

APPLICATION FOR REGISTRATION OF A TSG

COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 509/2006 on agricultural products and foodstuffs as traditional specialities guaranteed

"Birmingham Balti"

EC No: [for EC use only]

1. NAME AND ADDRESS OF THE APPLICANT GROUP

Birmingham Balti Association (BBA)

Address: Andy Munro
11 Orchard Way,
Hollywood,
Birmingham
B47 5NH

Tel.: 0121 2426957

Email: munroandy@hotmail.com

Composition: Producers/processors (5) Other (1)

The Association was formed in 1998 and is comprised of restaurant owners.

2. MEMBER STATE OR THIRD COUNTRY

United Kingdom

3. PRODUCT SPECIFICATION

3.1. Name(s) to be registered (Article 2 of Commission Regulation 1216/2007)

Birmingham Balti

3.2. Whether the name is

Specific in itself

Expresses the specific character of the agricultural product or foodstuff

3.3. Whether reservation of the name is sought under Article 13(2) of Regulation 509/2006

[Select one, "X":]

- Registration with reservation of the name
 Registration, without reservation of the name

3.4. Type of product [as in Annex II]

Class 2.5 Pre-cooked meals

3.5. Description of the agricultural product or foodstuff to which the name under point 3.1. applies (Article 3(1) of Commission Regulation 1216//2007)

The Birmingham Balti is a fast cooked curry dish which can be made using, chicken, fish, meat, or vegetables. The Birmingham Balti is cooked and served in a thin steel wok-shaped bowl called the balti, from which the dish gets its name.

One of the reasons for its popularity is that it is served in the dish it is cooked in straight from the high flamed hob so it literally bubbles with culinary vibrancy. The colours of which are due to the specific ingredients used for any chosen balti. It's reliance on natural and fresh ingredients rather than artificial colouring and generic curry powders and pastes, gives it a fresh 'wholesome' appearance set off by the chopped fresh coriander commonly used to decorate the dish once cooked.

Furthermore, the use of vegetable oil and the process of adding the ingredients one at a time, through the fast cooking process gives it a cleaner and discernable taste, as compared to many 'western style' curries which are traditionally served up using a highly coloured, thick cloying sauce which can overpower any of the individual flavours.

3.6. Description of the production method to which the name under point (3.1.) applies (Article 3(2) of Commission Regulation 1216//2007)

Vegetable oil is heated over a high flame in a small 'balti', which is roughly 22cm in diameter, made of thin, pressed steel,.

Base ingredients:

Chopped onions as a base ingredient are added to the heated vegetable oil to which ginger and garlic puree are added with a small amount of restaurant sauce.

Restaurant Sauce:

The restaurant sauce is pre-prepared and unique to each Balti House. It will include a base mix of onions, garlic, ginger, tumeric, salt and garam masala, to which extra ingredients maybe added according to the preferences and tradition of the Chef. It will be cooked over a long period of time, sufficient to reduce it to a smooth, liquid consistency. Pre-prepared generic commercial curry pastes and powders are not used and not permitted.

Main ingredients:

Off the bone meat, fish or a variety of vegetables are added to the restaurant sauce. Dried spices of fenugreek, turmeric, cumin and a garam masala mix can be added during the latter stages with other spices the restaurant Chef chooses.

Prior to serving, fresh coriander is sprinkled on the top and the meal is served in the balti dish the Birmingham Balti is cooked in. It is traditionally served and eaten with naan bread.

3.7. Specificity of the agricultural product or foodstuff (Article 3(3) of Commission Regulation 1216/2007)

The Balti is a form of curry. However, there are five characteristics which, when combined, differentiate it from other curries whether cooked for both the indigenous UK population or Indian sub continent palates.

- 1) For meat baltis, the meat is cooked off the bone rather than on the bone as in other curries in the traditional 'one pot' cooking of the Indian subcontinent e.g. Handi (clay pot) cooking.
- 2) The meal is fast cooked in a balti and cooked at high temperatures over a high flame very quickly.
- 3) Vegetable oil is used instead of ghee. Ghee has always been the traditional cooking medium on the south Asian sub continent. This method of cooking was brought to the UK by the mainly Bangladeshi population who opened up most of the restaurants in Britain and other countries in the early 1950's.

The decision to use vegetable oil, instead of ghee:

Ghee is high in saturated fats and the pioneering balti houses decided to use vegetable oil not only because it is healthier, and therefore generally preferred by their indigenous Western customers. Because of its naturally higher 'smoke point', it is better suited to the fast cooking over a high flame that is used in cooking the Birmingham Balti

An added benefit was vegetable oil, unlike ghee, does not solidify as it cools and therefore gives a cleaner, fresher taste preserving the integrity of the individual spices added to the balti during the fast cooking process.

- 4) Dried spices are used, with the exception of the fresh ginger and garlic puree. Pre-prepared generic commercial curry pastes and powders are not used. This is to ensure the taste of the balti retains its integrity with the individual spices all contributing separately to the flavour rather than being overpowered by a generic 'curry' taste. Fresh coriander is then sprinkled on the balti before serving.

- 5) The meal is served in the thin pressed steel 'wok', commonly known as the balti. in which it is cooked and traditionally eaten with the fingers using naan bread.

3.8. Traditional character of the agricultural product or foodstuff (Article 3(4) of Commission Regulation 1216//2007)

The Balti first appeared around the late 1970's in the 'Balti Triangle', an area in the South East of Birmingham comprising parts of the wards of Sparkhill, Sparkbrook, Balsall Heath and Moseley.

Birmingham has one of the largest overseas Pakistani communities in the world. At 110,900 residents, they account for 11% of the city's population, the largest in Britain. Most came from the Potohar area of Pakistan's Kashmir, and specifically the district and city of Mirpur and are known as Mirpuris. Many were displaced by the Mangla Dam project in the early sixties and allowed to settle in the UK under an agreement between the Pakistan and British governments.

