

SINGLE DOCUMENT

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

EU No: Pending EU allocation

PGI () PDO (X)

1. NAME

'*Ġbejna*'; (plural='*Ġbejniet*')

2. MEMBER STATE OR THIRD COUNTRY

Maltese archipelago islands, including Malta, Gozo and Comino

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCT OR FOODSTUFF

3.1. Type of product

Class 1.3. Cheeses

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

The '*Ġbejna*' is a fresh cheese produced with whole raw milk from sheep (*Ovis aries*) of the 'Maltese' breed and its crosses¹ with the Friesian breed, and that are registered in the Maltese islands, including Malta, Gozo and Comino. Sheep of the 'Maltese' breed are slender with a head that is mostly masked reddish, yellow or black, with long neck and semi lop ears. Muzzles have no wool and their long slim body with long silky coat is mostly white fleece but may have patches at any place; the patches are of the same colour of the head. Head and feet are not fleeced, while their long tail is covered with long fleece. The crossed breeds tend to retain most characteristics of the Maltese sheep breed mentioned above, though they are usually entirely white and have a wider girth.

The '*Ġbejna*' can be sold fresh ('*Ġbejna friska*'), air-dried ('*Ġbejna niexfa*') or pickled and peppered ('*Ġbejna tal-bżar*')^{2,3}.

The '*Ġbejna friska*' should possess the following physical, chemical and organoleptic characteristics: it should be white and glossy, with a fresh and soft core, and its surface takes the shape of the motifs of the mould in which it is processed. It appears as a truncated cone of small dimensions, with a height ranging between 3cm to 4cm, and a weight of 65g to 80g. The base diameter ranges between 5cm to 7cm while the top diameter ranges between 3cm to 5 cm. The Total Protein should be range between 15% and 20%, while the Total Fat should range between 15% and 20%. It should have an acidulous taste typical of sheep milk.

The '*Ġbejna niexfa*' should possess the following physical, chemical and organoleptic characteristics: it has a firmer consistency and varies in colour from white to off white to very light straw colour; the yellowish taint increases, and the parameters vary, as

the drying and storage period increases⁴. It should weigh between 30g to 50g, and have a pH ranging between 5.1 and 5.3. The Total Solid Content should range between 40% and 56%. The Total Protein range between 14% and 30%, while the Total Fat should range between 25% and 40%.

The '*Gbejna tal-bżar*' should possess the following physical, chemical and organoleptic characteristics: it presents itself with a varying amount of fine to rough ground crushed black pepper attached to its surface. It should weigh between 30g to 50g, and have a pH ranging between 4.9 and 5.1. The Total Solid Content should range between 37% and 52%. The Total Protein should range between 14% and 30%, while the Total Fat should range between 25% and 40%⁴.

3.3. Raw materials (for processed products only)

The raw sheep milk originating from herds of the 'Maltese' breed and its crosses, and that are registered in Malta, Gozo or Comino, is used to make the '*Gbejna*'. The milk should possess the following chemical characteristics: a pH ranging between 6.4 and 6.7; fat content ranging between 4.5% and 8.0%; a protein content ranging between 5.0% and 6.5%, and a dry matter content between 15.0 and 18.0⁴.

3.4. Feed (for products of animal origin only)

The sheep are fed locally sourced hays of leguminous and cereal plants for at least 55% of their intake (including barley, lolium, wheat, vetch, fava, sulla, maize, sorghum, alfalfa, ryegrass and clover amongst others), supplemented with concentrates produced from raw materials and distributed by the major feed mills. Depending on availability, sheep may also be fed locally sourced plants such as carobs, cladodes of prickly pears and vetch⁴.

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

The sheep are milked at the farm, and the milk is then transformed within 1-2 hours. The milk is first filtered through a very fine strainer to remove any animal hairs that may have fallen in the milk during the milking process³. While the milk is still warm (or, if necessary, after re-heating to 37°C), '*qtar tat-tames*' (i.e. the rennet produced on the farm using the stomach lining of a suckling lamb or kid that has not yet been weaned) or other commercially available milk coagulating enzymes is added to the milk.

Following the addition of the curdling agent, the milk is left to coagulate, and after approximately 20 to 30 minutes the curd ('*baqta*') is formed. The curd is collected into small moulds ('*qaleb*') which are then placed in a stainless steel or plastic tray and left to drain. The moulds were originally made of rushes but, for hygienic purposes, these have been replaced with plastic drain moulds.

