

# SINGLE DOCUMENT

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

**‘PIMENT D’ESPELETTE’ / ‘PIMENT D’ESPELETTE - EZPELETAKO-BIPERRA’**

EC No: FR-PDO-0105-0131-04.04.2011

**PGI ( ) PDO ( X )**

**1. NAME**

‘Piment d’Espelette’ / ‘Piment d’Espelette - Ezpeletako Biperra’

**2. MEMBER STATE OR THIRD COUNTRY**

FRANCE

**3. DESCRIPTION OF THE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCT OR FOODSTUFF**

**3.1. Type of product**

Class 1.8 (spice)

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

The PDO ‘Piment d’Espelette’/‘Piment d’Espelette-Ezpeletako Biperra’ relates to the chilli pepper of the ‘Capsicum annum’ species in the form of whole, fresh chilli peppers or chilli peppers in strings or in powder form. The chilli peppers originate from the seed of the Gorria variety or from the variety corresponding to the following varietal type: annual herbaceous plant up to 80 cm in height. Alternate, whole and oval leaves. Single white leaves at the leaf axil. Plump, hanging, conical fruit, turning red when ripe. A partition divides the fruit (incompletely at the top) into three cells housing many seeds. Producers can use seeds from their own holdings.

‘Piment d’Espelette’ chilli peppers have an intense odour dominated by fruity and/or smoky aromas, sometimes with an added hint of fresh mown hay, combined with a strong, but not overly fiery, taste. They turn red when ripe and come in three forms:

- fresh, whole chilli peppers: totally free of any green colour, the chilli peppers are regular and conical in shape, their skin is smooth, and they measure 7-14 cm in length, excluding the stalk;

- in strings: the chilli peppers are strung together in twos (in a fishbone shape), threes (in a triangle) or fours (in a cross); red in colour, they are regular and conical in shape, have a smooth skin and measure 7-14 cm in length, excluding the stalk. A string comprises 20, 30, 40, 60, 80 or 100 even-sized peppers. The strings must be arranged harmoniously and evenly, both in overall terms and in terms of the shapes and size of the chilli peppers, allowing the peppers to ripen and dry out;

- chilli powder: the chillies for each batch of powder must come from the same holding. Grinding occurs after a period of ripening, followed by drying in an oven; the powder is

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\* 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.

orange to reddish-brown in colour. It must be sufficiently finely ground so that the particles do not exceed 5 mm. ‘Piment d’Espelette’ chilli powder has an intense odour dominated by fruity, smoky aromas, and/or a hint of hay, combined with a strong, but not overly fiery, more or less long-lasting taste, which hits the palate gradually and/or with a sensation of heat. ‘Piment d’Espelette’ chilli powder may have a hint of sweetness and/or bitterness in the mouth. The moisture content of the chilli powder is lower than 12%.

**3.3. Raw materials (for processed products only)**

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Not applicable.

**3.4. Feed (for products of animal origin only)**

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Not applicable.

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

The chilli peppers must be produced and processed within the geographical area.

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

Packaging takes place in the area of production, thus guaranteeing not only the product’s authenticity, but also that it retains its qualities and characteristics and at the same time protecting the ‘Piment d’Espelette’ designation of origin.

The chilli pepper is harvested when it is red (no green discolouring) and fully ripe. Harvesting occurs on a regular basis. The peppers’ ripeness means they are fragile and need to be handled with great care after harvesting. The provisions laid down in the specifications aim to preserve the specific characteristics of the chilli pepper.

Within 48 hours of harvesting, the peppers are sorted and consigned fresh or in strings or are left to ripen for grinding into powder.

Peppers intended for packaging as whole, fresh chillies or in strings are sorted individually. This process calls for a particularly expert knowledge and understanding of the product to ensure the peppers are of the highest standard (regular, conical form, smooth skin and 7-14 cm in length).

The whole, fresh peppers are stored in a dry place, away from direct sunlight, before being shipped. They are packaged in small, slatted boxes labelled and used exclusively for ‘Piment d’Espelette’. The boxes can hold up to 15 kg and must be no more than 25 cm high.

Chilli peppers to be sold in strings of 20, 30, 40, 60, 80 or 100 peppers are strung up manually by the producer on a food string. This process calls for a particularly expert knowledge and understanding of the product. This knowledge, shared by the producers of the PDO, results in a string of peppers matching the product’s description: arranged harmoniously and evenly, both in overall terms and in terms of the shapes and size of the chilli peppers.

After sorting, chilli peppers to be sold in powder form are ripened for at least 15 days in a warm, well-aired place. At the end of the ripening period, the peppers have their stalks removed and are dried and ground. These processes are the result of an expert knowledge of the characteristics of the pepper and know-how passed down from generation to generation.

