

**THE USE OF TRADITIONAL MATERIALS IN THE PRODUCTION OF ARTISANAL
CHEESE AND DAIRY PRODUCTS:**
AUTHORISATION PROCEDURES

The characteristics of food premises and the equipment requirements are specifically described in Regulation (EC) No 852/2004, annex II, chapters I to V. In general, the use of impervious, non-absorbent, washable and non-toxic materials, as well as smooth surfaces, is required.

In the production of artisanal dairy products, materials and surfaces that don't meet these characteristics are often found: wood and cloth among others. It is possible the use of these traditional materials, within the scope of the hygiene package, specifically in compliance with Regulation (EC) No. 852/2004. However, these materials are widely used without being authorised as it should be, by the competent authority.

It is necessary to know the procedures to get these materials authorised, in order to use them in compliance with the hygiene regulations.

There are two different procedures to modify the content of Regulation (EC) No 852/2004, annex II, chapters I to V, to grant the use of traditional materials: by means of **adaptations** and by means of **derogations for foods with traditional characteristics**.

1. Adaptations

According to Regulation (EC) No 852/2004, article 13.3., Member States may, without compromising achievement of the objectives of this Regulation, adopt national measures adapting the requirements laid down in Annex II, with the aim of:

- a) Enabling the continued use of traditional methods, at any of the stages of production, processing or distribution of food; or
- b) Accommodating the needs of food businesses situated in regions that are subject to special geographical constraints.

In any other case, these national measures shall apply only to the construction, layout and equipment of establishments.

When traditional methods of production are applied, it is possible to ask for adaptations of Annex II in order to go on using traditional materials.

Following the principle of transparency, Member States wishing to adopt national measures shall notify the Commission and the other Member States, describing the requirements to be adapted, the foodstuffs and the establishments concerned, and the reason for the adaptation. The Commission and the other Member States have a three months period to send comments. National measures may be adopted by Member States only if consensus is reached.

This is a long complicated procedure, generally by means of a national law, when it's necessary to apply some measures at the national level for a specific food sector or food commodity.

2. Derogations for foods with traditional characteristics

According to Regulation (EC) No 2074/2005, article 7.2.b., when producing food with traditional characteristics, the type of materials of which the instruments and the equipment for the preparation, packaging and wrapping of these products are made, don't have to be smooth, impervious, washable and/or corrosion-resistant. In any case, these equipments shall be maintained at all times in a satisfactory state of hygiene and regularly cleaned and disinfected.

Bear in mind that for the purpose of this Regulation (see article 7.1), foods with traditional characteristics means foods that, in the Member State in which they are traditionally manufactured, are:

- a) Recognised historically as traditional products, or
- b) Manufactured according to codified or registered technical references to the traditional process, or according to traditional production methods, or
- c) Protected as traditional food products by a Community, National, Regional or Local law (PDO, PGI, TSG)

A simplified notification procedure (simple information) is laid down for foods with traditional characteristics. In this case Member States must no later than 12 months after granting individual or general derogations, notify the Commission and the other Member States any derogation granted, with a description of the requirements adapted and the foodstuffs and establishments concerned. Neither a standstill period nor comments from other Member States and the Commission are applicable.

This simplified procedure is faster and easier to ask for and to grant. Any traditional material intended to be used in the elaboration of dairy products with traditional characteristics, shall be authorised by the competent authority and notified to the Commission and the other Member States, within 12 months after being granted.

No national law is needed and the authorisation can include a specific food sector or food commodity, a traditional material to be used in some establishments, or even a specific establishment.

Having in mind that farmhouse and artisan cheeses and dairy products are made according to traditional production methods (article 7.1.b, see above), and that traditional materials are widely used in almost every cheese dairy, it's highly recommended to apply for collective derogations (for all the national farmhouse and artisan) and to include all the traditional materials generally found in farmhouse and artisan cheese dairies.