



Geographical Indication Product Database - Step 1-

Sarsko sirene **(cheese of the Sar Mountain)**

SOURCE :

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DESCRIPTION :

1. **NAME OF PRODUCT :** *Sarsko sirene (cheese of the Sar mountain)*

2. **COUNTRY AND REGION IN THE COUNTRY:** FYROM (Former Republic of Macedonia), Mountain of Sar

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

Traditionally, the sarsko sirene is a non pasteurised sheep cheese. It is made out of sheep milk. Sheep variety differs from one farmer to the other in the same area. In Sar mountain region the average number of sheeps per farmer is from 50 to a hundred and more. The image of the product totally comes from the image of the mountain because the sarsko cheese is not a very complex product and because the production process is almost the same for every white cheese in Macedonia. Therefore the reputation of the product directly comes from its region of production and other white cheese from other regions is sold under this name because the demand is higher. The traditional way of production is something which is very strong in Macedonia and which is not threatened for now. However, the dairies know they can play with the reputation of the name without keeping anything traditional in their way of production.

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

From the outside the cheese is white-grey with stripes and the inside is compact and soft with cracks. The taste is quite salty but still with a strong taste from the sheep milk. It is aged for a minimum of 90 days after the production in a cool temperature, usually at a high altitude. The Sar mountain offers specific climate and soil conditions which give all its taste to the cheese. Two parallel and very different supply chains are concerned by this cheese even though the product at the end is not the same in the two cases: one is a pasteurised sheep cheese and the other a non pasteurised one. There is one name for different products. In the supermarkets the cheese shelves are separated in between the cheeses which are produced by the dairies and presented in vacuum and sterilized packing and the ones which are supposed to be produced in the traditional way presented in bulk. Nevertheless, some dairies are used to mention on their packing "*handmade cheese with ecological pure pasteurised milk*". Therefore the confusion is totally possible in so far the dairies are also selling their cheese in bulk.

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

Sarsko sirene is one of the most famous in Macedonia, along with Mavrovsko (from Mavrovo mountain) or Malesevsko. All the white cheese products are defined with their area of production and are therefore very linked with the specific region and "terroir" they come from. In this regard, competitions from other areas should not be considered as a threat. The traditional region of production goes along Sar Mountain, on the border with Albania. Nowadays in Macedonia, the Sar producers' flocks are not only going down in the valley for the winter but also in some other place in Macedonia, which enlarges the region of production and appears to be quite problematic when looking at the typicity of the product. But because the cheese is seasonal (spring and summer), it does not have a big impact on the qualities of the final product.

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

The chain is complex, with three different level of production:

The small farmers with little to medium flock who are producing cheese for their own consumption, sometimes for the whole family. They may sell a small part of their production when they've produced enough cheese

The medium and big farmers with flocks from 200 to 1000 and more sheeps. Among them are former agrokombinats which are now private but still very basic in terms of conditions of production. All those farmers are associated in one association which is very formal.

The dairies that are collecting the milk around and are producing other varieties of cheese and using cow milk mainly.

Local resellers are very present locally and in the whole country. They are usually individual business men who are



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renting or owning stands on the green markets all over the country. Some problems occurred concerning the sarsko cheese insofar as some traders, mainly on Tetovo, the local green market bought some white cheese outside the region and are selling it as sarsko, even mentioning some farmers' names to prove the origin of their cheese. Some other markets were mentioned such as the direct sell in bulk to restaurants and canteen or even to unions, which are reselling it to their members. Supermarkets are also mentioned and used but the price offered is low (between 180 and 200 DN). Indeed, the price of the cheese in retail in supermarkets can be of 350 DN (5€). The role of the resellers is very important. The production does not go over 300 tons of cheese per year, therefore the marketing and sales are organised individually through green markets mainly in small stands proposing all kind of traditional cheese from different origins.

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

The role of the trader is pregnant because he is the only one to be able to guarantee to the consumer that the origin of the cheese mentioned on the label is the right one. Moreover, the Macedonian market being quite small for this cheese which cannot be exported, the traders have many choices between the several offers and they can easily impose their price. The dairies do not go through traders but sell directly to local supermarket chains such as Vero or Tinex or Ramstore or export part of their production.

6. APPLICANT / HOLDER (IF ANY) :

NONE AT THE MOMENT. MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE SUPPORTING THE OWNER OF A FORMER AGROKOMBINAT TO REGISTER SARSKO SIRENE AS A GI.

HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO THE LAW IN MACEDONIA THERE IS NO NEED FOR THE APPLICANT TO BE NEITHER AN ASSOCIATION NOR A REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY OF PRODUCERS

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

The current reform of the Macedonian system and the harmonization with EU legislation. It shows that something has to be done to avoid a misapplication of the system.

The traditional dairy product in Macedonia all face the problem of the bad hygienic quality of the raw milk production but on the other hand, to avoid the consideration of this problem could lead to the exclusion of an important number of small-scale producers.

The problems faced by the producers and the global structure of the system regarding traditional and origin products show the urgent need to accomplish some institutional modifications and ground-based initiatives on the issue.

CATEGORY :

☐ Origin Product

☒ GI product

☐ Recognized GI