The packaging of the powder is a key step, aimed at preserving the product's organoleptic characteristics.

The powder obtained must have a moisture content of less than 12%. It is orange to reddish-brown in colour, has an intense odour dominated by fruity, smoky aromas, and/or a hint of hay, combined with a strong, but not overly fiery, more or less long-lasting taste, which hits the palate gradually and/or with a sensation of heat. The powder may have a hint of sweetness and/or bitterness in the mouth.

Straight after grinding, the powder is stored in a sealed, vacuum-packed bag.

This process must occur swiftly in order to preserve the powder from organoleptic deficiencies such as pronounced bitterness or aromas of damp hay, fungus, greenery or even staleness. Powder not packaged straight after production would be prone to re-humidification, various forms of contamination and a rapid deterioration in its characteristics.

To be released to the market for consumption, the powder must be packaged in vacuum-packed bags of 250 g, 500 g, 1 kg or 5 kg or in airtight glass jars. No colourings, additives or preservatives may be added, except for inert gas.

Moreover, given the miscible nature of the chilli pepper's powder, the obligation to package the powder in the area of production guarantees its traceability and origin.

### **3.7. Specific rules concerning labelling**

Labels on fresh chilli peppers or those in strings or in powder form with the designation of origin 'Piment d'Espelette' or 'Piment d'Espelette-Ezpeletako Biperra' bear the words 'Piment d'Espelette' or 'Piment d'Espelette-Ezpeletako Biperra' in letters at least 1.3 times the size of the largest characters on the label. The label must contain the European Union PDO logo. The logo is accompanied by the name of the designation, with no intervening words.

The label can also contain the terms 'appellation d'origine protégée' [protected designation of origin] or 'AOP' [PDO], immediately followed or preceded by the name of the designation, with no intervening words.

Apart from the label, accompanying documents, invoices and markings must bear the name of the designation of origin and the terms 'appellation d'origine protégée' [protected designation of origin] and/or 'AOP' [PDO] and/or the European Union PDO logo.

## **4. CONCISE DEFINITION OF THE GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

The geographical area of production is spread over 10 municipalities in the Pyrénées-Atlantiques department: the municipalities of Larressore and Souraïde fall entirely within the area, while Aïnhua, Cambo-les-Bains, Espelette, Halsou, Itxassou, Jatxou, Saint-Pée-sur-Nivelle and Ustaritz fall partly within it.

A map delineating the boundaries of the geographical area has been lodged with the municipal authorities of the partially covered municipalities. A map of these municipalities is available on the website of the competent national authority in line with the requirements of the INSPIRE Directive.

## **5. LINK WITH THE GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

### **5.1. Specificity of the geographical area**

Located in the south-west of France, the small region of Espelette enjoys a southern, oceanic climate. Summers are warm (with average highs of 25°C in July) and winters mild (with an average of 12°C in January). Frost is rare (23 days/year on average), days without thaw even rarer (eight days in 20 years).

The Espelette region is close to the ocean yet it is not affected by the sea breezes caused by the contrast between the temperature of the ocean and that of the land, as it is protected by a range of hills some 100 m high which acts as a windbreak and prevents the phenomena of evapotranspiration and plant dehydration from occurring.

Moreover, the Pyrenean hills and mountains surrounding Espelette delimit a north-west-facing amphitheatre of sorts and form the first barrier against the humid ocean flows, which frequently erupt as heavy rain. The average precipitation in Espelette over the past 20 years stands at 1 800 mm.

On average, 180 days of the year benefit from precipitation. That gives the region the highest water balance (the difference between the inflow and outflow of water) in France at a similar altitude. Finally, by causing an increase in cloud cover, the surrounding hills regulate the temperature and reduce the difference between daytime and night-time temperatures.

The parcels on which the chilli peppers are to be grown are selected in such a way as to make the most of the opportunities afforded by the climate. The parcels are chosen several months before planting is carried out and undergo a specific procedure. They must be sufficiently fertile and rich in organic matter to meet the plant's needs, to provide a good water supply and good drainage, to benefit from favourable orientation and exposure to sunlight and to prevent the risk of erosion. The texture of these parcels is a balance between clay, silt and sand, benefiting almost each year from a healthy supply of well-decomposed manure.

Finally, the presence of the Pyrenees mountains, under the influence of the föehn between the northern and southern slopes, results in a southerly wind known as *haize hegoa*. This warm wind is unusual in that it preserves the same intensity by day and by night; it is frequent in autumn and winter, providing a very timely contribution to the ripening and drying of fruits.

