

# Cheese Market and Quality Marks in the Republic of Serbia and European Union<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

In the recent years, acknowledgment of originality of products has had growing significance, because of the need to preserve the characteristics of the famous ancient tradition that makes it recognizable and different from all the other traditions, as well as because of the need to prevent falsification of products. The protection of autochthonous cheese for every country represents the contribution to the environmental protection, as well as the stimulus to the rural population to produce standard high quality cheese in conformity with International Food Safety Standards. The production of autochthonous cheese in Serbia has a long tradition. It is of primary importance to accept and apply systems for control, supervision and preservation of traditional cheese taking the EU countries as a model.

**Key words:** *cheese quality marks, cheese market*

**JEL Classification:** *L66*

## Introduction

Cheese is one of the oldest food products. The production of cheese began 8 000 years ago in the fertile valley between the Tiger and Euftrat rivers, in today's Iraque, and represents the classic way of food preservation for long periods of time. The marks production of cheese has been modified and advanced until today, from the earliest primitive milk processing to the application of the latest industrial technology, which resulted in the great number of groceries of this kind. Autochthonous cheese represents a special group of groceries, which is a characteristic of a certain nation, country and region. Names of autochthonous cheese are strictly connected with their origin, in other words with the place where they are produced. Traditional production of autochthonous cheese has not only been preserved, but has also achieved a significant regeneration through the growing demand for organic food and high quality food with indications of geographical origin, whose competitiveness and prices, in comparison to conventional products, has been significantly increasing. Traditional ways of autochthonous cheese production in relatively isolated mountain environment has been preserved in Serbia.

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## Milk and Cheese Production in the Republic of Serbia

The decision of the European Commission to put Serbia on the list of countries from which it is possible to import milk into the EU countries will have long-term positive effects on domestic agriculture, because that decision will additionally stimulate agricultural production, since new markets for the placement of domestic products have been opening.

**Table 1.** Basic indicators of cow and sheep milk production in Serbia, 2004-2009

Year	Cow milk		Sheep milk		Private husbandries
	Total in mill. l	l per milked cow	Total in mill. l	l per milked sheep	Millions l
2004	1,579	2,427	14	41	1,449
2005	1,602	2,568	14	40	1,462
2006	1,587	2,645	15	50	1,449
2007	1,549	2,663	14	47	1,423
2008	1,534	2,731	14	56	1,404
2009	1,478	2,852	10	51	1,361

Source: Statistics annuals of the Republic of Serbia, 2004-2010.

The production of milk in Serbia is still holding an unenviable position. In the recent years, it has not only been stagnated, it has been reduced as well, therefore it is necessary to take appropriate measures in order to urge its growth and development. The production of cow milk in Serbia per dairy head of cattle is unsatisfactory and extremely low; on the average it is 2.585 l, which is about 18% less in comparison to the average value of the world milk production, and even 50% less in comparison to the average value of the European milk production (Stanković, 2010). In 2008, 1,534 billion litres of cow milk was produced, in 2006. -1,587 billion litres, and in 2005.-1,602 billion of litres (Table 1). The share of cow milk in the total production of milk in Serbia is 99%. Total quantity of sheep and goat milk and 92% of cow milk has been produced on individual farms (Božić and collaborators, 2008).

Serbia is on the bottom of the European scale according to the consumption of milk and dairy products ([www.mojafarma.rs/index.../Srbija/proizvodnja-mleka-u-Srbiji.html](http://www.mojafarma.rs/index.../Srbija/proizvodnja-mleka-u-Srbiji.html)) . If it approached the European average consumption, it would face deficit of these products. In 2007. average consumption of milk was 30,6 litres per capita, the average consumption of white cheese was 10,7 kg per capita, the average consumption of kajmak (a dairy dish) was 1,1 kg per capita and the average consumption of butter was 0,1 kg per capita (2 l). The consumption of dairy products in the European countries is significantly higher; one inhabitant of a European country consumes about 100 litres of milk during the year, 8.9 kg of hard cheese and semi hard cheese and 4.7 kg of butter. The consumption of cheese in the EU showed 9.1 % increase in 2007 (Kapidžić, 2007). It has been estimated that the consumption of dairy products in the world will show 2.5 % increase until 2010., the consumption of butter and cheese will show 2-2.7 % increase, and the consumption of hard dairy products will show 0.9 % increase (Kapidžić, 2007)

**Table 2.** Industrial production of cheese in Serbia, in tons, 2004-2009

Year	Total	Central Serbia	Vojvodina
2004	15,173	6,413	8,760
2005	17,193	7,992	9,021
2006	17,416	9,045	8,371
2007	18,263	8,483	9,780
2008	21,233	9,935	11,298
2009	21,945	8,984	12,961

Source: Statistics annuals of the Republic of Serbia, 2004-2010.

