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SPECIFICATION

COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 510/2006 on protected geographical indications and protected designations of origin

"Fal Oyster"

EC No:

PDO (✓) PGI ( )

1. Responsible department in the Member State

Name: Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)
EU Food Policy Team
Address: Food Policy Unit
Defra
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17 Smith Square
London SW1P 3JR
United Kingdom
Tel: +44207 238 6075
Fax: +44207 238 5728
Email: protectedfoodnames@defra.gov.uk

2. Group

Name:
Fal Fishery Cooperative CIC (Community Interest Company)
Address:
Chairman, Fal Fishery Cooperative CIC
5 Admiralty Quay, Mylor Yacht Harbour
Mylor Churchtown
Falmouth, Cornwall
TR11 5UF
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Email: protectedfoodname@falfisherycoopcic.co.uk

Composition: Producers/processors (9) Other ( )

3. Type of product

Fresh Fish, molluscs, crustaceans and fish based products. Category number 1.7

4. Specification

4.1 Name

Fal Oyster

4.2 Description

Fal Oyster is the name given to oysters caught in the designated area using only traditional sailing and rowing vessels.

The Fal Oyster is of the oyster species *Ostrea edulis*. It has a less than round or uneven round shaped shell with a rough scaly surface. The shell is brown or cream in colour with light brown or bluish concentric bands on the outer surfaces. The inner surfaces are very smooth and pearly and white or bluish-grey, often with darker blue areas.

The flesh is firm with a smooth surface. It is cream coloured while the fringes are opaque and grey coloured in appearance. The taste is described as salty, metallic, creamy and sweeter than other species and areas. Subtle differences in taste are due to the environment where the oyster grows and in Fal Oyster fishery the waters have rich mineral and biological content. The waters circulate as well as changing through each tide and so there is a unique level of salty sea

water and sweet river water. The biology and mineral content is responsible for the mix of plankton on which the oysters feed and therefore the area ultimately affects the taste.

The two halves (valves) of the shell are different shapes. The left valve is concave and fixed to the substratum, the right being flat and sitting inside the left. The oyster is mature at 3 years and about 50mm; it can grow to about 110mm. The Fal Oyster is harvested using traditional methods unique to the area.
After harvesting and depuration, the oysters are sold live 'in shell' to retail outlets or delivered to restaurants throughout the UK. The shelf life of the live product is 5 days approximately.

4.3 Geographical Area

The area where the Fal Oyster is produced can be described as within the Truro Port Fishery. The legal limits of which are described in the fishery order (1936 amended 1975) as all those parts of the Truro and Falmouth Harbours and of the bed of the Truro, Fal and Tresillian Rivers containing an area of 2721 acres (1,101 hectares).

This area can be described as north of a line drawn between Trefusis Point and St Mawes Castle to Mean Low Water Mark of an Ordinary Tide. The edge of the fishery is the Mean Low Water Mark and this coincides with the coast except at the entrance of each creek indicating the upper limits of the fishery at Mylor, St Just and Malpas.

The defined area is the only regulatory oyster fishery for *Ostrea edulis* in the south west of England.

4.4 Proof of Origin - Traceability

This application refers to oysters caught within the Truro Port Fishery area by sailing and rowing vessels using traditional methods. There is

specific legislation which controls the fishing methods used in the fishery. The fishing methods described below distinguishes the Fal Oyster from other native oysters. (See production methods below).

Fishermen are required to obtain a licence from the fishery Regulator prior to fishing for oysters. This is an annual licence issued for one season only. This ensures there is a record of all fishermen licensed to harvest oysters.

When the fishermen have gathered the oysters they are required to complete a 'Live Shellfish Movement Document'. This form provides the following details:

I. Date of Gathering
II. Geographic Area of gathering
III. Classification of area of gathering
IV. Species
V. Quantity of shellfish gathered
VI. Name and details of Gatherer
VII. Name and EU Approval number of purchaser (Depuration centre)

A copy of the form is kept by the Gatherer and the Falmouth and Truro Port Health Authority. This ensures that there is traceability through the supply chain.

After initial harvesting the oysters from the wild oyster beds the fishermen and the merchants sometimes keep some oysters on shallow beds in adjacent rivers and creeks of the Fal estuary which are commonly called lays. The lays are more accessible than the fishery and provide a short term storage period. The main benefit of relaying oysters is to manage the peaks in supply and demand but since a small part of the fishery was tested at a lower water quality and given Water Classification Grade C, relaying from these areas is mandatory under the hygiene requirements to ensure a safe product (whilst this Classification is maintained). Traceability is maintained by fishermen

and merchants who complete the same form (Live Shellfish Movement Document) when they are moved off the lays at the end of the storage period and they submit a copy to the Port Health Authority. If the lays are not used the oysters (B class only) are sent to the Depuration facility with the accompanying original Movement document.

The oyster merchants and processors keep detailed records of who they buy from and who they sell to. They also keep records of the schedules followed for each batch of oysters through their purification (depuration) system. The merchant attaches information such as species, batch number, EU Approval Number, date, on the label for the packaging which is used when sold. These records are kept by processors to comply with EU legislation on the traceability and hygiene of shellfish products.

The labelling is very specific and includes all the information including the batch number so that the name of the fisherman, date and location of gathering, site and duration of relaying, depuration time and conditions can all be traced via the processing records and movement documents. The label also records the health mark and approval number for the processor plus species, weight, date of packing. Information on the label complies with the relevant legislation. Records are kept of the depuration system including ensuring traceability of the oysters, water circulation, dates and times. These records are checked routinely by the Local Authority / Port Health Authority and occasionally by the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) during their periodic inspection of the processor. The processor keeps a record of who was sold each batch number.

