

Publication of an application 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

(2013/C 231/11)

This publication confers the right to oppose the application pursuant to Article 51 of Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council ⁽¹⁾.

SINGLE DOCUMENT

COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 510/2006

on the protection of geographical indications and designations of origin for agricultural products and foodstuffs ⁽²⁾

'WEST COUNTRY BEEF'

EC No: UK-PGI-0005-0668-21.12.2007

PGI (X) PDO ()

1. Name

'West Country Beef'

2. Member State or third country

United Kingdom

3. Description of the agricultural product or foodstuff

3.1. Type of product

Class 1.1. Fresh meat (and offal)

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

'West Country Beef' is the name applied to carcasses, sides or cuts of beef derived from cattle born and raised in the West Country region of England and slaughtered in accordance with Meat South West (MSW) or equivalent standards, in approved abattoirs within the West Country region, or outside of the area. These approved plants will have been inspected by an independent inspector to ensure full traceability and authenticity of product. The plants will be licensed by Meat South West as approved to process 'West Country Beef'.

All livestock is reared in line with agreed, high standards of husbandry and welfare, providing assurance of its safety.

Production must meet the following minimum requirements:

- born, reared and finished within the West Country region,
- fed a forage-based diet,
- comply with all current legislation,
- possess and be aware of all relevant codes of practice,
- ensure the health and welfare of the stock based on The Five Freedoms,
- ensure that full traceability systems are in place,
- ensure livestock are managed by competent stockmen and trained staff,

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 343, 14.12.2012, p. 1.

⁽²⁾ Replaced by Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012.

- ensure the safety and welfare of animals during transport, marketing and prior to slaughter,
- slaughter occurs in an approved and licensed facility with full traceability to ensure authenticity of product.

The farms and processing plants are inspected by independent inspectors with a defined inspection protocol.

To comply with the requirements of the 'West Country Beef' scheme, producers are required during the inspections to demonstrate the cattle are born, reared and finished within the West Country region. A feed log is required and proof provided that the cattle have been fed on a diet comprising of at least 70 % forage. The scheme requires an extensive system with a very minimum of six months grazing.

The specific grass-based diet improves the chemical composition of beef muscle (see Table 1 below) and also improves organoleptic qualities of the meat, when compared to concentrate fed cattle.

Table 1

Fatty acid composition (mg/100 g muscle) and vitamin E content (mg/kg) of beef loin muscle

	Concentrates	Silage	Grass
18:2 ⁽¹⁾	210	87	76
18:3 ⁽²⁾	8,1	48,7	35,6
EPA ⁽³⁾	2,6	19,7	19,2
DHA ⁽⁴⁾	0,5	5,1	2,8
18:2/18:3	27,2	1,8	2,1
Vitamin E	1,4	3,3	4,2

⁽¹⁾ Linoleic.

⁽²⁾ Linolenic.

⁽³⁾ Eicosapentaenoic.

⁽⁴⁾ Docosahexaenoic.

This results in more consistently tasty meat, giving an excellent eating experience. The natural marbling of the meat with intra-muscular fatty tissues adds flavour and succulence. The colour of the fat can be from white to yellow, but the specific diet encourages a cream colour. The meat colour varies from pink to dark red, with the maturation resulting in the meat being darker red.

The cattle are finished for a minimum of 60 days. The majority of stock start to finish naturally themselves — the age or weight varies as there are breed differences (a finishing weight between 200 kg and 500 kg dead weight is ideal).

The meat will receive a minimum of 10 days conditioning at refrigeration temperatures, a process known as maturation starting at the date of kill. During maturation the natural enzymes within, the meat break down the connective tissues and thus improve the tenderness and eating quality of the meat. For cuts that are traditionally slow cooked such as brisket and shin there is no minimum maturation time. These periods may be reduced by the application of high voltage electrical stimulation as these reduce the risk of cold shortening, or hip suspension, which improves the tenderness of the meat. Records are kept to show temperatures, processes and times to ensure the carcasses are cooled and matured correctly.

The carcass classification specification (based on the EUROP system), to ensure optimum eating quality, is:

- carcasses classified as conformation O+ or better, with a fatness of 2 to 4H.