The meteorological data recorded demonstrate that the small region of Espelette displays unusual climatic characteristics owing to the conjunction of its geographical and geomorphologic position.

### **5.2. Specificity of the product**

'Piment d'Espelette' chilli peppers have an intense odour dominated by fruity and/or smoky aromas, sometimes with an added hint of fresh-mown hay, combined with a strong, but not overly hot, taste. They are red when ripe and come in three forms: whole, fresh chilli peppers, and peppers in powder and in string form.

The pepper was first introduced to the Espelette region in the 16th century; it probably reached the province of Labourd through Spain in the same way as maize, which was introduced via the Nive valley. The first reference to chilli peppers of the Capsicum species and their use as a spice appeared in the 17th century. These peppers offered an affordable alternative to black pepper – which, up to then had been imported at a high cost – in the seasoning and preserving of meat.

The peppers were also praised for their therapeutic virtues and found their way into medicine cabinets in people's homes. In 1745 Father Manuel de Larramendi's Basque dictionary described the use of 'Piment d'Espelette' as a spice.

They were grown in kitchen gardens by women, mainly for use in the home or for sale to pork butchers and innkeepers, large numbers of whom set up in Espelette when trade was authorised by Louis XV.

Despite the far-reaching changes that took place in the countryside in the 19th and 20th centuries, the cultivation of 'Piment d'Espelette' has continued, and the crop has become closely associated with the local gastronomic tradition and the region's strong identity.

Even fairly recently, the income generated by 'Piment d'Espelette' provided a personal income for the women who grew it and supplemented the low incomes of small, mixed crop and livestock farms.

The development of pepper-growing has thus helped maintain these traditional, mixed crop and livestock farms.

Garlands of chillies drying on house-fronts in autumn are a typical, striking feature of the region.

'Piment d'Espelette' peppers are currently the only traditional chillies used as a spice that are produced in France. Given its tropical origin, the species *Capsicum annum* L., to which 'Piment d'Espelette' chillies belong, is not suited to cultivation and processing as a spice in French climes, except under very special conditions and in the case of a variety that is adapted to them.

It should be noted that the *Capsicum annum* species has been recognised by botanists since 1930 for its ability to take different forms according to the soil and climate.

The plant has retained strong climatic requirements from the tropical origins of its ancestors. The plant needs regular, generous watering as it does not flourish in too little or too much water. Excessive watering of the roots would cause the plant to stop growing permanently. Similarly, the plant can only develop when the soil temperature is above 12°C and it grows well when the average temperature reaches 20°C with only slight variation between day and night.

### **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 another characteristic of the product (for PGI)**

Uniquely in these latitudes, the climate of the small region of Espelette combines just the right temperature and humidity conditions that the plant needs to grow and to be processed into spice. The characteristics of the temperatures, rainfall and heat regulation allow the plant's needs to be met.

The local varietal type originates from the age-old mass selection performed by producers, originally only women. All these characteristics are in perfect harmony with the conditions of the local environment and enable the pepper to be processed into a highly distinctive spice: aromatic and hot without being fiery.

The local variety is the direct result of the observations and know-how of the local producers: it reflects their close bond with the environment and is particularly well-suited to the region's weather conditions.

From the selection of the seed to the preservation of the spice with all its organoleptic characteristics, each stage is conducted in accordance with local and adapted expertise,

which calls for a significant learning process. Growing and processing ‘Piment d’Espelette’ requires great powers of observation and frequent use of manual processes. Over the centuries, both women and men have succeeded in preserving the varietal type and the traditional cultivation, drying and processing techniques that have enabled the product to retain its originality.

‘Piment d’Espelette’ plays a prominent role in local gastronomy and culture: in France, it is the spice of the Basque Country. For example, a number of local expressions are based on the word *piment* [pepper], and the pepper festival at Espelette is a highlight for the entire region: on that day, some 20 000 people descend on the village both to stock up on and to celebrate ‘Piment d’Espelette’.

In the old days, ‘Piment d’Espelette’ enabled women producing it to become financially independent. Today, it accounts for a significant proportion of the income of some 60 agricultural holdings, and the production of ‘Piment d’Espelette’ allows small, family-run holdings to be set up or to stay in business.

The businesses of many prepared and cured meat firms, producers of prepared meals and restaurateurs in the region are directly linked to ‘Piment d’Espelette’.

At national level, the masters of French gastronomy are loyal to ‘Piment d’Espelette’, which often constitutes one of the secrets of their recipes.

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#### **Reference to publication of the specification**

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

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

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\* 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.