunshine and a predominantly northerly or north-westerly wind, is favourable for salt production.

According to Calado and Brandão (2009), the brine in the salt pans of the Rio Maior is associated with a diapiric marl structure (Dagorda marls) formed around 190 million years ago. The rock salt occurs at great depths, in deposits that are sometimes very thick. The authors show that there is a close link between the presence of sodium-chloride-rich waters, the presence of rock salt and the diapirs of the Dagorda marls, which in turn determine the chemical composition of 'Sal de Rio Maior / Flor de Sal de Rio Maior', which consists of 97–99 % sodium chloride and is rich in selenium.

All the evidence indicates that the brine is produced as a result of leaching from the salt-bearing marls, brought about through the action of rainwater infiltrating the subsoil. In the 1930s, Charles Lepierre carried out a chemical analysis of the brine, which showed that the solution in the well from which 'Sal de Rio Maior / Flor de Sal de Rio Maior' is produced today had a total dissolved solids (TDS) of around 200 g/kg of solution at that time, 96 % of which was accounted for by a sodium chloride content of 213,34 g/l (Lepierre, 1936, cited by Calado and Brandão, 2009). Besides the high salinity, the magnesium concentration in these waters was also of note (approximately 125 ppm) (Calado and Brandão, 2009).

The specificity of the geographical area also derives from human factors and the rules on land use in the 12th century, with documentary evidence of the history of the Rio Maior salt pans dating from that time. The defined geographical area's soil and climatic variables and geological make-up, together with the experience and know-how of the local workers, which are essential for preparing the salt pans and extracting, storing and preserving the salt so as to obtain a final product that is clean and free from impurities, make this a region with unique characteristics for the production of 'Sal de Rio Maior / Flor de Sal de Rio Maior'.

Salt production begins with preparing the salt pans, namely by cleaning away mud and sludge, preparing the water and repairing any damage that has occurred during the winter. Preparing the salt pans is vital in order to maximise both the quality of the water and the quantity of salt harvested. Harvesting by hand means that the salt worker can gather the salt, using a cleaning tool known as a *rodo*, right down to the bottom of the pool. As it is clean, the harvested salt contains more salt and fewer insoluble substances.

The Rio Maior salt pans merited an entry in Pinho Leal's dictionary, *Portugal Antigo e Moderno* [Ancient and Modern Portugal], which emphasises the qualities of the renowned salt extracted: 'The product of those salt pans is known as *sal espuma* [foam salt]. It is very clear, dry and shiny, so that it is formed into beautiful pyramids and various other figures that look as if they are made of refined flake sugar or stone. It so far exceeds the quality of common (sea) salt for seasoning meat that the quantity needed is half that of salt extracted from sea water. It is highly saturated with muriate of soda, which is extremely pure, and is unmixed with muriates of lime and magnesia, which are found in other common salts, making them bitter and deliquescent.'

Today the Rio Maior salt pans are the only place in Portugal where salt is extracted from underground brine. This, together with their uniqueness as a hydrogeological phenomenon, gives them huge relevance in terms of natural heritage.

Reference to publication of the specification

https://tradicional.dgadr.gov.pt/images/prod_imagens/sal/Docs/CE_Sal_Rio_Maior_022022VF.pdf