

SINGLE DOCUMENT

Council Regulation (EC) No 510/2006 on the protection of geographical indications and designations of origin for agricultural products and foodstuffs*

‘COMTE’

EC No: FR-PDO-0217-0116-30.06.2009

PGI () PDO (X)

1. NAME

‘Comté’

2. MEMBER STATE OR THIRD COUNTRY

France

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCT OR FOODSTUFF

3.1. Type of product

Class 1.3. Cheeses

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

‘Comté’ is made entirely of whole cow’s milk used in raw condition. It is a cheese with pressed, cooked paste that is salted on the surface or in brine. At the time of marketing, which takes place after a minimum maturation period of 120 days, the cheese’s paste has an ivory to yellow colour and an ‘ opening ’ that may reach the size of a small cherry.

‘Comté’ contains a minimum of 45 g and a maximum of 54 g of fat per 100 g of cheese after total desiccation and the dry matter must not weigh less than 62 g per 100 g of cheese. The salt content is not less than 0.6 g of sodium chloride per 100 g of cheese. The water content of the defatted cheese does not exceed 54%.

‘Comté’ is presented to consumers in the form of a wheel that weighs 32 to 45 kg and has a diameter of 55 to 75 centimetres and a straight or slightly convex heel 8-13 cm in height. It has a scrubbed, solid and grainy rind that is golden yellow to brown in colour. The cheese must not be more than 1.4 times higher at the centre than at the outer rim.

‘Comté’ may also be presented in packaged portions or grated.

‘Comté’ has a complex taste. While the general sensorial features of all the wheels are the same, no two wheels of Comté are identical. Six main groups of aromas can be distinguished in ‘Comté’ (fruity, milky, roasted, plant-like, animal-like, spicy) and they include more than 90 nuances.

* Replaced by Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 November 2012 on quality schemes for agricultural products and foodstuffs.

3.3. Raw materials (for processed products only)

The milk used to produce 'Comté' must come solely from a dairy herd of Montbéliarde cows of breed type 46, or from French Simmental cows of breed type 35, or from crosses of these two breeds of certified descent.

The milk must be collected from within a circular area measuring no more than 25 km in diameter. This rule limits the duration of transport and therefore protects the milk from structural degradation. This ensures that the milk is processed in the conditions laid down in the specification (raw milk). These conditions favour the development of endogenous lactic flora.

In order to maintain the quality and specificity of the product, milk productivity is limited per hectare of potential forage areas.

As regards the use of the milk, the capacity of the vats is limited to a maximum of 12 cheeses per vat in order to guarantee the quality of the product. Over a period of 24 hours not more than three production rounds may be carried out in the same vat.

3.4. Feed (for products of animal origin only)

In order to guarantee a close link between the region and the product by using specific feed from the geographical area, supplementary feed is limited to 1 800 kg per dairy cow per year. On the farm, the grazing area actually used must be at least equal to 1 hectare per dairy cow. Grazing is obligatory for as long as the weather conditions, the soils' bearing capacity and the presence of grass allow. Compliance with these provisions means that at least 70% of the herd's feed comes from the geographical area. The dairy cows' basic intake comes entirely from the geographical area.

In order to maintain the traditional practice of grazing, farm production systems where all the feed is supplied in troughs during the growing season are forbidden and grazing should remain the main practice.

Fermented fodder, whether silage products or other, are not to be used in the feed of the dairy herd at any time of the year owing to the technological risks related to these practices during the production and maturing of cheeses.

Only raw materials and supplementary feed derived from non-transgenic products are authorised for the dairy herd so as to preserve the traditional nature of the feed.

3.5. Specific steps in production that must take place in the defined geographical area

The milk is produced and the cheese manufactured and matured in the geographical area.

3.6. Specific rules on slicing, grating, packaging, etc.

The procedure of cutting and packaging pieces of 'Comté' is part of an extended maturation process. It requires particular know-how and has a direct and definite effect on the quality of the product, because it is necessary to sort the wheels to remove those that may not be fit for prepacking. These conditions make it possible to comply fully with the conditions for preserving the cheese after it has been formed into wheels and to guarantee the physical and organoleptic integrity of 'Comté' until it reaches the consumer.

If the cheese is prepacked, these are the reasons for cutting or grating it in the geographical area.

If the cheese is prepacked,

- the wheels may be cut within not more than two weeks of leaving the maturing cellar. During this time they must be kept at a temperature of 4°C to 8°C with a humidity level at least equal to 85%.

- the rind may be removed from portions weighing less than 40 grams each or intended to be grated. If the rind is very moist or if it has deteriorated, it must be removed immediately after the cheese has been cut into portions. If the rind is in good condition, it must be removed within 8 hours of the first cutting. Pieces whose rind has been removed may not be stored in the open air for more than 72 hours; after that, they must be vacuum-packed. Vacuum-packing must take place within two weeks.

- no simultaneous operations involving a product other than 'Comté' may take place on the cutting and packaging line.