To facilitate draining, the '*Gbejna*' is turned over inside the mould once or twice, after which it is usually sprinkled with a pinch (2 to 5mg) of locally sourced sea-salt (obtained locally from the natural drying of sea water in salt pans close to the shore) and then placed in a refrigerator at a temperature of 7 to 12°C to allow them to set in the traditional shape. The '*Gbejna friska*' is normally processed and sold within 24 hours of production. This is normally sold in whey or exuding whey.

To obtain the '*Ġbejna niexfa*', the '*Ġbejna*' can be dried in the '*qanniċ*', a wooden or metal frame cupboard covered in wire or nylon mesh with a mesh size ≤ 2 mm. The '*qanniċ*' is placed outside in a ventilated area, normally on a rooftop, to air dry the '*Ġbejna*' in a natural environment in rural areas of the Maltese Islands. The time required for complete drying depends on the wind direction; northerly blowing wind ('*riħ fuq*') is considered better than southerly blowing wind ('*riħ isfel*'). Once the '*Ġbejna*' has dried sufficiently, it can be sold as '*Ġbejna niexfa*'.

The '*Ġbejna tal-bżar*' can be obtained by pickling the '*Ġbejna niexfa*'. The latter is left in vinegar for up to 24 hours locally-sourced vinegar (derived from the fermentation of grape wine), after which it is coated with coarsely freshly ground black pepper.

The '*Ġbejna niexfa*' can be preserved for up to six weeks, while the '*Ġbejna tal-bżar*' can be preserved for up to six months^{2,3}. The preservation times are based on shelf-life studies which were conducted by a nationally-accredited laboratory, and certificates are available (Annex A below).

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

All *ġbejniet* are sold in their entire form. The '*Ġbejna friska*' is sold solely by quantity, while the '*Ġbejna tal-bżar*' and the '*Ġbejna niexfa*' are sold by either weight or quantity. The '*Ġbejna*' is packed either singly or in small groups, in various transparent plastic or glass containers, each sealed with a band sticker and labelled.

3.7. Specific rules concerning labelling

The product shall carry a rectangular label indicating: the product name as:

'*Ġbejna friska*', '*Ġbejna tal-bżar*' or '*Ġbejna niexfa*';

the European Union symbol for the Protected Designation of Origin status and the logo of the certifying authority.

4. CONCISE DEFINITION OF THE GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

The Maltese archipelago consists of three inhabited islands (Malta, Gozo and Comino) and some other uninhabited minor islands. The '*Ġbejna*' is produced in the three main inhabited islands of the Maltese archipelago.

5. LINK WITH THE GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

5.1. Specificity of the geographical area

The arid terrain typical of the Maltese islands favours the keeping and feeding of sheep, as these animals can use marginal agricultural areas unsuitable for other agricultural purposes. Historical records indicate that grazing sheep have been present on the Maltese islands since medieval times^{5,6}, while the earliest reports on cheese-making date back to the 15th century and again in the 17th century⁷. The arid terrain typical of the Maltese islands favours the grazing of sheep, as these animals can use marginal agricultural areas unsuitable for other agricultural purposes. Moreover, cheese-making was a logical way to preserve the milk for longer periods of time, especially since dairy produce could only be consumed on meat-eating days².

The know-how of the cheese-making process has been passed on from generation to generation, and a recent survey on the production of the ‘*Gbejna*’ confirmed that most current producers learnt the process from their parents or grand-parents⁴.

All steps involved in the cheese-making process can be and are typically carried out by the producer, and most ingredients are locally sourced. Moreover, the drying of the ‘*Gbejna*’ is carried out naturally taking advantage of the dry, warm and salty climate typical of this geographical area.

The ‘*Gbejna*’ is an integral part of the Maltese culinary heritage, and has also made its way into several Maltese expressions and idioms, highlighting the linkage between the ‘*Gbejna*’ and Maltese culture.

5.2. Specificity of the product

The ‘*Gbejna*’ is specific to this geographical area as it is produced with whole raw milk of the ‘Maltese’ breed sheep. Moreover, most ingredients (rennet, salt and vinegar) are locally sourced, and, whenever possible, the sheep are fed locally produced hays and fodder typical of the Mediterranean climate (e.g. carob, prickly pears)⁴.

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 characteristics of the ‘*Gbejna*’ are inextricably linked with the Maltese islands, and are due to inherent natural and human factors found in this geographical environment.

