



Geographical Indication Product Database - Step 1-

Sjenicki Sir (Cheese from Sjenica)

SOURCE :

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Date : 30.08.2006

DESCRIPTION :

1. NAME OF PRODUCT : *Sjenicki Sir (cheese from Sjenica)*

2. COUNTRY AND REGION IN THE COUNTRY: Serbia, Sandjak region (west Serbia)

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

Traditionally, the Sjenicki sir is a fresh white cheese made out of sheep milk. Due to several factors (emigration, war, establishment of industrial and semi industrial dairies collecting exclusively cow milk) the sheep herd on the plateau of Sjenica started to decrease in the early sixties and to be partially replaced by cows. Many farmers started to mix sheep and cow milks and the dairies are producing Sjenicki sir exclusively out of cow milk. In addition, many families who emigrated in other regions of ex-Yugoslavia started to produce and to sell “Sjenicki sir” mainly made out of cow milk. The denomination Sjenicki sir is well known all over Serbia and ex Yugoslavia but many consumers are not able any more to define the product (sheep milk/cow mil/mixed). The production of traditional sheep cheese in Sjenica started very recently to increase again which is certainly due to the increasing demand of the national and ethno restaurants.

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

The area of production is the plateau of Sjenica, a vast pasture at about 1100 m altitude. Two municipalities are concerned: the municipality of Sjenica and a small part of the municipality of Tutin. The plateau is partly included in the biosphere reserve (UNESCO) of Golija-Studenica.

The traditional sheep cheese is produced, exclusively by women, from May to October in “summer dairies” located in the upper part of the plateau of Sjenica. The traditional method of production is as follows

- Immediately after milking and when the milk is still at 34°, rennet or pepsin, is added to the milk.
- After 45 minutes the milk is “coagulated” and put in a cloth in order to extract as much liquid as possible
- This fresh cheese is pressed under a wooden plank and cut (different methods of cutting)
- It is stored in a very typical wooden basket (pine wood) containing 10 to 15 kg or in a plastic box by layers: one layer cheese, one layer salt...
- It is kept 40/45 days in a brine which is regularly renewed
- It is usually sold after 40/45 days but can also be kept 3 months (after milking). The old cheese is harder and the demand for harder Sjenicki sir is increasing, particularly in Belgrade

The farmers located around the city are usually mixing sheep and cow milk. Most often they are also mixing morning and evening milk, meaning that they have to heat the milk at 34° before to add pepsin.

All the dairies are producing exclusively cow milk sold under the denomination “Sjenicki sir”. The milk is pasteurized and the method of production as well as the final product is most often very different from the traditional product

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

The denomination is well known all over Serbia and the Sjenicki sir can be found on all green markets. However and as already mentioned the Sjenicki sir sold in Belgrade is often not produced in Sjenica.

The plateau of Sjenica is an exceptional and very specific ecosystem which explains the notoriety of the denomination, used not only for the cheese but also for other traditional products such as the beef sausage called Sudjuk, sheep smoked meat and beef smoked meat. The Ministry of Sciences of the Republic of Serbia conducted a study (2003-2005) aiming at defining the specificity of these products and the links with the specific “terroir” of Sjenica (soil, climate, plants varieties...). However this study is not yet published.

The traditional cheese can be partly linked to the local variety of sheep adapted to the hard climate condition (minus 20/30 in winter). But many animals are also coming from other areas for the pasture season, meaning that the local



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variety can hardly be considered as a major factor for the specificity of the cheese.

The traditional way of production is very specific. From may to October the families are leaving the villages to stay during all the season in the upper pastures of the plateau. The cheese is produced in small “summer farms” or “summer dairies” where the living and working conditions are very hard. It is not only a method of production but also a way of live and a unique culture where wolfs, quite common in the region, have also a role to play.