		Increasing fatness =>						
		1	2	3	4L	4H	5L	5H
Improving conformation =>	E							
	U+							
	-U							
	R							
	O+							
	-O							
	P+							
	-P							

After slaughter 'West Country Beef' is marketed to the trade in a number of forms as follows:

whole carcase, excluding inedible offal, hide, head and feet;

whole side: half of the carcase, split lengthwise;

hindquarter/forequarter: the whole side split between the 10th/11th ribs from the anterior (or otherwise similarly by arrangement);

primal cuts: produced by dividing carcasses/sides into smaller, recognised parts (to satisfy customer preferences). These cuts may be presented bone-in or boneless and in protective packaging.

'West Country Beef' may be sold fresh (refrigerated) or frozen.

3.3. Raw materials (for processed products only)

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3.4. Feed (for products of animal origin only)

The livestock may be fed supplements at the weaning and finishing stage, in which case, the details of the ingredients and purchase are recorded by the farmer and checked by the assurance inspectors. The time the animal is supplemented is determined taking into account factors such as animal welfare and marketing.

The maximum amount of supplementary feed is 30 %, with forage at 70 %. The supplementary feeding would be when required, such as during winter months or the weaning and finishing periods.

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

All livestock is reared in line with agreed, high standards of husbandry and welfare, providing assurance of its safety.

Production must meet the following minimum requirements:

- born, reared and finished within the West Country region,
- fed a forage-based diet,
- comply with all current legislation,
- possess and be aware of all relevant codes of practice,
- ensure the health and welfare of the stock based on The Five Freedoms,
- ensure that full traceability systems are in place,
- ensure livestock are managed by competent stockmen and trained staff,

- ensure the safety and welfare of animals during transport, marketing and prior to slaughter,
- slaughter occurs in an approved and licensed facility with full traceability to ensure authenticity of product.

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

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3.7. *Specific rules concerning labelling*

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4. Concise definition of the geographical area

The geographical area consists of the six counties of Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire, which together make up the West Country region of England.

5. Link with the geographical area

5.1. *Specificity of the geographical area*

The West Country of England is properly describable as a grassland peninsula. The distinction between grassland and arable farming has developed partly as the result of the different soil type. The West Country has a high proportion of gley and brown soils which support grass growth but are not ideally suited to arable farming. Arable growing areas have a higher proportion of clay and sandy soils, more easily drained. Further, the West Country has the highest average temperature and the highest minimum and maximum temperatures in the UK.

The West Country is the largest, most agricultural region in England. Its environment is one of the richest in the UK. Its farms produce an estimated 24 % of beef in England and it is this, together with its 21 % share of sheep production, which has helped shape and maintain the landscape and heritage of the region. The high density of livestock has encouraged the development of a large meat processing sector which creates much-needed employment opportunities in the region.

The West Country's combination of warm and mild temperatures, well-distributed rainfall through the year, and deep moisture-retentive soils means the grass and forage crops can be made and grazed for almost all the year. Grass grows in much of the region for over 300 days of the year. This year-round production is the norm in the West Country and explains why livestock production predominates. In addition, over 25 % of the West Country's grassland is situated either in National Parks or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and the region has over 57 % of the UK's flower-rich meadows. Research undertaken by Bristol University shows that beef flavour is deeper and more liked on grass than concentrate feeding.

5.2. *Specificity of the product*

There is a high reliance on fresh grass and conserved grass in the West Country. This produces a characteristic effect on meat quality and the nutritional value of beef in terms of fatty acid composition, vitamin E content and sensory quality. Scientific experiments have clearly demonstrated these effects. They showed a difference in fatty acid composition between steers produced on a grain-based (concentrate) diet and on a grass-based diet (Table 1). Those fed grass silage had higher levels of fat in muscle and the fatty acid profile was quite different. Linoleic acid and its product (arachidonic acid), both n-6 (omega-6) fatty acids, were higher in muscle of the steers fed concentrate; and linolenic acid and its products eicosapentaenoic EPA and docosahexaenoic DHA, all n-3 (omega-3) fatty acids, were higher in muscle of the steers fed grass silage and fresh grass. The ratio of n-6 fatty acids to n-3 fatty acids was much higher in the animals fed concentrate. The recommended ratio for the human diet is 4 or below which was easily achieved in the grass-fed beef but not in the concentrate — fed beef. A simple ratio which distinguishes grass — fed from concentrate — fed beef is 18:2/18:3, this being around 2 and 27 in Table 1 for grass and concentrate — fed beef respectively.