The ‘*Gbejna*’ is produced with whole raw milk of the ‘Maltese’ breed sheep and crosses. The cheese-making process is part of the traditional Maltese lore and heritage. It relies heavily on locally sourced ingredients such as sea-salt and vinegar, and the salty dry warm climate typical of these islands, particularly for the dry and peppered forms.

Since the cheese is made from raw whole milk it retains a distinctive flavour. This flavour is further augmented by the fact that, as long as the weather permits, the sheep are fed locally sourced hay forage and plants typical and unique to the Mediterranean climate, such as cladodes of prickly pears, carob and vetch.

Reference to publication of the specification

Article 8(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012

Bibliography:

¹I.L., Mason, 1996. A World Dictionary of Livestock Breeds, Types and Varieties. Fourth Ed. CAB International. 273 pp.

²Carmel Cassar, Cheeselets in Maltese Food Culture, April 2010 published in “Il-Ġens ILLUM” (Available in Appendix E)

³Cheese-making – An ancient traditional cottage industry in Gozo, In-Flight Magazine, AirMalta (Available in Appendix E)

⁴"New technologies supporting the traditional Cheeses in Sicily and Malta Islands – From Farm to fork". Publication for the project by project partners leaders: Prof. Everaldo Attard (University of Malta), Prof. Stefania Carpino (CoRFiLaC, Ragusa, Regione siciliana) and Prof. Giuseppe Licitra (University of Catania). Available at:
<http://corfilac.it/system/files/Tcheesimal/From%20Fark%20to%20Fork.pdf> (Available in Appendix F)

⁵Godfrey Wettinger, "The Arabs in Malta", p.97

⁶F. Winkelmann. *Acta Imperii inedita saeculi XIII et XIV*. Vol. i. pp.713-715 : Illuminato Peri. *Uomini, Citta e Campagna in Sicilia dall' XI al XIII secolo*. Pp. 154-155.

⁷Stanley Fiorini (2006) Documentary sources of Maltese History Part I. Notarial Documents No 1. Notary Giacomo Zabara R 494/1(1): 1487-1488. Malta. Pp. 249-250, 291-292, 330.

Further readings:

Ġbejna saved from extinction - Times of Malta 31-03-2014.

Malta asking for derogation to exempt *Ġbejna* from EU regulations – Malta Today 18-09-2013. P.7.

Let's Gozo, *Salted, Peppered or Plain – A Gozitan Love Affair*. Issue 2. November/December 2011. Pp. 32-35

Ġbejniet by Deborah Ratcliffe. Sky Time Magazine December

Annex A: Shelf-life studies conducted by a nationally-accredited laboratory.

Accredited by the National Accreditation Board (NAB) Malta



Food Testing Report

Client: Xirka Naghag u Moghoz
Client Address:

Samples Condition: Cold
Sampling done by: Client
Date / Time Received: 14/02/2017 14:15:00
Started Testing: 14/02/2017
End Testing: 20/02/2017
Testing Type: Routine

Report Number: 230
Report Name: FT17000357
SOP's Used: MBDSOPTC031,MBDSOPTC034,MBDSOPTC047,MBDSOPTC048

Sample Details

Lab No	Sample Name	Food Testing - Staphylococcus aureus*	Food Testing - Salmonella - ISO6579:2002*	Food testing - E.coli - ISO16649-2:2001*	Food Testing - Listeria monocytogenes
--------	-------------	---------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------

FT17000357 Gbejniet tal-Bzar < 200 cfu/g Absent in 25g < 20 cfu/g Absent in 25g

Overall Comments:

Sample FT17000357 is Satisfactory.
Listeria sp. was present in Sample FT17000357 but not Listeria monocytogenes.
Sample collection which has been done by the client using sample containers which have/have not been supplied by BioDNA Laboratory Services Ltd. may have an impact on the final results.

*All tests marked with an asterisk are ISO 17025 accredited.

Authorised By: Dr. Marisa Cassar
Ph.D., B.Pharm. (Hons.), MBA (Henley)
Laboratory Director

Signature

21/02/2017
Date

Disclaimer: All data in this result is private and confidential and cannot be reproduced. All procedures carried out during sample analysis are in accordance with Standard Operating Procedures of BioDNA Laboratory Services Ltd.