The cheese may be cut and grated outside the geographical area if this is done in front of the consumer.

3.7. Specific rules on labelling

All cheeses with the registered designation of origin 'Comté' must bear a label showing the designation in a font at least two thirds as large as the largest font shown on the label.

The labelling must include the European Union's PDO symbol. It may also include the words 'appellation d'origine protégée' ['protected designation of origin'].

The producer, maturer or prepacker must affix its name and address clearly, and the address must be located in the geographical area.

The use of any term or other reference accompanying the designation is prohibited on the labelling and in advertising, invoices or commercial documents, with the exception of specific trademarks.

Cheeses sold under the designation of origin 'Comté' must bear the required identifying marks. Prior to the cheese leaving the maturing cellar, a green or brick-brown band must be affixed to the side of each wheel. Each packaged portion must bear the 'Comté clochettes vertes' logo. For consumer portions, it is obligatory to affix the 'Comté clochettes vertes' logo and the name 'Comté' on the front in a font at least two thirds as large as the largest font using the Pantone 349C green colour code.

If the wheel is sold whole, it must bear on the side under the band an oval-shaped green casein plate bearing the following words printed in black: France, Comté, the number of the production plant and the production month. The production day must be indicated using a casein plate placed near the green casein plate.

4. CONCISE DEFINITION OF THE GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Definition of the geographical area

The geographical area extends over the territory of the following municipalities:

The department of Ain:

The cantons of Bellegarde-sur-Valserine, Brénod, Ceyzériat, Champagne-en-Valromey, Hauteville-Lompnes, Izernore, Lhuis, Nantua, Oyonnax, Poncin, Saint-Rambert-en-Bugey, Seyssel and Treffort-Cuisiat: all municipalities;

The canton of Ambérieu-en-Bugey: the municipalities of L'Abergement-de-Varey, Ambérieu-en-Bugey, Ambronay, Bettant and Douvres;

The canton of Coligny: the municipalities of Bény, Coligny, Domsure, Pirajoux, Salavre, Verjon and Villemotier;

The canton of Collonges: the municipalities of Chézery-Forens, Collonges, Confort, Farges, Lancrans, Léaz, Péron and Saint-Jean-de-Gonville;

The canton of Ferney-Voltaire: the municipalities of Sergy and Thoiry;

The canton of Gex: the municipalities of Cessy, Crozet, Divonne-les-Bains, Echenevex, Gex, Grilly, Lélex, Mijoux and Vesancy;

The canton of Lagnieu: the municipalities of Ambutrix, Lagnieu, Saint-Sorlin-en-Bugey, Sauls-Brénaz, Souclin, Vaux-en-Bugey and Villebois;

The canton of Pont-d'Ain: the municipalities of Druillat, Journans, Neuville-sur-Ain, Pont-d'Ain, Saint-Martin-du-Mont and Tossiat.

The department of Doubs:

The cantons of Amancey, Audeux, Baume-les-Dames, Besançon, Boussières, Clerval, Levier, Maîche, Marchaux, Montbenoît, Morteau, Mouthe, Ornans, Pierrefontaine-les-Varans, Pontarlier, Quingey, Roulans, Le Russey, Saint-Hippolyte and Vercel-Villedieu-le-Camp: all the municipalities;

The canton of Hérimoncourt: the municipalities of Autechaux-Roide, Blamont, Dannemarie, Ecurcey, Glay, Pierrefontaine-lès-Blamont, Roches-lès-Blamont and Villars-lès-Blamont;

The canton of L'Isle-sur-le-Doubs: the municipalities of Hyémondans and Lanthenans;

The canton of Pont-de-Roide: the municipalities of Dambelin, Feule, Goux-lès-Dambelin, Neuchâtel-Urtière, Noirefontaine, Péseux, Pont-de-Roide, Remondans-Vaivre, Rosière-sur-Barbèche, Solemont, Valonne, Villars-sous-Dampjoux and Vernois-lès-Belvoir;

The canton of Rougemont: the municipality of Rillans.

The department of Jura:

All the municipalities, with the exception of the municipalities of the canton of Chemin.

The department of Saône-et-Loire:

The canton of Beaurepaire-en-Bresse: the municipalities of Beaurepaire-en-Bresse, Sagy, Sallenard and Savigny-en-Revermont;

The canton of Cuiseaux: the municipalities of Champagnat, Cuiseaux, Flacey-en-Bresse and Joudes;

The canton of Pierre-de-Bresse: the municipalities of Beauvernois, Bellesvère, Fretterans, Mouthiers-en-Bresse and Torpes ;

The department of Haute-Savoie:

The canton of Seyssel: the municipalities of Challonges solely for parcels No 562 (a) and 563 (a) of section A, sixth leaf.

5. LINK WITH THE GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

5.1. Specificity of the geographical area

5.1.1. Natural factors

The geographical area comprises the arc of the Jura mountains, a set of limestone plateaux, and its extension into a small part of the adjoining plain.

