



Consorzio del Prosciutto Toscano

Organismo incaricato con Decreto del Ministero delle politiche agricole, alimentari e forestali 18 marzo 2008 della tutela del

Prosciutto Toscano DOP ai sensi dell'art. 14, comma 15 della L. 21 dicembre 1999, n. 526

Tasting Tradition

GENUINE AND SINCERE LIKE ITS PEOPLE.

In Tuscany, men and women, animals and plants have a form, a language, feelings, colors and joy to express. Each action is driven by passion for history and tradition in all things big and small, and the process of creation always takes the value of a “ceremony”. Tuscan pig farming has ancient, rural, smallholding origins and the resulting product has maintained to our days all those characteristics of genuineness, taste and flavor enhancing its excellence.

It was the year of grace 1000, when the art of processing pig meat in the Tuscan region was consolidated; actually, laws regarding pig slaughtering and pork meat preservation can be traced back to the time of Charlemagne. Tuscan farmers used to slaughter the pig, they had fattened for a full year with passion, in winter season, and transform it into salami and cold cuts dedicated for family consumption. This operation was quite an event and genuineness, taste and flavor reached levels of excellence. It was only around the XV century, at the time of the Medici, that Tuscan ham production was regulated by some measures concerning the whole production process.

A delicate flavor, the crimson red of its dry and lean slices and a strong taste intensified by a light flavor are the distinctive characteristics of one of the icons of the Tuscan food and wine tradition. Its intense taste and enriched flavor mark the uniqueness of the of Prosciutto Toscano (Tuscan Ham). However, the secret of its success lies in a perfect climate for ageing, with the caresses of the “breezes” and temperate land and sea winds blowing on a territory protected by the Tramontane and thanks to the Apennine Range. The result is a delicate taste wisely enriched with those unmistakable scents of Tuscany the “Toscanità”, being Tuscan, typical of its vegetation, rich in lentisk, myrtle, and juniper, secret ingredients of the producers’ recipes. That genuine simplicity the whole world associates to the Tuscan food production can also be found in its Hams.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING PDO (PROTECTED DESIGNATION OF ORIGIN)

In 1990, a group of Tuscan producers, aware of the need to protect Tuscan Ham from the uncontrolled proliferation of other hams which had little in common with the Tuscan tradition, joined together to create the Tuscan Ham Consortium, with the aim of promoting, enhancing and protecting their product both on domestic and foreign markets, while also keeping a close link with the territory it belongs to: Tuscany.

In 1996, the Tuscan Ham obtained the coveted Community recognition as PDO - "Protected Designation of Origin" - thanks to the commitment to, and the respect for, the Tuscan food tradition by all its members, who decided to proudly adhere to the precise articles set forth in the Set of Rules. Pigs are selected only among those born, bred and slaughtered in Tuscany and in the nearby regions.

All animals must be at least 9 months old and have a live weight between 144 and 176 kilos. Processing takes place exclusively at ham-production plants located in Tuscany and using fresh hind legs only (frozen hind legs or legs which underwent other preservation processes are not admitted).

Salting is carried out with dry salt, pepper and the natural flavorings typical of the Tuscan territory.

The resulting flavor is very characteristic: a delicate taste, wisely enriched with the unmistakable scents of "Toscanità", which made "Prosciutto Toscano" famous.

Production control is carried out by a Certification Body authorized by the Ministry for Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies which certifies the compliance of all producers with the articles set forth in the Set of Rules. After a long aging period, hams are branded with the Consortium Brand shaped as the region Tuscany, which labels the "Prosciutto Toscano PDO" and ensures its quality, provided all strict production requirements are met.

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STAGES OF NATURE

“Prosciutto Toscano PDO” processing, follows the stages of nature; each processing stage is performed by re-creating the climatic conditions of each period of the year in our maturation cells/rooms, according to the ancient Tuscan pig-farming tradition and thus making our product available to consumers all over the year. The production starts in December – January with the salting process and ends a year later, when our ham is ready in all its taste and flavor.

SELECTION PROCESS

Before processing fresh hind legs an accurate selection take place, only those legs that meet the requirements set forth in the Set of Rules and possessing all suitable characteristics to ensure a high quality product will be chosen. Then legs are trimmed, before salting, in order to give the ham a typical round shape of meat, not exceeding 8 cm protruding from the head of the femur. During this operation, part of the fat and rind are removed by making a typical “V” cut in order to favor salt and spice absorption.

SALTING PROCESS

Legs are dry salted by using salt, pepper, bay leaf, rosemary, juniper berries, garlic and other typical aromas of the territory of origin. The uses of preserving and additive components are not allowed.

The hind legs are then placed to age in a cell at a temperature of 2-4° C for about 3-4 weeks. This stage takes place in the months of December or January, when the climate is dry and cold.

PRE-AGEING PROCESS

Hind legs are hanged to age in special ageing premises and under controlled temperature for about 3 months, thus recreating the climatic conditions you can find between February and March: a humid, cold and windy time of the year. Changes in temperature and humidity lead to a progressive dehydration and aging of the product.

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SMEARING PROCESS

In the subsequent step, which mirrors the climate of April and June, when air is drier, hams are checked in order to be smeared. To protect hams, we caress and cover them with smear, a paste of pure ground fat pork enriched with rice flour, salt and pepper: a completely natural compound. This processing stage protects hams from an excessive dehydration and maintains their delicacy, allowing a proper ageing.

CURING PROCESS

The curing stage is carried out in special rooms with optimum temperature and humidity conditions. Here the hams mature slowly and develop all the peculiar fragrances and tastes of the “Prosciutto Toscano PDO”

SPIKING – FIRE BRANDING PROCESS

After a long curing process (at least 11 months), the product will be submitted to the humidity and salt analysis. If all the results for the different parameters are correct, hams will be checked one month later with the spiking test, in order to verify the olfactory characteristics by introducing a horse bone, needle-shaped, in different points of the ham meat; this operation allows us to identify possible product defects. Once this test is passed, the ham is fire-branded and ready to be sold.

Everything is done according to tradition all over the year, production sites work in continuous operating cycle, but each ham stays in a specific cell for as many days as required by a proven tradition that has always lead to excellent results and which does not require any pointless change.