4.5 Method of Production

Fal Oysters grow naturally on the sea bed within the fishery area and have done so for many centuries. The Native oysters feed naturally on the plankton that is abundant within the estuary. The production of

plankton is dependent on climatic conditions and the nutrients within the water column, it is the combination of these two that give the Fal oyster its particular flavour that is so prized by connoisseurs throughout the World.

The Fal is a natural and wild fishery where the oysters are not cultured or bred. There is a small amount of 'husbandry' of the wild and natural beds as during the process of fishing the substrate (cultch) is moved by the dredge which keeps the fishery in good heart, and also occasional extra dredging of the beds without harvesting (described as harrowing) further improves the oyster beds and encourages a good spatfall (young oysters to settle).

Growth rates of the oysters depend upon the availability of food but is generally between 4 – 7 years, Native oysters spawn when the water is warm and survival of the spat (young oysters) varies from year to year. As spawning occurs during the summer there is a 'Closed season' between 1st April and 31st October each year to prevent damage to spawning populations at this critical time of year. It is a criminal offence to remove an oyster from the fishery during the closed season.

As the oysters are wild and propagate naturally, the stock size fluctuates from season to season and in order to prevent over-fishing a minimum size is imposed and the Council oyster bailiff is responsible for policing it. All dredgermen must be licensed but as it's an open Fishery as there's no restriction on the number of licences that can be issued.

The fishing method uses dredges which are towed across the sea bed. Following historic and traditional methods the dredges are towed by sailing or rowing boats and there is no motor power used to harvest the oysters. Considerable skill is required in sailing the vessel at the same

time as working the dredges. This method is unique to the region and is not repeated anywhere else in the country.

After the dredges are towed across the sea bed they are hauled aboard and emptied on deck. The dredges are hauled up by hand or hand winch. The oysters to be sold are put in mesh bags and these are different for each fisherman. The minimum size of oyster which is harvested is determined by the fishery byelaws (in 2007, only oysters which hang on a ring of 2 5/8th inch (equivalent to 66.3mm) diameter can be harvested and oysters which pass through the ring must be put over the side of the boat back onto the fishery). At this stage the fisherman makes a record of the date, catching area and quantity on the Live Shellfish Movement Document.

The fishermen sell the oysters to merchants or processors, alternatively they may put them in short term storage in lays. The merchant or processor collects the oysters from the shore in their mesh bags and takes them to their factory in Cornwall. At the point of sale the form (Live Shellfish Movement Document) is completed with the buyer's details and a copy of this form is sent to the Port Health Authority.

The next process involves cleaning the shell, grading by weight, and depuration. The processing also involves labelling and packaging the oysters for delivery to customers. Cleaning involves the removal of mud and seaweed by washing each shell. This is followed by weighing each oyster and they are sorted into different sizes by weight bands for example 60-80 grams 80-100grams and 100+ grams. Depuration is carried out by immersion in tanks where the circulating water has been cleaned and UV treated according to the EU rules for purification and hygiene of shellfish products. The packaging utilised involves baskets and cardboard or labelled polystyrene boxes where the live oysters are

packed in the correct manner to ensure their survival during transit. (Cup shell down).

4.6 Link

Natural History

The taste of an oyster is determined by the environment where it grows. The rivers of the Fal area are fed from steep sided valleys and have rich mineral and biological content. The estuary is also very deep and so the water circulates as well as changing through each tide. This unique environment generates plankton on which the oysters then feed. The taste is described as salty, metallic, creamy and sweeter than other species and areas. Subtle differences in taste are due to the environment where the oyster grows and in Fal Oyster fishery the waters have rich mineral and biological content. The biology and mineral content is responsible for the mix of plankton on which the oysters feed which ultimately affects the taste.

The characteristics of the Fal Oyster is linked to the area on the basis of the local tradition of the harvesting method which is unique to the area.

The fishing method uses dredges which are towed across the sea bed by sailing and rowing vessels. These dredges and vessels are in the same style as those used historically and which date back to descriptions from 1750.

The strong link between the fishery area and the product is evident from the records of the fishery which describe the operation of catching, growing and merchanting the Fal Oyster in and around the Fal river and adjacent rivers. Historic records describe sailing and rowing boats fishing by using dredges. The descriptions are very similar to the methods and equipments used today. There are

numerous records describing historic and contemporary catching methods, which no other area uses.

Following historic and traditional methods the dredges are towed by sailing or rowing boats and there is no motor power used to harvest the oysters. This long standing tradition of fishing is evident in the knowledge and equipment passed down through generations of fishermen. There is evidence that the vessels used have been passed down through generations and some of the vessels are over 100 years old. (A History of the Falmouth Working Boats, Alun Davies, 1997) Examples of the skills handed down include the ability to locate the oysters, the careful handling of the catch, the methods of dredging particular oyster beds depending on the tide and wind.

Historic references throughout the 1800's refer to trade in oyster harvesting and growing in the Falmouth Harbour area which included fishing, growing, sorting and selling the oysters.

During the 1900's bye laws were made to restrict the fishing methods to the traditional techniques particularly only allowing sailing and rowing and also to protect the fishery for the long term. However the fleet of about 100 vessels was catastrophically reduced in the 1980's when an oyster disease severely reduced stocks and made fishing unprofitable. The recovery from the disease has been slow but the fleet has gradually expanded and a group called the Oyster Fishery Management Group has brought together fishermen, processors and the regulator to manage the fishery.

The use of the name Fal Oyster and its reputation for fine taste and quality has grown through the hard work of the processors and members of the Oyster Fishery Management Group. All members use the name Fal Oyster and present a high quality product for sale via the wholesale supply chain.

4.7 Inspection Body

Trading Standards
Cornwall County Council
County Hall
Truro
Cornwall
TR1 3AY
Tel: 44 (0) 1872 322000

4.8 Labelling