

# **PRODUCT SPECIFICATION FOR THE PROTECTED DESIGNATION OF ORIGIN “ALCACHOFA DE BENICARLÓ”**

## **A) PRODUCT NAME**

Protected Designation of Origin "Alcachofa de Benicarló" or "Carxofa de Benicarló"

## **B) DESCRIPTION**

Flower heads of artichoke (*Cynarus scolymus* L), intended for fresh consumption and of categories Extra and I, provided they meet the conditions set forth in the following specifications and other applicable requirements of current legislation.

The varieties to be protected are those belonging to the group of early white varieties, including the “Blanca de Tudela” and its variations “de Benicarló”, “del Prat” and “de Reus”. They are called early because they are likely to flower in autumn, continuing through winter and spring.

With regard to the characteristics of the product, the flower heads, in addition to having a good external appearance, compacted and clustered, also have a greater resistance to blackening after cutting.

## **C) GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

The production area consists of the municipalities of Benicarló, Cálig, Peñíscola, and Vinarós, all close to the coast and located in the "Baix Maestrat" region, belonging to the province of Castellón (Valencian Community).

The entire production area currently covers 25,129 hectares, of which approximately 16,000 ha are cultivated land, with 3,800 ha dedicated to vegetable crops, of which more than 18% are devoted to artichoke cultivation.

The production area coincides with the processing area.

## **D) PROOF OF ORIGIN**

The Regulatory Council of the Protected Designation of Origin will keep a register of plantations and another of storage and packaging facilities.

In the plantation register, only those within the production area and planted with authorized varieties will be registered. Periodic inspections will be carried out on the plantations registered under the denomination of origin to verify that they are within the protected geographical area, that the variety belongs to the white group, and that the area matches the declared one.

The storage and packaging facilities register will include those located in the production area that wish to store and condition protected artichokes and comply with the regulations. Periodic inspections will be carried out to ensure a perfect separation between artichokes that meet the conditions to be covered by the Protected Designation of Origin and those that do not.

The flower heads shall be marketed only in legally authorised packaging, provided with a numbered counter-label issued and controlled by the Regulatory Council.

## **E) METHOD OF PRODUCTION**

### **a. Land Preparation**

First, the plots are selected in such a way that at least three to four years have elapsed between two artichoke plantations on the same plot.

The land is prepared meticulously, as the artichoke can last 2 or even 3 years in the same soil, for which 1 or 2 deep ploughing operations are carried out to ensure good soil aeration and permeability in depth. Then, a rotary tiller is used to break up the surface soil and prepare the furrows for subsequent planting.

At least 20 days before planting, organic amendment (manure along with base fertilization) is incorporated.

### **b. Planting**

The propagation system used is by cuttings from self-selected mother plants. For the production the cuttings, once the harvest is finished and irrigation is interrupted (i.e., after causing the plant to dry out), the selected mother plants are uprooted and the farmer obtains 4 to 6 cuttings from the rhizome of the mother plant.

These cuttings are planted manually in July and August, with densities ranging from 12,000 to 18,000 plants per hectare.

### **c. Irrigation**

The irrigation system has traditionally been by furrows, but in recent years, localized irrigation has been introduced as it allows for a more rational use of water and better fertilization control. During the initial rooting stage of the crop, several irrigations are given, as it coincides with the hottest and driest months of the year.

#### **d. Fertilization**

In addition to the base fertilization done during land preparation, top fertilization is applied throughout the growing season according to the needs of the plant at each stage of its vegetative cycle.

#### **e. Weed Control**

In the first phase of cultivation, manual and chemical weeding is done to control weeds, and when the plant has 3 or 4 leaves, hilling is carried out less frequently until the plant's shading prevents weed proliferation.

#### **f. Harvesting**

Harvesting is staggered from approximately October to April. It is done manually with a knife, selecting artichokes with a stem portion less than 10 cm, which are placed in baskets carried by the harvester.

Once filled, the baskets are emptied as carefully as possible, so as not to damage the product, into plastic crates and sent to processing centres as quickly as possible to avoid any loss of quality.

#### **g. Conditioning and Packaging**

Once the product reaches the conditioning and packaging facilities, a rigorous selection is made on the sorting and packing lines, and the artichokes are classified and packaged according to categories.

### **F) LINK WITH THE GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

#### **a. Historical**

The artichoke is a product with a long tradition in the area, mainly in the town of Benicarló, where knowledge of its cultivation has been passed down through generations.

The cultivation is perfectly adapted to the area, and its importance in the municipality is reflected in its coat of arms, which features an artichoke plant (see the current coat of arms and the seals from 1724 and 1842 in the annex).

Regarding the figure of the "carxofa" or "carxofera" in the Benicarló coat of arms, it is worth noting that the presence of both elements is very old. There is unanimity among researchers of the history of Benicarló in relating the thistles in the coat of arms to that of the family of the Templar Master D. Berenguer de Cardona (late 13th century), with the oldest version being the one carved on the apse of the San Gregorio hermitage (16th century). Other versions of the Benicarló coat of arms have come down to us. In the 1724 version (Main Seal, bronze), the thistle appears very stylized and symmetrical, completely distorting the natural reality.