Food Testing Report

Client: Xirka Naghag u Moghoz
Client Address:

Samples Condition: Cold
Sampling done by: Client
Date / Time Received: 14/02/2017 14:15:00
Started Testing: 17/02/2017
End Testing: 23/02/2017
Testing Type: Routine

Report Number: 231
Report Name: FT17000358
SOP's Used: MBDSOPTC031,MBDSOPTC034,MBDSOPTC047,MBDSOPTC048

Sample Details

Lab No	Sample Name	Food Testing - Stapylococcus aureus*	Food Testing - Salmonella - ISO6579:2002*	Food testing - E.coli - ISO16649-2:2001*	Food Testing - Listeria monocytogenes
FT17000358	Gbejniet Friski	< 200 cfu/g	Absent in 25g	2.00 x 10 ⁻¹ cfu/g	Absent in 25g

Overall Comments:

E.coli was detected in Sample FT17000358 when the Gbejniet Friski were tested on the 3rd day from preparation. Listeria sp. was present in Sample FT17000358 but not Listeria monocytogenes. Sample collection which has been done by the client using sample containers which have/have not been supplied by BioDNA Laboratory Services Ltd. may have an impact on the final results.

* All tests marked with an asterisk are ISO 17025 accredited.

Authorised By: Dr. Marisa Cassar
Ph.D., B.Pharm. (Hons.), MBA (Henley)
Laboratory Director



Signature

27/02/2017
Date

Disclaimer: All data in this result is private and confidential and cannot be reproduced. All procedures carried out during sample analysis are in accordance with Standard Operating Procedures of BioDNA Laboratory Services Ltd.

Food Testing Report

Client: Xirka Naghag u Moghoz
Client Address:

Samples Condition: Cold
Sampling done by: Client
Date / Time Received: 07/03/2017 13:30:00
Started Testing: 09/03/2017
End Testing: 15/03/2017
Testing Type: Routine

Report Number: 402
Report Name: FT17000596
SOP's Used: MBDSOPTC031, MBDSOPTC034, MBDSOPTC047, MBDSOPTC048

Sample Details

Lab No	Sample Ref	Sample Name	Food Testing - Staphylococcus aureus*	Food Testing - Salmonella - ISO6579:2002*	Food testing - E.coli - ISO16649-2:2001*	Food Testing - Listeria monocytogenes
--------	------------	-------------	------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------

FT17000596	Lot. No. C7	Gbejniet Bojod Nixfin	< 200 cfu/g	Absent in 25g	< 20 cfu/g	Absent in 25g
------------	-------------	-----------------------	-------------	---------------	------------	---------------

Overall Comments:

Sample FT17000596 is Satisfactory.
Listeria sp. was present in Sample FT17000596 but not Listeria monocytogenes.
Sample collection which has been done by the client using sample containers which have/have not been supplied by BioDNA Laboratory Services Ltd. may have an impact on the final results.

*All tests marked with an asterisk are ISO 17025 accredited.

Authorised By: Dr. Marisa Cassar
Ph.D., B.Pharm. (Hons.), MBA (Henley)
Laboratory Director



Signature

16/03/2017

Date

Disclaimer: All data in this result is private and confidential and cannot be reproduced. All procedures carried out during sample analysis are in accordance with Standard Operating Procedures of BioDNA Laboratory Services Ltd.



Food Testing Report

Client: Xirka Naghag u Moghoz
 Client Address:

Samples Condition: Cold
 Sampling done by: Client
 Date / Time Received: 07/03/2017 13:30:00
 Started Testing: 12/04/2017
 End Testing: 18/04/2017
 Testing Type: Routine

Report Number: 411
 Report Name: FT17000613
 SOP's Used: MBDSOPTC031, MBDSOPTC034, MBDSOPTC047, MBDSOPTC048

Sample Details

Lab No	Sample Ref	Sample Name	Food Testing - Stapy/lococcus aureus*	Food Testing - Salmonella - ISO6579:2002*	Food testing - E.coli - ISO16649-2:2001*	Food Testing - Listeria monocytogenes
FT17000613	Lot. No. C7	Gbejniet Bojod Nixfin	< 2,000 cfu/g	Absent in 25g	< 20 cfu/g	Absent in 25g

Overall Comments:

Sample FT17000613 is Satisfactory.
 Listeria sp. was present in Sample FT17000613 but not Listeria monocytogenes.
 Sample collection which has been done by the client using sample containers which have/have not been supplied by BioDNA Laboratory Services Ltd. may have an impact on the final results.

*All tests marked with an asterisk are ISO 17025 accredited.

Authorised By: Dr. Marisa Cassar
 Ph.D., B.Pharm. (Hons.), MBA (Henley)
 Laboratory Director

Signature

21/04/2017
 Date

Disclaimer: All data in this result is private and confidential and cannot be reproduced. All procedures carried out during sample analysis are in accordance with Standard Operating Procedures of BioDNA Laboratory Services Ltd.



