

PRODUCT SPECIFICATION

“Whitstable Oysters”

PDO () PGI (✓)

1. Responsible department in the Member State:

Name: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)
Area 3A
Nobel House
Smith Square
London
SW1P 3JR
United Kingdom
Tel: 0207 238 6075
Fax: 0207 238 5728
Email: Protectedfoodnames@defra.gsi.gov.uk

2. Group:

Name: The Ancient Oyster Companies of Whitstable and Faversham
Address: c/o Elaine Kirkaldie
Marketing Director
Seasalter Shellfish (Whitstable) Ltd
East Quay
The Harbour
Whitstable
Kent CT5 1AB
Tel: 0227 27003/262003
Fax: 0227 264829
Email:

Composition: producer/processor (2) other (0)

Seasalter Shellfish (Whitstable) Ltd

Sole producer of hatchery raised oysters in the area. Only company actually farming oysters at present on its freehold oyster beds known as The Pollard Ground. Direct descendant of the Seasalter & Ham Oyster Fishery Co which was inaugurated in 1893.

The Whitstable Oyster Fishery Company

Incorporated by Act of Parliament in 1793 as The Company of Free Fishers and Dredgers of Whitstable. Not growing oysters at present but may well do so in the future. Owns extensive areas of seabed and foreshore at Whitstable.

The Faversham Oyster Fishery Company

Quoted in the Guinness Book of Records as the oldest existing company in the world! Quoted as having existed “since time out of mind”. They are at present growing clams and mussels but may decide to grow oysters in the future. Has the fishing rights to an extensive area of seabed some of which is off Whitstable.

3. Type of product:

Shellfish Class 1.7

4. Specification (summary of requirements under Art. 7(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012)

4.1. Name:

“Whitstable Oysters”

4.2. Description:

Physical:

The two types of oyster grown locally are the native Whitstable oyster *O. edulis* and the cultivated Whitstable oyster *C. Gigas*

The native oyster takes 5 years to reach a marketable size. It is flat and round in shape with a distinctive thumb on the right hand side of the hinge. Growth rings mark the exterior shell which has a delicate pink/grey hue. They are unusually slow growing taking five years to reach a marketable size and average 240 grammes, unlike flat oysters from warmer waters whose shells are much lighter with a smaller meat content.

The Whitstable area is renowned for the quality of its oysters the meat of which is fat and succulent.

Chemical/Microbiological:

Oysters contain a potent cocktail of rare vitamins and minerals. The most important being zinc of which oysters are the richest animal source. Essential for sexual maturity, an active brain and healthy skin, its healing powers are well recognised in the medical profession. Omega 3, a fatty acid present in oysters, lowers cholesterol levels. Taurine, an amino acid in oysters can help lower blood pressure, ease arthritis and cure liver complaints.

Whitstable is classified as a Grade B water but our Health laboratory tests show the area is really quite pure and we often get Grade A results. In order to ensure the cleanliness of the product, the oysters are depurated for two days in clean sea water treated with UV light.

Organoleptic:

When eaten 'au naturel', the experience could be likened to one's first ever dip in the ocean, with an aftertaste of minerals which strangely seems to increase after the oyster has been swallowed. Mainly with a soft and creamy texture, the adductor muscle is particularly succulent.

4.3. Geographical Area :

The oyster beds in the vicinity of Whitstable, Kent

4.4. Proof of origin:

Raw materials:

The oyster spat raised at Reculver some eight miles from Whitstable are produced from broodstock taken from the sea off Whitstable. Their food, several species of microscopic algae, is grown in a specially designed system invented by John Bayes BSc, Managing Director, Seasalter Shellfish (Whitstable) Ltd. Once they are transferred to a nursery at 3mm, they learn to fend for themselves and adapt to the ambient temperature before being relaid on the beds off Whitstable. Apart from minute addition of vitamins, minerals and silicate to their diet (for healthy growth and shell formation) no other material is used in their production apart from a daily pumped supply of new seawater.

Some natural production of flat oysters still occurs on the free fishing grounds of the Kentish Flats, within an eight mile radius of Whitstable harbour. This is greatly

assisted by natural spat falls of native oysters from the farmed area. The cupped species (*gigas*) do not breed in our cold waters.

4.5. Method of production:

Production:

Area where oyster farming occurs. Both *Ostrea edulis* (Native oyster) and *Crassostrea gigas* (cultivated European oyster) spat are reared in our hatchery at Reculver. When they have grown to a sufficient size they are laid off on the freehold oyster beds North of Whitstable.

Processing:

Oysters are collected from the beds during Spring Tides and brought ashore by barge. They are then washed, graded and placed in licensed depuration tanks for two days prior to sale. Samples are checked every month by the Public Health Laboratory.

Preparation:

Oysters are rinsed in fresh water before being packed into wooden tubs for despatch. No other preparation is required as the product is sold live.

The Hatchery at Reculver artificially creates the ideal conditions for spawning oysters. Seawater is filtered and pasteurised before it is used for growing the particular microscopic algae which are the food of the oysters at all stages of their life. Algae are grown in this treated seawater in tall plastic algae growing bags in a greenhouse, using natural and artificial light, nutrient mixtures, aeration and added carbon dioxide.

The algae-rich sea water is fed to the ripening breeding oysters kept in tanks in the hatchery, where the temperature is raised to 25°C. Oysters begin life as males and become female after about a year. A mixture of oysters of different ages is kept in the tanks to ensure fertilisation of the eggs when they are produced.

Once an oyster has spawned the microscopic larvae are placed in a separate tank. Up to one million eggs may be produced by one oyster. The larvae swim for about two weeks before settling down and becoming spat, cementing themselves to a hard surface. They are immediately scraped from this hard surface. They are still tiny (0.3mm) but have the form of adult oysters and they have lost the ability to swim.

The spat is kept in suspension for a further 10 days by bubbling air into the bases of tall narrow containers – upwellers – where an upward flow of water keeps them in constant movement. They are fed on a constant supply of algae-rich aerated sea water. The small oysters are regularly washed and graded to encourage rapid growth.

Once the young oysters have reached 3mm in diameter, they are hardened off in larger upwellers in the holding units at a lower temperature, to adapt them to life in the open tanks. They are then transferred outside to the lagoon-fed nursery where they are grown on until required by a customer or for relaying on the Company's beds.

4.6 Link:

Whitstable has been famous for its oysters since Roman times. This is well documented in many books such as –

The Oysters and Dredgers of Whitstable – AO Collard

Oysters with Love – John Rydon

The Glorious Oyster – Hector Bolitho

Wild About Whitstable – Giselle Stroud & Elaine Kirkaldie

Farming Oysters – Whitstable Museum

A New Oyster Cult – Elaine Kirkaldie

In the last century oyster dredging and its associated trades provided the main employment in the area.

4.7 Inspection body:

Name: Product Authentication Inspectorate Ltd (PAI)

Address: Rowland House

65 High Street

Worthing

West Sussex

BN11 1DN

The inspection body is an official public body conforming to the principles of the EN 45011 standard.

4.8 Labelling

N/A