However, in 1842, this reality is reflected in a true "carxofera" that could not have been so realistically conceived if the author had not been totally familiar with the daily presence of this plant. On the occasion of the presentation and first use of this coat of arms, the Benicarló Town Council recorded that "henceforth, this coat of arms will be used as the main seal of the town, as stamped below this agreement, for the reason that these are the arms of the town, and there is no difference between this coat of arms and the previous one except for its larger size and background cleanliness". Finally, in 1971, the file for the rehabilitation of the current coat of arms was processed and approved.

Artichoke cultivation was introduced by the Arabs who settled in the area in the 8th century and occupied it for more than 500 years. In fact, its popular name "carxofa" ("xorsofa" in Arabic) is still in use, as are many of the agricultural practices of that time, thanks to the long tradition of the Benicarló gardeners in producing artichokes for family consumption.

The botanist Cabanilles called them *Scolimus Hispanicus* at the end of the 17th century and said that they abounded in all the irrigated areas throughout the Valencian region. There is a fairly unanimous opinion that the cultivation of the Benicarló artichoke plant dates back a long time, although not for commercial purposes but as a family gastronomic supplement.

The current production and marketing of the artichoke began half a century ago, at the end of the 1940s, when the farmer, accustomed to its cultivation, did not hesitate to grow it on a larger scale, as soon as trade spread and markets became closer by means of transportation.

## **b. Natural**

The area has all the optimal edaphoclimatic conditions for artichoke cultivation, as detailed below:

- **Orography**

These lands are characterised by forming an important plain with gentle slopes (2% on average, with higher values in contact with the mountain ranges that protect them to the west, and lower values near the sea that borders them to the east). This uniformity is only interrupted in very specific places such as ravines and dry riverbeds.

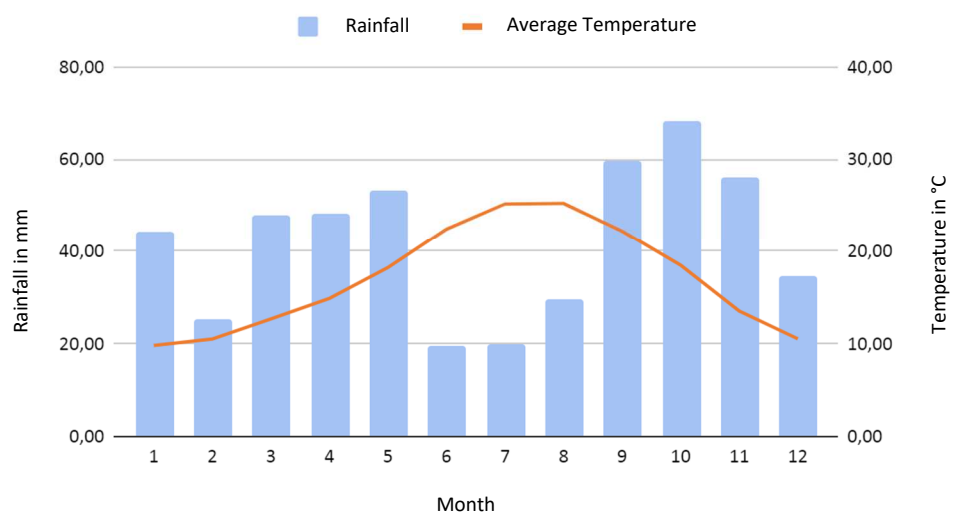
- **Soil**

With regard to the characteristics of the soils, it should be said that the bedrock is carbonate-type, making them slightly basic or tending towards neutrality. The textures are mainly clay-loam and sandy-loam.

- Climate

The climate is dry sub-humid, Mediterranean maritime. The area is characterised by mild but not warm winters and a microclimate that protects it from frost for most of the year. The average annual rainfall is 500-700 mm with an irregular distribution, which means that irrigation water is necessary.

CLIMOGRAPH BENICARLÓ



Therefore, in a space limited by the farmlands of the municipalities, the white varieties develop flower heads with unique qualities, as besides having a good external appearance, compact and clustered, the artichokes of the area have greater resistance to blackening after cutting, a highly valued quality in commerce, which is reflected in higher prices for the product from the area compared to other nearby competing areas.

### c. Cultivation and Production Conditions

The cultivation techniques are, along with the previously mentioned edaphoclimatic characteristics, a differentiating factor of the quality of the artichokes in the area.

Cultivation, as described in Section E, is manual and expected from the selection of the cuttings by the farmer to the harvesting, when the artichokes are selected on a daily basis at their optimal point. These stages and the intermediate ones are carried out by the farmer with great care, resulting from the professionalism and tradition developed over several generations.

