

Rooibos added to EU's register of iconic geographic indicators

The European Commission has approved the registration of the designation 'Rooibos'/'Red Bush' in its register of protected designations of origin and protected geographical indications. Rooibos is the first African food to be approved by the EU for listing on the register.



Credit: miya via Pxabay

Rooibos joins the EU's list of other products with protected designation of origin, including Champagne, Irish Whiskey, Porto and Queso Manchego, which can only be labelled accordingly if they come from their designated region. Rooibos products can now use the EU's logo to indicate authenticity and quality to European consumers.

Food products listed on the EU register of protected designations of origins generate almost R1.24tn in value. Bilateral agreements between EU and its international partners, including between EU and China, recognise the protected designations of origin.

The recognition of the products' origin empowers consumers to distinguish quality products and trust that they are enjoying authentic quality products linked to the region of origin, knowledge and know-how of its producers.

Valuable competitive advantage

The Rooibos registration was hailed by the South African Rooibos Council, the Western Cape government and the Delegation of the European Union to South Africa, stating that the listing will greatly benefit South African producers and rural communities.

“Rooibos is one of the most iconic products of the Western Cape and its inclusion in the PDO register will signal its unique quality to consumers, not only in Europe but all over the world. We expect that this will lead to an increase in demand by discerning consumers with the benefits working their way back to farms in the designated production area,” says Western Cape Minister of Agriculture, Dr Ivan Meyer.

Dr Mogale Sebopetsa, head of the Western Cape Department of Agriculture, adds: “We have been working with the Rooibos industry since the 1990s to prevent the name ‘Rooibos’ from being misused by others. The inclusion of Rooibos/Red Bush in the register recognises the fact that it can only be produced in parts of the Western Cape and Northern Cape provinces. In this way, our heritage is safeguarded for posterity and will benefit the producers in our region.”

Dawie de Villiers, SA Rooibos Council legal director, says inclusion in the EU register is a “big win” for the Rooibos industry and South Africa. “The registration will allow Rooibos to use the protected designation of origins logo, which is well-recognised by consumers in Europe. The logo will identify Rooibos as a unique product.” He says the registration will afford the industry greater ability to protect Rooibos’ trade mark worldwide.”



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Safeguarding heritage, uplifting small-scale farmers

De Villiers also notes that the registration will go a long way towards sustaining the Rooibos industry. Higher consumption of Rooibos because of increased recognition will contribute to the preservation of traditional knowledge and further uplift small-scale farmers in the indigenous communities producing Rooibos.

“As an industry, we recognise the close connection between Rooibos, the area where it grows, as well as the community and their traditions. Our goal is to protect, support and promote the sustainability of not only Rooibos, but the rich heritage of the industry as a whole, which is why we so doggedly pursued the registration.

“Rooibos also forms part of SA’s rich biodiversity, and we believe that the registration will make way for other indigenous species, such as Buchu and Aloe Ferox to also be indicated as PDOs and reap similar rewards,” says De Villiers.



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Trade relations

According to the EU’s ambassador to South Africa, Dr Riina Kionka, “The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated that solid trade relations are critical to ensuring the continuous and uninterrupted supply of safe, nutritious, affordable and sustainable food as well as to providing essential income and jobs along food value chains. This is why South Africa and EU preferential trade relations are so important.

“These relations include the protection of geographical indications which enable a stronger connection between unique local food products and European consumer tastes. This has direct benefits for all involved in South Africa and in the EU. Geographic indications offer a valuable competitive advantage that is difficult to erode, so we are delighted that Rooibos has been approved as the first African product on the EU register of protected designation of origin (PDO).”

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