

# L'AQUILA SAFFRON PDO

THE CONSORTIUM FOR THE PROTECTION OF ZAFFERANO DELL'AQUILA PDO, a PDO product, was founded with a deed on 13/05/2005, and registered in the CCIAA Register of Companies of L'Aquila on 22/06/2005, REA no. 110993.

**DENOMINAZIONE DI ORIGINE PROTETTA**



"Zafferano dell'Aquila" was registered in the PDO Commission Register with registration no. CE 205/2005 on 04/02/2005 completing the attachment Reg. CE 2400/1996 for the registration of Designations.

The Consortium is currently funded by the European Community Reg. CEE No. 1257/1999 for the sale of quality

agricultural products PSR 2000 – 2006 Abruzzo Region, "M" Measure(ment) – Year 2005.

The current scenario of regulation and evolution in food consumption, makes it necessary to control the whole production line, from the producer to the consumer. This applies even more so to PDO products as their intrinsic high quality must be guaranteed. The technical objective the Consortium fixes itself is rapid and sure traceability of the lots of materials used (raw materials, packaging, etc.) and of the finished products in order to be able to retrace the origin and destination: the certificate of Traceability of the production line, based on conformity to the requirements specified in Regulations UNI 10939/2001 and 11020/2002 makes it possible to reconstruct the complete history of a product and to follow the use to which it is put by means of documented identification.



The producers who can apply the designation "Zafferano dell'Aquila" are entered in specific register lists kept by the control commission together with the registered parcels of the land on which the product is cultivated.

The possibility to trace the origin as well as to determine the activities involved in the various stages of production and marketing is a guarantee for the consumer as it formally identifies the responsibility of all the participants in producing the finished product. This product, thus certified, will allow the consumer of Zafferano dell'Aquila to clearly understand, from the label, the origin, the safety and purity of the product, which is naturally an advantage for the brand too.



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## THE CONSORTIUM

The Consortium was founded to promote and protect a product as unique and exclusive as its history, environment and processing: "Zafferano L'Aquila PDO". Its goal is to evaluate local products and their area of production, affording more financing and employment opportunities to the inland districts of the province of L'Aquila. The creation of the Consortium shows the determination of local producers to present themselves convincingly on the market, clearly emerging and distinguishing their products from the vast majority which are not qualified and often tend to confuse consumers. The Consortium represents the finest of local production, thereby playing a fundamental role in protecting the product and promoting more national and international quality consumption.



Considering the above, the objectives of the Consortium are as follows: to spread knowledge of the production of Abruzzo saffron to the relative markets, transmitting its constituent values of territory,

authenticity and quality, to create an image of itself which is in keeping with the nature of the product, to make the Consortium known in Italy and abroad, creating an efficient association between the territory, producers and consumers, to promote the product and its use through the specific tourist outlets (restaurants, shops selling typical products, etc.), to carry out an activity of guarantee and control with tourist operators.

[WWW.ZAFFERANODOP.IT](http://WWW.ZAFFERANODOP.IT)

## THE HISTORY AND MARKETING OF SAFFRON

According to Greek mythology the birth of saffron is to be attributed to the love of a very handsome youth called Crocus, who was protected by the gods. He fell in love with a sweet nymph called Smilax who was the god Hermes's favourite. To avenge himself on Crocus, the god transformed the youth into the beautiful saffron flower.

Saffron has been known for thousands of years, in fact Homer, Virgil and Pliny often mention it in their works as did Ovid in *The Metamorphosis*. It is mentioned in Egyptian scrolls dating from the II Century BC, in the Bible and in the IX and XII books of the Iliad. Isocrates used to have his pillows perfumed with saffron before going to bed and Trojan women used it to scent the floors of their temples. Saffron was cultivated in Cilicia, Barbary and Styria and Scono writes that the Sydonians and the Styrians used saffron to colour the veils of their brides and the priests to perfume their temples for important religious ceremonies.

