

# Single document

‘Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ’  
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## 1. NAME(S) OF PDO

‘Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ’

## 2. MEMBER STATE OR THIRD COUNTRY

Malta

## 3. DESCRIPTION OF THE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCT OR FOODSTUFF

### 3.1. Type of product

Class 1.3. Cheeses

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

The ‘Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ’ is a fresh cheese produced with whole raw milk from sheep (*Ovis aries*) of the ‘Maltese’ breed [1] and its crosses with the Friesian breed or others, and that are registered in the Maltese islands, including Malta, Gozo, and Comino.

The ‘Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ’ can be sold fresh (‘Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ’ friska), air-dried (‘Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ’ niexfa), or pickled and peppered (‘Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ’ tal-bżar) [2,3].

The ‘Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ’ 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 and 5cm, and a weight of 65g to 110g.

The base diameter ranges between 5cm and 7cm, while the top diameter ranges between 3cm and 5.5 cm.

The Total Protein should 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.

When cut into smaller portions, the 'Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ' friska is very soft with a smooth texture, and it melts in the mouth in seconds. The taste of the product is that of fresh creamy milk and, similarly, can be used as a spread.

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The 'Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ' 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 increases [4].

It should have a height ranging between 1.5cm and 5cm, weighs between 30g to 100g, and have a pH ranging between 4.8 and 5.3.

The Total Solid Content should range between 40% and 56%.

The Total Protein should range between 14% and 40%.

The Total Fat should range between 15% and 40%.

The 'Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ' niexfa is a fresh cheese but may develop into a semi-hard cheese on further drying and storage.

The taste is stronger and more noticeable compared to the 'Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ friska', surpassing the creamy taste undertones given by the sheep milk.

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The 'Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ' 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 surfaces.

It should have a height ranging between 1.5cm and 5cm, weighs between 30g to 65g, and have a pH ranging between 4.7 and 5.1.

The Total Solid Content should range between 37% and 52%.

The Total Protein should range between 14% and 40%

Total Fat should range between 25% and 40% [4].

This variant retains the consistency and texture of the 'Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ' niexfa. However, its taste is enhanced through the use of vinegar and pepper. The colour may change depending on the type of vinegar used (red or white wine vinegar), whereas the overtones of pepper may vary depending on the type of pepper utilised.

### **3.3. Feed (for products of animal origin only) and raw materials (for processed products only)**

The maximum percentage of feed sourced outside the geographical area is 45% dry matter on an annual basis. It is not technically possible to source 100% of the feed locally from the geographical area due to the lack of rainfall and limited availability of land.

The sheep are fed locally sourced hays of leguminous and cereal plants for at least 55% of their intake (including barley, lolium, wheat, vetches, 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 and cladodes of prickly pears [4]. The taste of the 'Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ' is related to this use of local feed.

The raw material (sheep milk) is wholly sourced from the specific geographical area for all 'ġbejna tan-nagħaġ' varieties: 'Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ' friska, 'Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ' niexfa, and 'Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ' tal-bżar

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 'Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ'. 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 ranging between 15.0% and 18.0% [4].

### **3.4. Specific steps in production that must take place in the identified geographical area**

The production steps that take place in the geographical area are:

Farming (breeding, rearing, milking of the specific Maltese breed sheep)

Cheesemaking from the raw milk

Maturing, packing and labelling of the 'ġbejna tan-nagħaġ'

### **3.5. Specific rules concerning slicing, grating, packaging, etc. of the product the registered name refers to**

All three 'ġbejna tan-nagħaġ' varieties are sold in their entire form.

The 'Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ' friska is sold solely by quantity, while the 'Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ' niexfa and 'Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ' tal-bżar are sold either by weight or quantity.

The 'Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ' is packed either singly or in differing quantities depending on the producer and the requirements of the customer(s), in various transparent plastic or glass containers, each sealed with a band sticker and labelled.

It is not economically viable for the product to be packaged outside the geographical area.

### **3.6. Specific rules concerning labelling of the product the registered name refers to**

The product shall carry a rectangular label with the term: 'Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ' and may in addition have a descriptor as listed below indicating one of the following three product varieties:

- 'Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ' friska,
  - 'Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ' niexfa,
  - 'Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ' tal-bżar.
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- The logo of the certifying control authority.
  - The EU quality symbol

## **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 tan-nagħaġ' is produced in the three main inhabited islands of the Maltese archipelago.

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

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 century [7].

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. The Maltese islands are situated almost in the centre of the Mediterranean Sea. In and around Malta, evaporation greatly exceeds precipitation, and this renders the sea water with a specific gravity of 1.0300 (which is much higher than the Atlantic), and with relatively warm surface temperatures.

The large volumes of sea water around the islands greatly affect the climate, which is largely equable although, in recent years, it is suffering changes caused by the global climate change.

Largely the climate is characterised by mild wet winters and hot dry summers; 60% of prevailing winds are from the west to the northwest whilst on hot days the heat is often aided by southerly winds that sometimes carry the 'gibli' bringing over red sand from the Sahara. The flora is typical of the region and of pelagic islands that have a similar geological formation. There are no rivers or freshwater lakes in Malta. The valleys and ravines are sometimes described as dry riverbeds, and these fill up with

water during the rainfall periods. In view of the hot dry summers without rainfall, natural flora during this period is inexistent and therefore grazing during this period is not possible. Maltese soils are prevalently calcareous with a pH usually over 8. These soils are derived from the calcareous rock formations that make up the islands. The distribution of plant communities in the Maltese islands is closely related to the geology and topography of the country. According to weather conditions, salt spray may be blown on to any vegetation and culture on the island. The arable crops mainly cultivated as fodder include chickpea (*Cicer arietinum*), sulla (*Hedysarium coronarium*), barley (*Hordeum vulgare*), pale pea (*Lathyrus ochrus*), Indian pea (*Lathyrus sativus*), lentil (*Lens culinaris*), prickly scorpion's-tail (*Scorpiurus muricatus*), common wheat (*Triticum aestivum*), southern vetch (*Vicia ervilia*), and common vetch (*Vicia sativa*). These crops are frequently sown in small very poor areas where there is a large increase in the native weed species, particularly Leguminosae, a wide variety of trifolium which are harvested with the rest of the sown crop. The plants of *Vicia faba* grown to supply broad beans for human consumption are also harvested, dried, and used as summer fodder. The feed of sheep is also supplemented with cladodes of prickly pear (*Opuntia ficus-indica*) and locust beans from the carob tree (*Ceratonia siliqua*).

Cheesemaking was a logical way to preserve the milk for longer periods of time, especially since dairy produce could only be consumed on meat-eating days in view of the prevailing Catholic cultures and traditions [2]. 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 'Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ' confirmed that most current producers learnt the process from their parents or grand-parents [4].

All steps involved in the cheesemaking process can be and are typically carried out by the producer, and most ingredients are locally sourced. Moreover, the drying of the 'Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ' is carried out naturally taking advantage of the dry, warm, and salty climate typical of this geographical area.

The 'Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ' 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 'Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ' and Maltese culture.

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

<https://mccaa.org.mt/Section/Content?contentId=7953> ;  
<https://www.gov.mt/en/Government/DOI/Government%20Gazette/Notices/Pages/2022/05/Notices2405.aspx>