Growth in the production of cheese was established in Serbia (Table 2). During 2004 it was produced 15173 t of cheese in total, and during 2008 it was produced 21233 t of cheese, which shows production increase of 39,94 %. According to the statistical data, a small increase in production of cheese was recorded in Vojvodina, during the period from 2004 to 2008 (28,97 %) in comparison to Central Serbia (54,91 %).

### **Autochthonous Cheese**

Autochthonous cheese is a product that has been made for the first time in specific area as a result of the development of the traditional production that lasted for a long time. Great number of various sorts of cheese, world known, originate from autochthonous production, for example Ementaler from Switzerland, Gauda cheese from Holland etc. Preservation of autochthonous cheese is very important because in that way the ethnographic wealth of a country remains preserved, and at the same time recognizable gastronomic and tourism offer and placement on foreign markets is enabled. Production of autochthonous cheese in rural regions becomes a more and more important way of gaining income. In order to place autochthonous cheese on the foreign market, it is necessary to apply traditional, but standardized technology with the assurance of standardized quality and safety of these products, so that they should be adapted to market demands of the EU.

Consumers all over the world, taking care of their health, become more and more demanding looking for natural products of famous origin. Today, there is a growing number of consumers who want to buy and use in nutrition autochthonous products that were produced in small quantities, according to ecological standards. According to the FAO data, annual sale of ecological food in the world has been growing more than 20%. Market research reports show that this kind of food is 15% more expensive than common food. The greatest part of ecological food has been placed in the EU countries (Kapidžić, 2007).

Autochthonous cheese is mostly produced from unprocessed milk. Phase of ripening does not last long, and it has a distinct taste and a specific texture. Authenticity of autochthonous cheese according to which it differs from the same types of cheese made in other regions depends on, among other things, autochthonous microorganisms, which are heterogenous types of lactic acid bacteria. Domination of a certain type depends on the type and origin of milk. Addition of commercial culture could result in the loss of cheese authenticity. It has been paid more and more attention to biodiversity protection today, but it has not still been worked enough on preservation of microorganisms, especially on preservation of lactic acid bacteria that originate from traditionally produced fermented milk products. Preservation and use of autochthonous lactic acid bacteria will enable production of traditional cheese and a base for application of appropriate standards, which will guarantee first-class quality and safety of these products with unique organoleptic features.

Thanks to the geographic, climate and vegetation diversity in Serbian regions, production of autochthonous cheese was developed during the past. Preservation of autochthonous technologies for the production of cheese in mountain areas like: Zlatar, Zlatibor, Golija, Kopaonik, Stara planina, Šar planina etc. is extremely important. These technologies are a base for an accession to organized production of autochthonous cheese in accordance with international standards. Quality cheese in brine like: Zlatar cheese, Sjenica cheese, Javor cheese, Golija cheese etc. has been produced in mountain area Stari Vlah. These types of cheese are famous for an established quality and the diffusion of production. These types of cheese were originally produced from sheep milk, but cow and mixed cow and sheep milk were more and more used. Lately, the use of goat milk in the production of autochthonous cheese has been revived again.

Autochthonous cheese will always have a higher price than most of the industrial types of cheese, because of small production lines, as well as because of the additional value considering its unique organoleptic features. A story about the culture of people that produce cheese represents a particular value of autochthonous cheese.

## Cheese Quality Marks

Almost all members of the EU strive to protect the production of their autochthonous cheese. The EU adopted the Regulations No. 2081/92 according to which cheese can be protected by quality marks: of origin (Protected Denomination of Origin (PDO), geographical indication (Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and traditional speciality guaranteed (Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG). The names of products are being protected by these quality marks, but only those that satisfy precisely defined criteria, while at the same time the Regulations are being in accordance with the Intellectual Property Law and with The Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights from 1994.

Protection and support to the production of autochthonous cheese came as a result of new agricultural policy of the EU, by which expansion of trade exchange and reduction of the industrial dairy products supplies has been achieved, as well as preservation of products from disappearing and falsification and help for the consumer to recognize uniqueness of products. Agrarian policy of the EU stimulates certain sort of extensive agricultural production, which contributes to the environmental protection, as well as to the protection of biodiversity and rural areas.