From Asia the cultivation of saffron spread to various parts of the world, even as far as Tunisia, and from there to Spain, covering the regions of Albasete, Teruel, Toledo, Valencia and Murcia. From these areas it came to Italy brought by a Dominican monk belonging to the Santucci family of Navelli. The Synod of Toledo, held in about 1230 and approved by Pope Gregory IX, introduced the Inquisition. At that time the monk Santucci was a member of the Inquisition court. He was a great enthusiast of both the law and agriculture. Santucci was enraptured by the tiny saffron plant and, with the sweet soil of his homelands in Navelli in mind, believed that this plant would thrive there. This habitat did indeed turn out to be very favourable, it yielded a product which was far better than that cultivated in other countries.



In the XIII Century the town of L'Aquila had recently been founded and yet was soon famous thanks to the excellent quality of its saffron. This boosted the economy based on sheep breeding and wool production. From the plateau of Navelli the cultivation spread to the whole province of L'Aquila, resulting in a flourishing trade. After a short time

L'Aquila was to set up trading with the most important cities in Italy like Milan and Venice, as well as with foreign cities like Frankfurt, Marseille, Vienna, Nuremberg and Augsburg.

The XV Century was the most important period in the history of L'Aquila, so much so that King Ferrante I of Aragon decreed the right of the town to found a University. This event coincided with the opening of a flourishing printing works by a saffron merchant and the laying of the foundation stone of the famous Basilica of Saint Bernardino. The Saint's Mausoleum instead, was entirely financed by Jacopo Notar Nanni from Civitaretenga, a great friend of Saint Bernardino's and properous saffron and wool merchant thanks to his ability as a sheep breeder. The town of L'Aquila was often in dire straits, especially under Spanish rule, but, thanks to the saffron merchants who sold off their product, it was able to pay the taxes imposed.

With the accession of the Bourbons to the Kingdom of Naples the saffron farmers acquired new confidence, so much so that in 1830 production reached 45 quintals from a surface area of 450 hectares. But in the XX Century cultivation started declining again, first of all because of conflicts and then because of abuses by the merchants who did not want to pay a fair price for the saffron.

## PRODUCTION AREAS OF PDO SAFFRON

The production zone of PDO saffron includes a clearly-defined area in the Province of L'Aquila with the towns of Barisciano, Caporciano, Fagnano Alto, Fontecchio, L'Aquila, Molina Aterno, Navelli, Poggio Picenze, Prata d'Ansidonia, San Demetrio nei Vestini, San Pio delle Camere, Tione degli Abruzzi and Villa Sant'Angelo. The boundaries of the area are defined by the perimeters of these municipalities. Within this area cultivation must take place on lands lying at an altitude of between 350 and 1,000 metres above sea level.



## PRODUCTION AND PROCESSING

The cultivation cycle of *Crocus Sativus L.*, from which the PDO saffron is obtained, starts with the ploughing of the fields to a depth of 30 cms and the application of 300 quintals of mature manure per hectare. The soil is dressed and the surface levelled.



The beds are then prepared and 2 – 4 furrows 20 – 25 cms apart dug. This is where the new corms will be planted 2 -3 cms apart. No other type of fertilizer will be applied during the vegetative cycle. Afterwards the soil must be kept soft until the planting, which takes place in August. The number of corms per hectare ranges from 90 to 100 quintals i.e. from 500 to 600 corms. The soil is

never irrigated. The corms are planted in beds with 2 – 3 furrows each, 20 cms apart and at a depth of about 10 cms. The vegetative cycle begins with the first rains in September when a few narrow vertical leaves emerge from the ground. The flowers are composed of six pinkish-purple petals, the crimson-red stigma which are divided into three threads (filaments) ending in a trumpet-shaped apex fixed to the base by a white stalk, (ovary) and three yellow stamens commonly called "females" but which are actually the male part of the flower. The leaves can grow to a length of 40 cms and are dark green.

