	Geographical Indication Product Database - Step 1- **Colchester Oysters**	**SOURCE :** **Author : Ness** **Institution : UNEW** **Date : Aug 2006**

DESCRIPTION :

1. NAME OF PRODUCT :

Colchester Oysters

2. COUNTRY AND REGION IN THE COUNTRY:

West Mersea on the coast of the region of Essex

3. TYPE OF PRODUCT : (including the possible substitutes and imitations of the product)

Oysters (Fresh fish, mollusca and crustaceans). Substitutes are oysters, shellfish in general. Evidence of imitation, hence product is subjet to application for PGI status

4. DESCRIPTION OF THE PRODUCT AND ITS AREA (including its specific characteristics, conditions of production, main differences with the substitutes) :

The oysters *Ostrea edulis* are cultivated in Grade A creeks and backwaters that intertwine around the coast of Mersea Island. Oysters from Cornwall on the south west coast and the Solent on the south coast may be re-layed in the waters of the area to develop their distinctive qualities.The oysters have a reputation for quality and consistency and are known for their unique taste. They are meatier and have a firmer consistencies than rock oysters, *Crassostrea gigas*.

5. LINK WITH THE GEOGRAPHICAL AREA (tradition, know how, reputation, soil, climate, etc.):

Colchester was capital of the kingdom of Cunobelinus (Shakespeare's Cymbeline), leader of the Trinovantes tribe who controlled south east Britain in pre-Roman Britain. It became the centre of Roman Britain, and Britain's first city, under the name of Camulodunum following the Roman conquest of Britain in 43 AD. The oysters were cultivated in the creeks surrounding the town from that time.

Oyster fisheries were granted a charter in 1189 and supplied the London fish market of Billingsgate for hundreds of years. Oysters were eaten in pubs from the 17th to the 19th centuries. They disappeared during the early 1960s due to pollution and disease, and the effects of a particularly cold winter in 1962-63.

6. PRODUCTION SYSTEM / SUPPLY CHAIN (some data about the number of producers, processors, market structure..) :

Although the practised cultivation methods have not changed appreciably for over a thousand years, the knowledge and husbandry has been passed from father to son for generations. Oyster growers at West Mersea still retain many historic methods but have evolved modern methods that have increased productivity and quality.

In terms of the supply chain, the oysters occupy a unique position according to food writers. Famously, they are better known outside of the UK. They have a reputation for quality in Belgium, France, Spain and the Far East. Approximately one third of production is exported to Europe to leading restaurants and Belgium's second largest supermarket, Delhaize. Approximately 80 per cent of production is exported

In the UK the main market are restaurants in London and the 'rich and famous'.

Distribution is by direct retail to restaurants or through wholesale distribution. The oysters are distributed 'live' in wooden crates. They are dampened and are tightly packed with seaweed.

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7. MARKET AND REPUTATION (size, price premium, attractiveness, growth) :

The seafood market in the UK is valued at £302 million at 2003 prices. The sector has enjoyed strong growth over 5 years. Retail sales in the UK are dominated by prawns (65%), scampi (26%) and lobster (3%) so that Oysters are located in a niche category that represents less than 5% of the market.

The product is targeted at the premium sector. It has recently been included in the 'Arc of Taste' by the Italian slow Food Movement. The oysters have a reputation for quality and consistency and are known for their unique taste. Annual production is approximately 60-70 tons per year and the oysters are sold in restaurants at £3.00 each.

The only PGI in the UK is held by Whitstable oysters from the Kent coast. The Whitstable oyster is a rock oyster, *Crassostrea gigas*. These oysters are sold at retail for £1.00 each. The superior quality of the Colchester oyster is said to be associated with a meatier taste and a firmer consistency.

8. APPLICANT / HOLDER (IF ANY) :

Oyster growers of West Mersea

RELEVANCE : Why is this case important for research in general and for SINER-GI in particular ?

Product with almost two thousand years history within the geographical area.

Reputation of very low awareness in the domestic market, apart from customers of high quality restaurants in London and the 'Rich and Famous' but a high reputation in export markets, especially Belgium and France

A product name that has attracted mis-use and is currently the subject of an application for PGI status

CATEGORY :

☑ **Origin Product** **X** GI Product with application for PGI status at the UK consultation stage.

☐ **Recognized GI**