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

Updated data are not available. The sheep herd is estimated to be about 20 000 (more than 200 000 in the early sixties) plus an unknown number of sheep coming from other areas during the pasture season. The number of “summer dairies” still producing is estimated to be about 400 to 500 (meaning a total production of real traditional cheese of about 500 to 1000 MT). It is low compare to the past but still high considering the hard working and living conditions and the demographic situation in the other mountainous areas of Serbia. The plateau is not a desert and the average age of the producers is low compare to similar areas in Serbia. The traditional sheep cheese is most often delivered directly from the summer dairies to specialized traders (collecting high quality and specific products) or very often also to restaurants, hotels and individuals (“connaisseurs”). A significant part of the production is also sold to the numerous “gastarbeiters” coming back to Sjenica during the summer season. It is therefore difficult to find it in the greenmarkets (it goes “from the field to the table”).

The cheese produced out of mixed cow/cheese milk is sold in the green markets of Sjenica and Novi Pazar (main city of the Sandjak Region). It also collected by traders, to be sold in the green markets of Belgrade and other main cities of Serbia. Generally speaking these traders, linking the producers to the urban markets, play a major role in the distribution of traditional farm products.

The 5 semi industrial dairies which are producing Sjenicki sir out of cow milk are selling to the national supermarkets (Cmarket...) and started very recently (2006) to sell to the international hypermarkets (Mercator, Interex, Vero) located in Belgrade and in a few main cities of Serbia (Cacak, Novi Sad, Nis). The industrial dairy (35 000 litres/day) of Sjenica does not produce since more than 10 years but has been recently (2006) privatised. The production could restart in 2007 or 2008.

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

The Sjenicki Sir has a strong reputation in Serbia and in the neighbour countries. But this reputation is jeopardized by two factors:

- The use of the denomination by producers from other regions in Serbia
- Due mainly to the strategy of the dairies, the cheese is losing its identity and specificity in the region itself

However the demand and consequently the production of traditional sheep cheese started very recently (after 2000) to increase after 50 years of regular decreasing. In 2006 the producers are selling the sheep cheese 3 Euros/kg while the cow cheese and mixed cheese are sold 2.5 euros/kg. Traditional Sjenicki sheep cheese has been seen at 10 euros/kg in Sarajevo and Podgorica.

8. APPLICANT / HOLDER (IF ANY) :

The situation so far is as follows:

- The **Ministry of Sciences** financed a study aimed at defining and finally protecting Sjenicki Sir.
- The study has been conducted by the **Institute of Animal Husbandry from Belgrade**. The results are not available yet but the definition of Sjenicki Sir according to the Institute is that it is a cheese exclusively made out of sheep milk.
- An **Agrokombinat from Sjenica, AD PIK-PESTER**, recently privatised, was the local partner of the study. The new owners are using this study to build their strategy partly based on the “branding and



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standardization” of 5 typical products including Sjenicki sir.

- The kombinat wants to follow the strict definition given by the Institute of Animal Husbandry: sheep milk , addition of pepsin immediately after milking (=no industrial production), no pasteurization.
- the kombinat wants to organise the traditional producers (as a cooperative), to establish strict standards, to control the production, to collect the cheese and to sell as a PDO under the brand of the company.

However, the strategy regarding the branding of the name is not very clear: trademark or PDO? The kombinat certainly envisaged a trademark but realised that in the new legal framework it would be difficult or impossible to privatise “Sjenicki sir”. They are speaking now about a “collective property”. They are describing a production system involving many small producers but all of them under the control of the kombinat. In this system Sjenicki Sir would be sold under the unique brand of AD Pik Pester.

The registration of Sjenicki Sir is in process but the issue so far is addressed only by professors from Belgrade and by a kombinat which is for the time being not producing at all in the area. The other stakeholders, traditional producers, dairies and municipality are not involved in the process.

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

- The link between a PDO properly registered and implemented and the economic development of the area is obvious. To a certain extent the future of this product and of the traditional producers is related to the PDO registration: re-positioning of the product in the urban markets, increase of the additional value ...
- The case highlights the risk of monopolization of the PDO/PGI system by external and private actors and interests, risk that remains very high in the Balkans. The role of the institution (ministry of agriculture, office for intellectual property) is here into question.

CATEGORY :

☐ Origin Product

☒ GI product

☐ Recognized GI