Publication of an application for registration pursuant to Article 6(2) of Regulation (EEC) No 2081/92 on the protection of geographical indications and designations of origin

(2000/C 173/05)

This publication confers the right to object to the application pursuant to Article 7 of the abovementioned Regulation. Any objection to this application must be submitted via the competent authority in the Member State concerned within a time limit of six months from the date of this publication. The arguments for publication are set out below, in particular under 4.6, and are considered to justify the application within the meaning of Regulation (EEC) No 2081/92.

COUNCIL REGULATION (EEC) No 2081/92

APPLICATION FOR REGISTRATION: ARTICLE 5

PDO (x) PGI ( )
National application No: —

1. Responsible department in the Member State:

Name: Subdireccion General de Denominaciones de Calidad
Direccion General de Alimentacion Secretaria
General de Agricultura y Alimentacion Ministerio de
Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentacion

Address: Paseo de la Infanta Isabel, 1, E-28071 Madrid

Tel. (34) 913 47 53 97

Fax (34) 913 47 5410

2. Applicant group:

2.1. Name: Asociacion Nacional de Productores de Azafran

2.2. Address: C/Madrid 9, E-45720 Camunas (Toledo)

Tel. (34) 925 47 03 46

2.3. Composition producer/processor (x) other ( )

3. Type of product: 1.8 — other Annex II products (seasonings)

4. Specification:

(Summary of requirements under Article 4(2)):

4.1 *Name:* Azafran de La Mancha

4.2 *Description:* Saffron (Crocus sativus L.) is a bulbous plant belonging to the Iridacea family. The spherical corm is fleshy, with a diameter of 2 to 3 cm, and is covered with brown-grey reticulate membranes. Between October and November, each bulb produces 1 to 3 flowers, which form a tubular shape before opening into a lilac-purple cone. This is the rose of saffron, and has long

narrow petals which eventually open out to reveal its interior.

Inside is the ovary, from which emerge the three yellow stamens and a white filament, and the style, which divides into three red fibres or stigmas: the saffron threads or cloves.

Saffron in the form of a spice comes from the stigmas of these flowers attached to their respective style, once they have been sufficiently dried using the process described below.

Physical characteristics: Azafran de La Mancha is easily recognisable because its red stigmas protrude from the flower and the style is shorter than in flowers of other varieties.

Azafran de La Mancha must be sold exclusively in threads, never in powdered form. The threads must be strong and pliable with brilliant red stigmas.

The ratio stigma: style length must be greater than one, with a tolerance value of 1 %.

The stigma must not be less than 22 mm long, with a tolerance value of 1 %.

The content in floral residue (styles which have become detached from their stigmas, stamens, pollen and pieces of petals or ovary) must not exceed 0,5 % of the total weight.

A maximum of 0,1 % of foreign matter is permitted. Foreign matter is any vegetable residue which does not come from the saffron flower: minerals (sand, soil or dust), parts of or whole dead insects, etc.

The product must not contain mould or live insects.

Organoleptic characteristics: aroma: exclusive to the drying process, intense and penetrating, mixed with a faint scent of corn or dried grass with floral overtones.

Olfactory-gustatory sensation (in infusion): a long-lasting and mild taste, bitter at first and later with a persistent flavour of corn and the drying process.

Analytical characteristics:

Chemical characteristics:

Analytical parameter	Loose saffron	Packed saffron
Moisture and volatile substances	7-9 %	< 11 % (m/m)
Total ash	—	< 8 % (m/m)
Ash unsoluble in acid	—	< 1 % (m/m)
Ether extract	—	3,5-14,5 (m/m)
Extract soluble in cold water	—	< 65 % (m/m)
Colouring power (')	> 200	> 200
Flavouring power ([i])	> 20	> 20
Bitterness (picrocrocin) ([ii])	> 70	> 70
Safranal content ([iii])	> 65 %	> 65 %

P) Expressed as a direct measurement of absorbency at 440 nm over dry weight.