The agricultural areas in question are characterised by their poor soils and significant contours and by the calcareous and molassic nature of the geological substratum.

The climate of the area tends towards both continental and northern with a big difference between winter and summer temperatures and rainfall that, although it is even throughout the year, is heavy in the summer, with a low annual average temperature, despite summer heatwaves, and a large number of days of frost.

It is a very wet mountain or sub-mountain environment with annual rainfall always in excess of 900 mm and generally in excess of 1 000 mm. This rainfall is already considerable at low altitude and increases towards the interior of the mountain range. Seasonal distribution is characterised by the lack of a dry season.

This area is divided between woodland, half of which is composed of spruce, and grassland. The area's particular geo-climatic conditions (heavy rainfall, no summer drought, limestone substrate) contribute very favourably to high-quality grass production. Indeed, they allow the development of natural grassland that has a very rich flora (especially as regards dicotyledons) and a specific limestone flora.

5.1.2. Human factors

In this area which is well-suited to grazing, dairy cows feed in this manner for as long as the weather conditions, the soils' bearing capacity and the presence of grass allow. Breeders have selected the Montbéliarde breed, which is well adapted to the conditions in the area and makes up nearly all of the dairy herds in the geographical area. The extensive farming of grassland has been maintained (stocking density, the use of nitrogen and concentrates etc. are limited). In addition, the geographical area has a particular cheese-making tradition. This tradition, based on the pooling of milk for the purpose of making a large cheese, has led to a strong sense of solidarity and common rules.

Since the 11th century farmers in this region have worked together to pool every day the milk produced by their various herds in order to make a large wheel. Still today the great majority of milk producers belong to cooperatives and pool their milk in a processing plant called 'fruitière', the local cheese dairy.

The traditional methods of making this cheese live on and are maintained, on the one hand, in the way the animals are bred using a specific system for the management of pastures and the drying of mowed grass and, on the other, in the way the cheese is made by carefully timing the cutting of the curd, its stirring and heating, the extraction and pressing and then the salting, prematuring and maturing.

5.2. Specificity of the product

'Comté' is a cheese made from raw cow's milk. It has a cooked pressed paste and is in the shape of a large wheel 55 to 75 cm in diameter. It is matured for a long time and is therefore a long-keeping cheese.

'Comté' has a limited fat content and this distinguishes it from other cheeses with a cooked pressed paste.

It contains at least 62 grams of dry matter per 100 grams of cheese and the water content of the defatted cheese does not exceed 54%.

The salt content is not less than 0.6 g of sodium chloride per 100 g of cheese.

'Comté' has a complex taste. While the general sensorial features of all the wheels are the same, no two wheels of Comté are identical. Six main groups of aromas can be distinguished (fruity, milky, roasted, plant-like, animal-like, spicy) and they include more than 90 nuances.

5.3. 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)

It is in this difficult environment, where the landscape is divided between woodland and grassland and where it was impossible to develop other resources, that large hard cheeses became the product of choice. For the people living on this land, a long-keeping cheese was the only preserved food that could be made from the abundant supply of summer milk and that would keep through the long winter. Therefore local breeders selected a cow breed that was particularly well suited to the local conditions and to the making of this particular cheese. The milk was pooled in the 'fruitières' for the purpose of producing a large, long-keeping cheese that would allow the breeders to make the best use of the richness of this land outside the geographical area. The choice of a cheese with a cooked paste was based on the abundance of firewood in the area.

The distinctive characteristics of the grassland are expressed in the cheese with the help of specific expertise applied at every production stage.

First of all, the great floral richness of the natural environment of the geographical area contributes strongly to the development of the cheese's aromatic components. This diversity is preserved through the extensive farming of the grassland. The close link between floral diversity and the rich aroma of 'Comté' has been demonstrated by two scientific studies in 1994. By limiting the fat content during cheese-making it is possible to avoid off-tastes due to lipolysis and reinforce the typical aromas of 'Comté'. By laying down a minimum dry matter content and a maximum water content for the defatted cheese, it is possible to avoid excess water in the cheese and help bring out all the aromas. The aromas are enhanced also by the minimum salt content of the cheese. The obligation to use open vats allows the cheesemakers to maintain their skills, such as the correct timing of the cutting and extraction of the curd. Finally, the maturers use their know-how to carefully adjust the maturing conditions of each lot. The cheese's aroma, which is the result of natural factors such as the grass and the microbe ecosystem, is fully developed only after a long period of maturation on spruce boards, which are particularly well suited to the maturation of 'Comté'. The production of 'Comté' allows the maintenance of traditional agricultural activities and contributes greatly to achieving a balanced local economy.

Reference to publication of the specification

[Article 5(7) of Regulation (EC) No 510/2006*]

<https://www.inao.gouv.fr/fichier/CDCComte.pdf>

* Replaced by Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 November 2012 on quality schemes for agricultural products and foodstuffs.