## **G) INSPECTION BODY**

- Name: Instituto de Calidad Alimentaria de la Comunidad Valenciana (Food Quality Institute of the Valencian Community)
- Address: Plaza Polo de Bernabé, 8 bajo E-46020 VALENCIA
- Tel: 34 96384124
- Fax: 34 96384179
- E-mail: instituto.calidad@agricultura.m400.gva.es

The production control tasks are to be provisionally assumed by the Instituto de Calidad Agroalimentaria, as a competent authority in designations of quality for the autonomous community of Valencia, until the Regulating Body of the PDO “Alcachofa de Benicarló” complies with standard EN-45011.

## **H) LABELLING**

The owners of the processing centres will be given bands for the packages, which must prominently display the name of the Designation of Origin “Alcachofa de Benicarló” and their own logo, provided with a numbered label that, regardless of the type of packages in which the artichokes are shipped for consumption, must be placed before shipment in accordance with the rules established by the Regulatory Council.

## **I) NATIONAL LAW REQUIREMENTS**

- Law No 25/1970 of 2 December 1970 (Statute of vineyards, wine and spirit drinks).
- Decree No 835/1972 of 28 March 1972, regulation of Law No 25/1970.
- Order of 25 January 1994 specifying the correlation between Spanish legislation and Regulation (EEC) No 2081/92 on designations of origin and geographical indications for agricultural and food products.
- Royal Decree No 1643/1999 of 22 October 1999 regulating the process for the handling of applications for registration in the Community register of protected designation of origins and protected geographical indications.

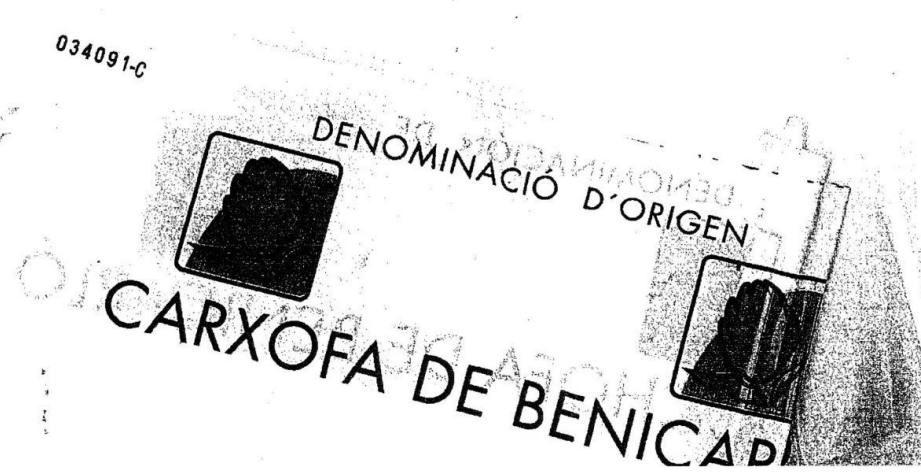


POD "ALCACHOFA DE BENICARLÓ"

MODEL FOR LOGO



MODEL FOR NUMBERED COUNTER-LABEL







MINISTERIO  
DE AGRICULTURA, PESCA  
Y ALIMENTACION

DIRECCIÓN GENERAL DE  
ALIMENTACION

SUBDIRECCIÓN GENERAL DE  
DENOMINACIONES DE CALIDAD Y  
RELACIONES INTERPROFESIONALES Y  
CONTRACTUALES

**CURRENT COAT OF ARMS OF BENICARLÓ**

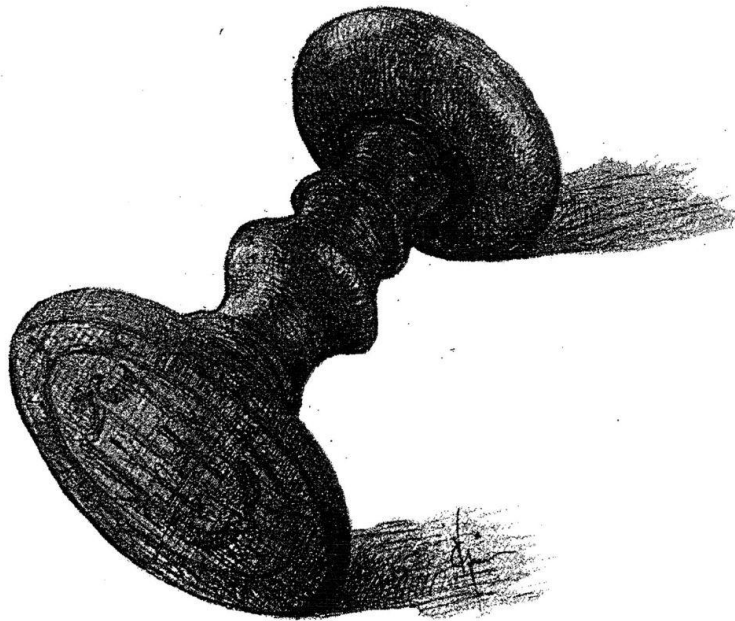




Main Seal, 1724



Main Seal, 1842



View of the Main Seal, in bronze, 1724