(2) Expressed as a direct measurement of absorbency at 330 nm over dry weight.

(3) Expressed as a direct measurement of absorbency at 257 nm over dry weight.

(4) Expressed as a percentage of the total content in volatile substances.

4.3. *Geographical area:* The geographical area is situated within the automonous region of Castile-La Mancha, and encompasses districts of La Mancha in the provinces of Toledo, Cuenca, Ciudad Real and Albacete.

4.4. *Proof of origin:* Saffron produced in this region is easily recognisable, since it has protruding red stigmas and very short styles.

The manufacturing process, which consists of drying the product by toasting it over a slow fire rather than by sundrying, seems to be the reason for the end product's higher quality, intense aroma, increased safranal content and colouring power.

The physical, organoleptic and chemical characteristics of the product, described above, are linked to the environment and the conditions in which the product is grown and to the manufacturing process.

Although these characteristics alone should be enough to guarantee the origin of the product, this must also b ecertified by the inspection body.

The saffron must be planted in plots situated within the production area registered by the inspection body.

The saffron must be packed in establishments appearing in the registers of the inspection body. The designation of origin will apply only to saffron from the most recent harvest from the registered plots, and to packages with a net maximum content of 100 g.

Those packing Azafran de La Mancha will adopt appropriate measures to ensure that the product meets the physical, chemical and organoleptic requirements. The inspection body will set up an inspection scheme, in accordance with EN 45011 standard, which will cover all stages of the product's market life. Under this scheme, it will be obligatory to keep records and to be able to correctly identify, at all times, saffron eligible for the designation of origin.

"" In the event of inferior quality products being identified, appropriate measures will be taken. These will include the suspension and definitive withdrawal of certification, obliging the consigner to withdraw the faulty goods from sale.

4.5. *Method of production:* Traditionally, the bulbs are planted between the second fortnight in June and the first fortnight in September.

When the plant blooms, all the open flowers are picked daily before they become withered. This normally takes place over a period of approximately 30 days in October and November, depending on the climatic conditions of the particular year.

Great care must be taken when picking the flowers. They must be cut cleanly and precisely so as to prevent the stigmas from separating or becoming detached.

The flowers are taken to be trimmed without being crushed or overheated in transit. They are laid out to be aired on sacks, canvas or firm soil in fine layers. They must not be piled up.

The flowers are always trimmed within 12 hours of picking. This process involves cutting the stigmas, attached to their styles, at the place where the styles are beginning to turn white.

In preparation for the drying process, the trimmed stigmas are laid out on flour sieves with wire or silk mesh of a suitable size for the heat source. They are placed in layers of a maximum depth of 1,5 cm.

The saffron is toasted for 20 to 45 minutes by heat produced from braziers, stoves or any other suitable indirect source providing a constant and uniform heat which does not contaminate the product with alien flavours or aromas.

The dried saffron is weighed and put into clean, new containers, suitable for conserving foodstuffs, which protect their contents from moisture and light. Whilst awaiting delivery, the containers are stored in cool, clean and dry areas. The product is packed by hand or machine in containers suitable for foodstuffs, whose maximum capacity is 100 g. The containers must seal in such a way that that the product will be preserved when stored in clean, dry, well-ventilated areas where the temperature does not exceed 25 °*C.*

4.6. *Link:* Saffron is very well suited to the climate of the production zone. The average altiude is approximately 700 m above sea level, and the soils are predominantly dark and limy with a sandy-clay texture. The climate is Mediterranean continental: generally mild with high levels of sunshine. Summers are hot and dry and winters cold, with marked contrasts in temperature (maximum 38 to 42 °C, minimum - 6 to - 12 °C). The low rainfall is the main factor preventing higher yields.

