

## AN EXAMPLE OF CROATIAN LABELING FOR PROTECTION OF AGRICULTURAL FOOD PRODUCTS

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### Abstract

Food markets are saturated with highly competitive products that often do not possess the adequate quality. For this reason, consumers are uncertain about the quality and origin of the food products that they intend to buy. European Commission (EC) recognizes this problem and in 1992 created labels for protection of agricultural food products, known as “Protected Designation of Origin” (PDO), “Protected Geographical Indications” (PGI) and “Traditional Specialty Guarantee” (TSG). Croatia adopted these labels in 1995, since then, 4 products are registered with PDO label, 8 products with PGI label and one product is under the process of getting PDO label. At the beginning of 2012 the project aimed to protect the geographical origin of “Vrgorac strawberries” was initiated by strawberry producers’ association. The aim of project is to enhance production, increase competitiveness and quality of strawberries from area of Vrgorac. In the survey entire producing area of “Vrgorac strawberry” was involved, including the fields Rastok, Kotezi, Kokorici, Prapatnica, Jezero and Pojezerje. Furthermore, in this project, supported by the Ministry of Agriculture of Croatia, the production processes and the production range were standardized, and the most important chemical, morphological and organoleptic characteristics of the strawberries from that area were described. Based on the obtained results, a specification of “Vrgorac strawberry” will be drafted and submitted to the procedure for getting the protection of geographical indications label.

**Keywords:** labels, protection of food products, protected geographical indications, evaluation, strawberry

### Introduction

Food markets worldwide are saturated with highly competitive products that often do not possess the adequate quality. In those competitive markets, consumers have begun to increasingly recognize and appreciate products that are characterized by a special quality. Those high quality products have to be protected and labelled by labels; “Protected Designation of Origin” (PDO), “Protected Geographical Indications” (PGI) and “Traditional Specialty Guarantee” (TSG), to avoid adulteration and misleading of consumers. For this reason, in 1992 European Commission (EC) created these labels to protect agricultural food products and also to protect consumers. Those labels were defined in European Union (EU) by Council Regulation (EEC) 2081/92. In 2006 this Regulation was replaced by a new EU Council Regulation (EEC) 510/06 on the protection of geographical indications and designations of origin for agricultural and food products. Croatia adopted all EU Regulations on labelling of food products. At the beginning it was in the responsibility of State Intellectual Property Office, and in 2003 it is transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture. The Ministry of Agriculture has issued an Act on PDO, PGI and TSG of agricultural food products (NN 50/12), which, among other things, Croatian legislation taken from Council Regulation 510/06 on the PDO, PGI and TSG. In 2012, Croatian Ministry of Agriculture complement the old Regulation (NN. 50/12) with a new one NN 102/12 which is complied with EEC 1898/96.

Vrgorac strawberry is characterized by high quality product and became a successful brand on markets in Croatia and abroad. Resellers recognized this brand and usually label the strawberries from other breeding areas or even from import as “Vrgoracka strawberry” to achieve a higher market price. To protect strawberry producers from Vrgorac area and consumers “Association of Vrgorac strawberry” started the project to label the Vrgorac strawberry with PGI.

PGI is defined as name of a region, a specific place, or in exceptional cases, a country that is used to describe an agricultural food products; if product originate from that region, specific place or country; if possesses a specific quality, reputation or other characteristics to its geographical origin; or if the production and / or processing and / or preparation takes place in that geographical area.

### **Materials and methods**

This study was done within the project “Vrgorac strawberry-local product for the global market” which is financed by the Croatian Ministry of Agriculture. In accordance with project design, authors made a project protocol, which consists of several separate ensembles. The first part of the project was the selection of locations for sampling strawberries, soil and water. After that carrying out a survey on the cultivation of strawberries in Vrgorac area, strawberry sampling, sample analysis and analysis of the results. The last step of the project protocol was preparation of the food product specification, in accordance with all relevant regulations for labeling Vrgorac strawberry with PGI (NN 102/12, EEC 1898/96).

### **Results and discussion**

The process of obtaining the PGI in Croatia is defined in the Regulation NN. 102/12 and right to apply for PGI has any association of producers and / or processors (regardless of their legal status, which the association has) and individual manufacturer and / or processor (either natural or legal persons). The procedure for registration of food product with PGI is under the responsibility of Ministry of Agriculture in Sector for labeling and food quality in the Department of indigenous products. An application for the registration of food product with PGI shall contain: the registration form tag; form for registration of users of registered mark; details about applicant; label that intends to register or use; product specification; the name of the certification body and the written consent of that body; certificate of conformity and summary of the application.

Product specification is the most important document for the registration of food products with PDO, PGI and TSG labels. Even that specification is the part of the application for PGI it is important because it represents the essence of the label protection of the product and must be developed in detail. Producers are obliged to its responsibility to make product specification. According to the specification, the certification body makes control plan (approved by the Ministry of Agriculture) to issue certificates of conformity. Minister authorizes legal entities (certification authority) which is supervised by the Ministry and Croatian Accreditation Agency.

Content of the product specification:

- Product name
- Description of product
- Geographical area
- Proof of origin
- Description of a method of obtaining a product
- The connection between the product and geographical area
  - a) details of the geographical area
  - b) details of the product quality
  - c) a causal link between geographical area and product

- Information about certification body
- Specific labeling rules
- Requirements prescribed by special regulations
- Historical evidence

The right to use the registered PGI belongs to all the producers and/or processors of Vrgorac strawberry that are the members of “Association of Vrgorac strawberry” and as long as they meet the requirements. From 2006 Croatian producers can apply for registration of a designation of origin and geographical indications directly to the EC ( Regulation No. 510/2006). Application forms are available on the website of the European Commission (<http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture>).

After collecting all necessary data, historical evidences, chemical and morphological analysis of Vrgorac strawberry, authors made product specification. Vrgorac strawberry and area of Vrgorac is described in detail and quality that this strawberry possesses is connected to the geographical area. Strawberries from Vrgorac with all their specific characteristics belongs to the class of premium product that is possible to grow with that characteristics only in area of Vrgorac.

### Conclusion

Getting the PGI label for Vrgorac strawberry will protect the producers from this area from adulteration and protect misleading of consumers. This label will also have an important socio-economic aspect on development of this rural area. From the economic point of view; higher market price of the product; recognition of region and product; ability to export and development of tourism. From the point of view of Legal aspect, PGI label will contribute in protection from abuse and the reputation of the original product. Consumers will increase demand for this local product and labels guarantee recognizable quality. From the Social aspect point of view, PGI label will prevent the outflow of population from the region (keep the rural citizens in the rural area) and increase producers income.

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