When they arrived in Birmingham the Mirpuris brought with them their traditional method of cooking which is to slow cook meat on the bone (chicken, lamb and beef) or vegetables usually in an earthenware pot called a 'Haandi' or cast iron receptacle usually called a 'Karahi' over a low heat. Haandis or Karahis are still available today though most restaurants require at least 45 minutes notice for their preparation.

Gradually these restaurants became more frequented by non-Pakistani residents though their owners noticed that these customers were unhappy with waiting so long for their meals and were also keen to eat more healthily. In response the chefs made three significant adaptations; first the meat was ready prepared off the bone which meant it would cook faster. Secondly they stopped using the traditional ghee and replaced it with vegetable oil which they believed was preferred by the Western customer for health reasons. They discovered it was not only healthier, but also gave a cleaner, fresher taste. Thirdly they experimented with cooking the food at high temperatures because of the need to serve Western customers quicker.

Since the earthenware pot could not stand high heat they commissioned a local steel maker to manufacture thin pressed steel bowls with two handles, similar to a wok, about 22cm in diameter, which they called a 'balti'. The term was used on the basis that indigenous 'Brummies' found it easier to pronounce than the generic term 'Karahi' and also gave a unique name to this new fusion dish.

The origin of the term 'balti' has been the subject of much discussion but a dictionary of Anglo Indian terms of the late nineteenth century, Hobson-Jobson, claims that the Hindi word 'balti' has as its origin the Portuguese word 'balde', a bucket. "Balty, H. bāltī, 'a bucket,' is the Port. balde." A word commonly used at weddings on the south Asian sub continent as due to the amount of diners, cooked meat was served from large buckets.

This explanation is plausible given the ease with which the soft sound of the 'd' and 't' are interchangeable; balde and balte. There is a mountainous area

of Pakistan in the North bordering Tibet called 'Baltistan'; where a tribe called the Baltis live and this is also given as an origin of the word 'balti' but the former explanation is more likely given the origin of those who invented the dish in Birmingham. However the custom of cooking and serving a dish in the same receptacle was undoubtedly a convenient custom of nomadic tribes in the mountainous area of Pakistani and the Kashmir.

The freshness and informality of the food soon caught on plus there was the added bonus that Balti restaurants, known locally as 'Baltihouses' were unlicensed allowing people to bring their own drinks.

The use of the balti and high temperature cooking on an open flame was also another reason for the use of vegetable oil replacing ghee or clarified butter as the vegetable oils used in baltis have even higher smoke points (usually above 250 C) than ghee (190 - 240 C). Ghee also solidifies when cool, which looks unpleasant at the bottom of a balti about to be scraped out using naan bread. Another variant was the use of original spices and herbs unlike the commercially prepared generic curry pastes and powders used in restaurants elsewhere.

The process of preparing the meal is to use onions or tomatoes as a base with freshly cooked chicken breast (balti murgh), or part cooked lamb (balti gosht) in meat baltis, fish or vegetables for vegetable baltis. During the fast cooking process over a high flame, ginger and garlic purée are added with a selection of spices including fenugreek, turmeric, cumin, garam masala mix and a small amount of the restaurant's own freshly prepared sauce. On the point of serving fresh coriander is usually sprinkled on top.

Given that steel cools very quickly, the meal was eaten direct from the balti at the table rather than served onto a plate and risk cooling. It also means all the flavours are retained in the bowl. This leads to another important aspect of eating a balti which is the absence of cutlery; pieces of naan are traditionally torn off by hand and used to scoop up the hot sauce from the pot and to wipe the bowl clean at the end.

Reputation and Evidence

The first recorded reference to the balti was in the Curry Club's 'Curry Magazine' Edition 29, winter 1984 which answered a reader's query about the definition of balti as the balti was virtually unknown then. Books on curries prior to then such as the classic "The Complete Book of Curries" by Harvey Day published in 1970 make no reference to the balti. Since then there have been numerous references to the Balti including the Balti Curry Cookbook by Pat Chapman and the Essential Street Balti guide.

A recent book of curries from around the world split by country only mentions the balti in the section on British food. In it Roopa Gulati writes "Having more in common with Birmingham than Pakistan, baltis are the star attraction for curry aficionados." (Page 332 Dorling Kindersley Publishing 2006, various contributors)

With the spread of the balti to other parts of the country and indeed abroad, the original concept of the balti has been lost in regional variations using methods and ingredients far different from those used in a traditional Balti'.

The Birmingham Balti Association is seeking TSG status to preserve this unique food, as a fusion between the traditions of South Asian and British cuisine.

3.9. Minimum requirements and procedures to check the specific character (Article 4 of Commission Regulation 1216//2007)

An annual inspection of each of the premises producing the Birmingham Balti shall be made.

The inspection shall check;

- a) All meat must be off the bone for meat baltis
- b) All cooking is done in the thin pressed steel wok, commonly called the balti, and cooked continuously at a high temperature
- c) Vegetable oil must be used. Ghee is not permitted
- d) Fresh dried spices are used. Commercially produced curry mixtures and pastes are not permitted
- e) The meal is served in the balti dish, in which it is cooked.

4. AUTHORITIES OR BODIES VERIFYING COMPLIANCE WITH THE PRODUCT SPECIFICATION

4.1. Name and address

PAI Ltd,
Rowland House,
65 High St
Worthing, West Sussex BN11 1DN
01903 237799 or 01423 878878(Harrogate Office)

[Select one, "X":]

Public Private

4.2. Specific tasks of the authority or body

To ensure compliance with the specifications in 3.9 above