Food Testing Report

Client: Xirka Naghag u Moghoz
 Client Address:



Samples Condition: Cold
 Sampling done by: Client
 Date / Time Received: 14/02/2017 14:15:00
 Started Testing: 15/05/2017
 End Testing: 20/05/2017
 Testing Type: Routine

Report Number: 232
 Report Name: FT17000359
 SOP's Used: MBDSOPTC031,MBDSOPTC034,MBDSOPTC047,MBDSOPTC048

Sample Details

Lab No	Sample Name	Food Testing - Staphylococcus aureus*	Food Testing - Salmomella - ISO6579:2002*	Food testing - E.coli - ISO16649-2:2001*	Food Testing - Listeria monocytogenes
FT17000359	Gbejniet tal-Bzar	< 200 cfu/g	Absent in 25g	< 20 cfu/g	Absent in 25g

Overall Comments:

Sample FT17000359 is Satisfactory.
 Listeria sp. was present in Sample FT17000359 but not Listeria monocytogenes.
 Sample collection which has been done by the client using sample containers which have/have not been supplied by BioDNA Laboratory Services Ltd. may have an impact on the final results.

*All tests marked with an asterisk are ISO 17025 accredited.

Authorised By: Dr. Marisa Cassar
 Ph.D., B.Pharm. (Hons.), MBA (Henley)
 Laboratory Director

Signature

31/05/2017

Date

Disclaimer: All data in this result is private and confidential and cannot be reproduced. All procedures carried out during sample analysis are in accordance with Standard Operating Procedures of BioDNA Laboratory Services Ltd.



Food Testing Report

Client: Xirka Naghag u Moghoz
 Client Address:



Samples Condition: Cold
 Sampling done by: Client
 Date / Time Received: 14/02/2017 10:30:00
 Started Testing: 16/08/2017
 End Testing: 21/08/2017
 Testing Type: Routine

Report Number: 1233
 Report Name: FT17001844
 SOP's Used: MBDSOPTC031,MBDSOPTC034,MBDSOPTC047,MBDSOPTC048

Sample Details

Lab No	Sample Name	Food Testing - Staphylococcus aureus*	Food testing - E.coli - ISO16649-2:2001 *	Food Testing - Salmonella - ISO6579:2002*	Food Testing - Listeria monocytogenes
--------	-------------	---------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------

FT17001844	Gbejniet Tal-Bzar (Retesting after 6 months)	< 200 cfu/g	< 20 cfu/g	Absent in 25g	Absent in 25g
------------	----------------------------------------------	-------------	------------	---------------	---------------

Overall Comments:

Sample FT17001844 is Satisfactory.
 Listeria sp. was present in Sample FT17001844 but not Listeria monocytogenes.
 Sample collection which has been done by the client using sample containers which have/have not been supplied by BioDNA Laboratory Services Ltd. may have an impact on the final results.

* All tests marked with an asterisk are ISO 17025 accredited.

Authorised By: Dr. Marisa Cassar
 Ph.D., B.Pharm. (Hons.), MBA (Henley)
 Laboratory Director

Signature

23/08/2017

Date

Disclaimer: All data in this result is private and confidential and cannot be reproduced. All procedures carried out during sample analysis are in accordance with Standard Operating Procedures of BioDNA Laboratory Services Ltd.



LS2.1.1 and LS2.1.2
Malta Life Sciences Park,
San Gwann Industrial Estate,
San Gwann,
Malta.
Tel: +356 21665164
Email: marisa@mlsbiodna.net

To whom it may concern

For the shelf life study carried out on the following items:

Ġbejniet tal-bżar
Ġbejniet nixfin
Ġbejniet friski

The methods used for the testing were based on the following ISO methods:

E.coli ISO6572:2002
Salmonella ISO6572:2002
L. monocytogenes ISO 11290-1:2017
Staphylococcus aureus ISO6888-1

List of accredited tests:

<https://nab.gov.mt/en/Documents/Accredited%20Cabs/005-BIO-Accreditation-Scope.pdf>

The Ġbejniet tal-bżar and Ġbejniet nixfin were stored in a household fridge during the test period of 6 months and 1 month respectively.

Dr. Marisa Cassar Ph.D., B.Pharm (Hons), MBA (Henley)
Director
BioDNA Laboratory Services Ltd.