Growing practices have been passed on from father to son for generations. Saffron is grown for three years in a particular plot and then moved to another location where neither it nor beetroot nor alfafa has been grown in the previous five years. In an area whose average population density is less than 9 inhabitants per km^2 and where there is a serious danger of desertification, saffron is an important crop because is gives around 10 000 families the opportunity to increase their income during the period *between* the end *of the* grape harvest and the beginning of the olive harvest.

Saffron was introduced to Spain during Arab rule. During the eigth and ninth centuries it was used exclusively by the Andalusian upper middle classes. Arabic dishes contained many herbs, and so they were grown in every orchard, the main varieties being cumin, caraway, black cumin, cress, sweet anise, fennel, wood anise, coriander, mustard, mint, and parsley. However, the most important condiment for the Muslim economy was saffron, an indispensable colouring and seasoning in most dishes.

Later, a work from 1897 entitled *Cultivo del azafran en la Solana,* by J. A. Lopezde la Osa, furnishes proof that saffron was grown in La Mancha. The book includes information going back 100 years on this crop, and quotes a legal inventory from 1720 which also mentions saffron.

In the first third of the 19^{th} century La Mancha was producing the best quality saffron in Spain, with the highest yields per hectare for dry farming. The ancient growing tradition is very well documented in Pedro Munoz, Campo de Criptana y Manzanares (Ciudad Real), in Lillo, Madridejos, Villacanas, Villanueva de Alcardete y Cabezamesada (Toledo) and in Montilla del Palancar (Cuenca).

However, the best proof of a strong historical link between the La Mancha region and saffron can be found in the area's many cultural traditions.

As with all activities which are firmly rooted in a particular society, growing saffron has given rise to its own rich vocabulary. The saffron-growing tradition in La Mancha is reflected in the region's folklore, in songs and refrains, and it is also forms the backdrop for the musical comedy entitled *La* rasa *de azafran* (a libretta by F. Romero and G. Fernandez Shaw; with music by Jacinto Guerrero, put on in Madrid in 1930).

It should also be noted that instruction manuals describing growing and production techniques exist, such as the aforementioned work by J. A. Lopez de la Osa, or *El azafranero prdctico* by L. *Jimenez Martin (Albacete:* Imprenta Eduardo Miranda, 1900).

The importance of this crop in traditional culture is once again demonstrated by the Fiesta de la Rosa del Azafran which takes place in Consuegra (Toledo), the trimming competitions held as part of the patron saint's festivities in La Solana (Ciudad Real) and the Festival de la Rosa del Azafran in Santa Ana (Albacete).

A significant indicator of the traditional nature and the economic value of this crop is a custom which still survives in some in La Mancha: presenting newly wed couples with the gift of a few threads of saffron, as a symbol of the desire for prosperity.

Saffron is part of the historic *and cultural heritage* of this region. Age-old growing traditions mean that those harvesting and trimming the saffron are highly qualified, and therefore the end product is of maximum quality.

4.7. *Inspection body:*

Name: Fundacion Consejo Regulador de la Denominacion de origen 'Azafran de la Mancha'

Address: C/Castilla-La Mancha 15, bajo A, E-45720 Camunas (Toledo)

Tel/Fax (34) 925 47 02 84

Authorisation: Order of 11 February 1999 from the Department of Agriculture and Environment (Diario Oficial de Castilla-La Mancha No 10, of 19 February 1999).

4.8. *Labelling:* The words 'Denominacion de origen "Azafran de La Mancha"' must figure on all packing. The products must bear a guarantee seal and a numbered label issued by the inspection body, affixed in such a way as to prevent reuse.

4.9. *National requirements:* Order of 9 May 1998 from the Department of Agriculture and Environment of the Junta de Comunidades de Castilla-La Mancha laying down provisions for the application of Council Regulation (EEC) No 2081/92 of 14 July 1992 on the protection of geographical indications and designations of origin for agricultural products and foodstuffs (Diario Oficial de Castilla-La Mancha No 23 of 22 May 1998).

EC No: G/E/00112/99.10.28.

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