Grass, whether fresh or conserved, is a source of α -linolenic acid, which can be converted in the animal to long chain n-3 (omega-3) polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFA), valuable nutrients in the human diet. Grass also contains vitamin E and both n-3 fatty acids and vitamin E are at higher concentrations in grass-fed beef. These nutrients also affect the taste of the meat.

Thus, grass and grass forage diets demonstrably produce a distinctive fatty acid profile in muscle that distinguishes them from concentrate diets. Values of around 1 % linolenic acid, 0,5 % EPA and 0,1 % DHA are descriptive of grass-reared beef. These are %s of the fatty acids present, which is the way fatty acid composition is often described. This effect benefits 'West Country Beef'. Vitamin E found naturally in grass is incorporated into muscle and fat tissue in cattle. Steers fed grass silage had at least double the concentration of vitamin E in muscle than those fed concentrate (Table 1). This causes the meat to retain its bright red colour for two extra days during retail display.

British studies concluded that the taste of beef is better in grass-finished cattle than grain-fed cattle. The score for beef flavour was higher with grass than concentrate. The score for abnormal flavour was highest for concentrate.

The independent report commissioned by Meat South West from which the above conclusions were extracted shows a summary of the special characteristics to be a low ratio of n-6 fatty acids to n-3 fatty acids and a high concentration of vitamin E:

- 18:2/18:3 ratio less than 4,
- vitamin E > 3,0 mg/kg loin muscle.

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)*

The West Country of England, as a result of its climate, topography, geology and the consequent lushness of grass production, imparts particular qualities to cattle reared in the region, and thence to the meat from those animals. A high proportion of its farmed area is grass, which is ideally suited to cattle production and can also be used in supplementary feed.

There is a strong and objective scientific case that beef produced and processed in the West Country of England has qualities that are inherently linked to that geographical area, because of the greater availability of and reliance on grass in the diet, leading to higher concentrations of n-3 PUFA and vitamin E in the meat.

Grass growth is affected by soil type, temperature, rainfall and sunshine. A further important factor is topography i.e. altitude, with grass growth declining as altitude increases. The more favourable climate in the West Country increases the number of grass-growing days in comparison with other regions. Grass grows for more than 220 days of the year in all parts of the West Country which is not true of any other part of Britain, with parts achieving over 300 days of grass growth. As a result, cattle produced in the West Country have a greater access to grass and grass products than those in most other parts of Britain or elsewhere in the EU.

These values are achieved in beef from cattle which are born, reared and finished in the West Country of England where animals have access to fresh grass for longer than in other regions because of the warm wet climate and where production systems are based on extensive production from grass. Climate changes in the future are likely to favour grass farming in the West Country even more than at present.

Meat South West estimates the total contribution of the red meat sector to the West Country economy at GBP 3 billion per annum and 28 000 jobs. The continuation of livestock production is essential if the region's environment and heritage are to be protected. Indeed it is that special environment that is the basis for the characteristics that are inherently developed in 'West Country Beef' as a consequence of the source animals being raised in the region.

Historically the most common cattle breeds in the region have been South Devon and Ruby Red. However, many native and continental breeds are also well suited to the region's landscape and perform well on the region's grasses. 'West Country Beef' can therefore be produced from any breed of cattle. The diversity of landscapes allows a stratified livestock industry to exist within the region's boundaries. The upland areas of Exmoor, Dartmoor and Bodmin Moor provide the breeding grounds and summer grazing for traditional beef herds, and the lowland grasslands and coastal regions, where grass continues to grow for most of the year, provides ideal finishing pastures.

Reference to publication of the specification

(Article 5(7) of Regulation (EC) No 510/2006 ⁽³⁾)

<http://archive.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/food/industry/regional/foodname/products/documents/wc-beef-pgi-final-20121127.pdf>

⁽³⁾ See footnote 2.