

LANDMARKS FROM EUROPE

PDO products and European quality assurance. A guide to recognizing them.

The *Landmarks from Europe* communication campaign of PDO quality brands spotlights fine products such as Barolo and Barbaresco wines as well as Fontina cheese. What does it really mean when a product bears the PDO label? It is an official certification of the European Union that guarantees food safety, its geographical origin and quality. Let us find out together how to recognize an authentic PDO product and avoid fakes.

What does PDO stand for?

The acronym PDO stands for *Protected Designation of Origin*. This label can only be put on products grown, processed, and packed in a specific geographical area, according to traditional methods and with local ingredients. In the wine sector, DOC (Controlled Designation of Origin) and DOCG (Controlled and guaranteed Designation of Origin) designations were integrated into the EU PDO category in 2010.



Fontina PDO, a symbol of the Aosta Valley

Fontina, an authentic food from the Aosta Valley territory, stands out among PDO products. This cheese was granted Protected Designation of Origin status in 1996. It sets itself apart by its milky smell, sweet and unmistakable flavour, and soft and melting texture.

How to recognize genuine Fontina PDO?

To be sure you are buying genuine Fontina, it is important to check for certain identifying marks on the wheel.

1. **The brand:** the middle of each wheel is marked by the official stamp certifying compliance with production specification and the approval of the “Brand Protection Committee” of the Protection Consortium.
2. **The CTF number**, located just below the stamp, gives the name of the producer, member of the Fontina Protection Consortium. This code can also be found in

LANDMARKS FROM EUROPE

specialized outlets and on the official website of the Consortium, in the section on producers.

3. **The casein plate**, an additional element of guarantee, is the plate with an identification number that allows complete traceability of the cheese, including production date and origin of the milk.

Quality controls

Before being marketed as Fontina PDO, the wheels must pass rigorous inspections. These include manually checking the consistency and a technique that involves drilling a sample of “*carrot-shaped*” cheese from the wheel to ensure that it has the desired softness and flexibility to meet quality standards.

A wheel suitable for PDO certification and ready for marketing usually weighs between 7.5 and 12 kilograms, has a diameter of about 43 centimetres, and a firm brown rind.

Only wheels that have passed all these controls can officially obtain and bear the PDO mark.



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