Autochthonous cheese must be produced in certain regions. Climate, position and land type, natural vegetation, species of cultivated plants, the ways of raising and animal breed all together enable cheese originality and uniqueness.

Tradition and experience that have been handed down from generation to generation have been of special, crucial importance for the origin of autochthonous cheese. Protected Denomination of Origin (PDO) represents connection between historical and geographical dimension. Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) enables protection of cheese on condition that the technology of production, procession or preparation of products has been performing in the place of origin. Physical, chemical and organoleptical features of the products represent the result of mutual influence of the region, land, vegetation and man. The cheese protected by Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG) has specific features that resulted from the way of production or from the traditional structure, unbound to the certain area.

Dairy products, especially cheese, belong to the group of the most important agricultural products, that are protected by the system of qualitative marks of the EU (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Number of cheese registered with marks PDO, PGI and TSG in EU

Country	Number of PDO cheese	Number of PGI cheese	Number of TSG cheese
Austria	6		
Belgium	1		
Bulgaria	1		
Denmark		2	
England	9	5	
France	41	4	
Greece	20		
Holland	4		1
Ireland	1		
Italy	34		1
Germany	4		

- Table 3 (cont.) -

Poland	2		
Portugal	11	1	
Slovakia		3	
Spain	22	1	
Sweden		1	1

Source: Rosati, 2009.

International Agricultural Trade Liberalization caused change in agrarian policy of certain countries that are members of the EU. Most of the countries recognized the importance of autochthonous cheese protection (Table 3). Those countries protected their own producers through national legislation, which enables better trade exchange among the countries that are members of the EU, but also stimulates rural development. Protection of autochthonous cheese also contributes protection of the consumers, which are being given precise information about the product together with a quality and authenticity guarantee. Besides, mark given by the European Commission means that the name of the product has been protected, so that it has been protected from imitation in all countries that are members of the EU.

Protection of its own cheese represents the protection of cultural identity of a certain area, therefore it also represents the protection of cultural identity of a country, as well. At the same time, it has been reflected in the environmental protection, as well as in the stimulation of local population to produce high quality cheese, which is different from industrial cheese. In order to get PDO mark, which is acknowledged in the EU, quality of autochthonous cheese must originate from the uniqueness of geographical area and production, which has been performing under strictly defined conditions, including human and natural factors. During the procedure of acknowledgment of PDO mark, the fulfillment of the following *conditions* is being checked:

- a share of natural pasture in a certain area (Pecorino Toscano-Italy);
- breed of milked animals (Le-Beafort-breed, Tarentaise-France);
- use of unprocessed milk (Vastedda, Sicily-Italy);
- unique characteristics of rennet (Queso de la Cerena-plant origin rennet, Spain);
- natural microflora as a starter culture (Mozzarella di Bufala, Italy);
- unique or traditional technology of cheese production (Ragusano-Sicilia, Italy);
- unique natural ripening environment (Roquefort, France);
- unique shape, as well as particularity of the ingredients (Le Pouligny Caint-Pierre, France).

The EU adopted the Council Regulation (EC) No. 510/2006, according to which producers from countries which are not members of EU can protect geographical origin of their products. It means that, the products that fulfill the requirements stated by the Directive, will have the possibility to use the same marks that products of the countries that are members of the EU use. That is the legal basis according to which the producers from the countries that are not members of the EU can place their products on the EU market.

System certification has to ensure an adequate control, which should be identical with the control within the EU. The bodies that perform control must guarantee objectivity and impartiality and must have qualified staff at disposal. Holding a seminar of this kind will contribute establishment of the efficient systems for control and certification of the products with geographical origin.

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Waterpower Engineering of the Republic of Serbia strives with its measures to contribute that domestic products with geographical origin find their place on the EU market also, with the same marks which protect geographical origin that the products which originates from the countries that belong to the EU have, in order to increase their export.

Production of autochthonous cheese is very simple under the conditions of rural household, but proceedings for the acknowledgment of Geographical Indication mark of these products is very demanding. In order to produce autochthonous cheese in accordance with Food Safety standards,

the appropriate hygienic conditions during the production, as well as hygienic conditions of storage and distribution must be enabled, and there also must be a permanent control and education of producers. Sale and purchase must be in connection, they must not vary, because that provokes suspicion and insecurity among producers. Among series of demands, priority is given to good hygiene practice of the production, so that permanent quality and safety of products could be guaranteed. For that purpose, collaboration among scientific and expert staff and the producers of autochthonous products is necessary in order to enable conditions for the acknowledgment of Geographic Indication.