The blossoms are picked in the early morning before the sun opens them. Once they have been harvested they are opened and the stigmas removed. These stigmas are placed in an upturned flour sieve and hung over hot wood coals (almond or oak) in the fireplace. The toasting is the most crucial moment of the whole process. During toasting the stigmas lose 5/6 of their weight so that 600 grams of fresh stigmas yield 100 grams of dry ones. The finished product retains 5 – 10% humidity. Powdered saffron, ready to be packed in sachets, is obtained by grinding the dried stigmas with a normal grinder. The product should be stored in a dark, dry place. As soon as the harvest is over the daughter corms (cormlets) start to form. The part of the saffron plant above ground dries out completely in summer and stays dormant for the whole

season. This biological cycle of development proves that the plant is compatible with an area where the thermic threshold is about 20 – 25°C and the rainfall less than 20 – 30 mms. The harvest lasts about 15 – 20 days. It takes about 200,000 flowers and 500 hours of labour to produce 1 kg of saffron.

The product must be sold in paper packets or glass jars, or containers made of other materials conforming to current Community regulations regarding the packaging of foodstuffs. The net weight of the contents of each package, as well as the specification as to whether the saffron is in powder or in thread form, must be declared. There are no limitations as to the quantity in each package.

The labels must bear the date of packaging and the expiry date of the product as well as the PDO logo, the designation "Zafferano dell'Aquila – Protected Designation of Origin", the name, type of company and address of the producer and, if applicable, the producer's trade mark.

Production areas of PDO Saffron

## MASTER CHEFS' RECIPES

**Instructions for use:** When using Zafferano dell'Aquila in threads it must first be soaked in a little warm stock or cooking water. Otherwise (or as well as) ground saffron, available in packets, could be added when the food is almost cooked.

### Saffron Risotto

(or Risotto alla Milanese without the traditional bone marrow)

Serves 4

- » 360 gr. rice
- » 2 small shallots or half an onion
- » 150 gr. butter and 50 gr. Parmesan cheese
- » 1 glass dry white wine
- » ½ gr saffron threads and 1 x 10 cgr packet
- » stock

Finely chop scallions or onion and sauté in pan with 100 gr. butter. Add rice (if possible Carnaroli) and toast. Add wine and leave to evaporate. Gradually add hot beef or veal stock stirring regularly till almost cooked. When there is still one minute to go adjust salt and add saffron threads and powder. Add remaining butter and grated Parmesan cheese and mix well.

### Tagliolini with garden vegetables and L'Aquila Saffron

Serves 4

- » 4 eggs and the amount of flour needed to make the tagliolini (500 gr. good fresh bought pasta – farfalline or rombi- could also be used);
- » 1 potato, 1 carrot, 1 courgette, 6 courgette flowers (if in season), a handful of peas, 6 green beans, ¼ onion or shallot;
- » freshly ground pepper, oil, a few small ripe tomatoes or 150 gr. canned tomatoes;
- » ca. ½ gr. saffron threads;
- » basil leaf and parsley to decorate the dish;
- » mixed vegetables for the vegetable stock.

Make vegetable stock boiling carrot, celery and beet leaves in slightly salted water over low heat. Cube all the other raw vegetables. Lightly fry onion, add carrots, beans and peas and fry gently. Cook for about 15 minutes gradually adding ladels of hot stock. Lastly add courgettes and potatoes, then tomatoes with pepper and a leaf of basil. After a few minutes add the saffron. Finally mix the vegetables with the pasta and serve decorated with parsley and basil.

### Saffron Rib of Lamb

Serves 6

- » 1500 gr. lamb rib chops
- » 600 gr. mushrooms in season
- » 1 gr. L'Aquila saffron threads
- » sprig of rosemary
- » 3 cloves garlic
- » ½ onion, ½ glass dry white wine;
- » extra virgin olive oil, chilli pepper and salt to taste
- » vegetable stock

Separate the lamb chops and brown in oil with onion, garlic, chilli pepper and rosemary, then add salt. Sprinkle with wine and, once it has evaporated, add vegetable stock and saffron threads. Fry the mushrooms separately in oil, garlic, chilli pepper and parsley. Mix the meat and mushrooms and serve decorated with a few threads of saffron.