**Table 4.** Traditional cheese in West Balkan countries

	<b>Cheese name</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Marks</b>
<b>Serbia</b>	Homolj cow cheese	Homolj	PGI
	Homolj sheep cheese	Homolj	PGI
	Homolj goat cheese	Homolj	PGI
	Lužnička vurda	Babušnica	
	Pirot hard cheese	Pirot	
	Sjenica cheese	Sjenica	
	Svrljig hard cheese	Svrljig	PGI
	Zlatar cheese	Zlatar	
	Golija cheese	Golija	
	Stara planina hard cheese	Stara planina	
	Sombor cheese	Sombor	
	Šara cheese	Štrpce	
	Šara hard cheese	Štrpce	
	Šara white cheese	Štrpce	
Šara cheese for pies	Štrpce		
<b>Bosnia and Herzegovina</b>	Livno sheep cheese	Livno	
	Vlašić sheep cheese	Vlašić	
	Travnik cheese	Travnik	
<b>Croatia</b>	Pag cheese	Pag	PGI
	Lički škrpavac	Lika	
	Ovčiji sir iz mješine	Pakovo village	
	Sheep cheese	Pakovo village	
<b>Macedonia</b>	Šarplanina sheep hard cheese	Šarplanina	PGI
<b>Slovenia</b>	Nanos cow cheese	Nanos	PDO
	Bovec cheese	Bovec	PDO
	Tolminc cow cheese	Tolminc	PDO
	Mohant (cow cheese)	Bohinj	PDO
	Karst sheep cheese	Karst	PDO

Source: [hrt.hr/index.php?id=48&tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=5639&](http://hrt.hr/index.php?id=48&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=5639&); [www.sinj.com.hr](http://www.sinj.com.hr); Arsić and collaborators, 2009; [www.focus-balkans.org/](http://www.focus-balkans.org/)

One of the examples that have already been realized is standardization of the technology for the production of Zlatar cheese for the purpose of registration and nomination for the protection of Geographical Indication. This was performed in collaboration with research fellows of the Faculty of Agriculture in Belgrade, in the form of science research project, financed by the Ministry of Science of the Republic of Serbia and by the producers from rural environment of Zlatar.

Legal protection of Geographic Indication marks is carried out through administrative procedure, conducted by Intellectual Property Office of the Republic of Serbia. Within the scope of testing the conditions for registration, Intellectual Property Office is obligated to obtain an opinion of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Waterpower Engineering about fulfillment of conditions for the acknowledgment of the status of authorized user of the

Geographical Indication mark. Application for registration of the Geographical Indication mark contains three important *parts*:

- demand for registration of the Geographical Indication mark;
- geographic description of the area;
- data about specific characteristics of products.

In 2008, the following types of cheese were nominated by means of filling out an application in Serbia: Zlata cheese, Sjenica cheese, Rajac cheese, Stara planina hard cheese, Pirot hard cheese.

## **Financial Support to the Acknowledgment of the Geographical Indication Mark in the EU and in the Republic of Serbia**

The EU Commission established a fund which directs financial resources for the support of presentation of agricultural products with protected Geographical Indication. There are private promotion campaigns, some of them co-financed by the EU Commission ([ec.europa.eu/agriculture/](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/)). With this fund the EU enables about 50% of the necessary financial resources for the system of support to the presentation of agricultural products with protected Geographical Indication. Contribution to the presentation of agricultural products with protected Geographical Indication within the EU was 8,5 million of euros during 2002, and 7,6 million of euros for the countries that do not belong to the EU. System of support to the presentation of agricultural products with protected Geographical Indication was established in the following *documents* of the EU:

- Council Regulation (EC) No 2826/2000 of 19 December 2000 on information and promotion actions for agricultural products on the internal market;
- Council Regulation (EC) No 509/2006 of 20 March 2006 on agricultural products and foodstuffs as traditional specialities guaranteed;
- Commission Regulation (EC) No 1216/2007 of 18 October 2007 laying down detailed rules for the implementation of Council Regulation (EC) No 509/2006 on agricultural products and foodstuffs as traditional specialities guaranteed;
- Council Regulation (EC) No 510/2006 of 20 March 2006 on the protection of geographical indications and designations of origin for agricultural products and foodstuffs;
- Commission Regulation (EC) No 1898/2006 of 14 December 2006 laying down detailed rules of implementation of Council Regulation (EC) No 510/2006 on the protection of geographical indications and designations of origin for agricultural products and foodstuffs;
- Commission Regulation (EC) No 417/2008 of 8 May 2008 amending Annexes I and II to Council Regulation (EC) No 510/2006 on the protection of geographical indications and designations of origin for agricultural products and foodstuffs;
- Commission Regulation (EC) No 628/2008 of 2 July 2008 amending Regulation (EC) No 1898/2006 laying down detailed rules of implementation of Council Regulation (EC) No 510/2006 on the protection of geographical indications and designations of origin for agricultural products and foodstuffs.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Waterpower Engineering of the Republic of Serbia announced an open competition for the distribution of stimulation resources for the improvement of production of agriculture and food products with Geographic Indication. Among all others, Citizens Associations and collective farms had the right to submit a demand to use stimulation resources. Priority in awarding resources was also given to the producers who

financed a part of activities from their own resources, or to those who applied for the purpose of realization of activities related to agriculture and food products with Geographical Indication of autochthonous breed.

With a view to increasing the export and decreasing domestic stock of milk, The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Waterpower Engineering will separate significant financial resources for subvention of dairy sector through passing the following *regulations*:

*Milk quality improvement* – milking equipment, equipment for distribution and storage of milk (milking machines, complete linear milking systems, milking places and lactofreezes), in percentage from 40% to 50% of irretrievable commitments of resources;

*Construction of modern buildings for animal housing* (cattle, sheep and goats), in percentage from 40% to 50% of irretrievable commitments of resources;

*Construction of fodder storage buildings* (silos and hay storage buildings), in percentage from 40% to 50% of irretrievable commitments of resources;

*Farm equipment* (automatic watering places, automatic breeding places for concentrate food), in percentage from 40% to 50% of irretrievable commitments of resources;

*Mechanization for preparation and distribution of fodder on a farm* (mowing machine, machine for overturning hay, machines for making bales and trailers for mixing fodder), in percentage from 40% to 50% of irretrievable commitments of resources;

*Investment in buildings for manipulation, storage and treatment of fertilizers*, in percentage from 40% to 50% of irretrievable commitments of resources;

This sort of financial support contributes to the creation of adequate conditions for the production of autochthonous cheese that should have been nominated for the registration of Geographical Indication and Protected Denomination of Origin marks.

## Conclusion

During the last decade, a need to protect production and to acknowledge origin and geographical indication of autochthonous cheese has been imposed again, in order to preserve uniqueness and distinction of products and to prevent imitation and therefore protect consumers.

Traditional technology of production of autochthonous cheese is very simple in modest conditions of hilly and mountainous area of the Republic of Serbia. The geographic position, the climate, the height above sea level and the abundant mountain pastures are suitable for sheep raising and cattle raising, and therefore for the production of milk and traditional products. In order to find a place on the EU market for autochthonous cheese made in the Republic of Serbia, it is necessary to bring the technology of production to the level which ensures high, standard quality and safety of products, so that all necessary conditions could be fulfilled for the purpose of getting Denomination of Origin and Geographical Indication marks. This is possible to accomplish through collaboration among individual producers and their associations and scientific institutions and authorized ministries.

Financial support to the presentation of agricultural products with Denomination of Origin (PDO) and Geographical Indication (PGI) marks is given, under certain conditions, by the EU, as well as by the Republic of Serbia.

Before admission to the EU, the Republic of Serbia should start with more massive production of autochthonous cheese with Denomination of Origin and Geographical Indication marks, especially because of the fact that for the export of these types of cheese quota does not exist. After the admission to the EU, the Republic of Serbia will be obligated to correct milk production to be in accordance with the current EU regulations and quantities.



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## Piața brânzeturilor și mărcile de calitate în Republica Serbia și Uniunea Europeană

### Rezumat

*În ultimii ani, recunoașterea originalității produselor a avut o semnificație din ce în ce mai mare, datorită nevoii de a conserva caracteristicile tradițiilor renumite din vechime, care îi aduc recunoaștere și o diferențiază, dar și datorită nevoii de a împiedica falsificarea produselor. Protejarea brânzeturilor autohtone în cazul fiecărei țări reprezintă contribuția acesteia la protecția mediului, precum și un stimul pentru populația din zona rurală de a produce brânzeturi de calitate în conformitate cu standardele internaționale de siguranță alimentară. Producerea de brânzeturi autohtone în Serbia are o tradiție îndelungată. Sunt extrem de importante acceptarea și aplicarea sistemelor de control, supervizare și conservare a brânzeturilor tradiționale, preluând modelul țărilor din UE.*