

# PRODUCT SPECIFICATION

“Ayrshire New Potatoes” / “Ayrshire Earlies”

PDO ( ) PGI (✓)

## 1 RESPONSIBLE DEPARTMENT IN THE MEMBER STATE

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## 2 GROUP

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e-mail: [girvaneearlygrow@btconnect.com](mailto:girvaneearlygrow@btconnect.com)  
Composition: Producers/processors ( ) Other ( § )

## 3 TYPE OF PRODUCT

Class 1.6 – Fruit, vegetables and cereals fresh/processed

## 4 SPECIFICATION

### 4.1 Name:

“Ayrshire New Potatoes” / “Ayrshire Earlies”

#### **4.2 Description:**

Ayrshire New Potatoes / Ayrshire Earlies is the name given to immature potatoes of the *Solanum tuberosum* species of the *Solanaceae* family grown in Ayrshire, Scotland.

The potato has the following characteristics: It is small in size, 15 – 70mm diameter, due to the young age. The potato is round or oval in shape with a soft skin and distinctive strong earthy nutty flavour and aroma. It has a creamy texture with colour depending on the variety which is consistent throughout the potato.

Ayrshire New Potatoes / Ayrshire Earlies are grown from the basic seed varieties catalogued in the national registers of varieties of the Member States of the EU.

Ayrshire New Potatoes / Ayrshire Earlies are harvested from the beginning of May until the end of July before the lifting of maincrop potatoes.

Ayrshire New Potatoes / Ayrshire Earlies must be planted, grown and harvested within the defined geographical area.

Ayrshire New Potatoes / Ayrshire Earlies are sold to local markets, retailers, supermarkets and potato wholesalers throughout the UK. The potatoes are sold either loose or in trays/bags of various weights. The first crop is harvested in May and is sold with the soil still on in order to protect the soft skin of the potatoes. As the season progresses the skin hardens sufficiently to allow washing. The latest date for sales of the PGI product to final consumers (shoppers and restaurant customers) is the last day of July.

#### **4.3 Geographical area:**

The region of Ayrshire in the West of Scotland within the geographic Local Authority boundaries of North, East and South Ayrshire Councils.

#### **4.4 Proof of origin:**

##### ***From seed***

Seed potatoes maintain full traceability from their source, to their arrival on farm and traceability is maintained throughout the growing, harvesting, processing and sale of the potatoes ensuring complete full traceability from “field to fork”.

##### ***On farm***

Immediately post harvest, before the potatoes leave the farm, each batch of potatoes, is allocated a unique number which makes reference to the date and field of harvest and the name and address of the Ayrshire farm from which it came. This information is available to processors.

##### ***Post farm packaging and distribution***

Ayrshire New Potatoes / Ayrshire Earlies are sold to local markets, retailers, supermarkets and potato wholesalers throughout the UK.

If further processing occurs, e.g. if potatoes from a 1 ton box are washed and put into the smaller packs of the weights mentioned above, each pack will be allocated a separate number which makes reference to the 1 ton box from which it came. Post farm assurance, including traceability is in line with British Retail Consortium Global Standard for Food Safety, or equivalent. This system is required to identify and trace product lots throughout all stages of processing and distribution to market. The system ensures that produce supplied to customers is adequately labelled or identified to facilitate traceability.

The quality control system used is capable of linking raw material lot codes through to finished product codes. This enables the finished product to be identified should the recall of a particular batch of raw material need to be instigated. The traceability system covers primary packaging (in direct contact with food), other relevant packaging materials such as printed outer packaging, and processing aids. Traceability of batches of products is able to link to any quality and residue test results. The system provides traceability "forwards" and "backwards" in both directions and the traceability system is tested at least annually in its entirety.

#### **4.5 Method of production:**

The growing of Ayrshire New Potatoes / Ayrshire Earlies has two pre planting elements, preparing the soil and preparing the seed, followed by dedicated and specialist planting, growing and harvesting management.

##### ***Soil Preparation***

When soil temperatures are approaching 10°C, which is usually in the last two weeks of February, the soil is cultivated to further break it down to make it as fine and free draining as possible. The soil is then ready for planting.

##### ***Seed preparation***

Ayrshire New Potatoes / Ayrshire Earlies are grown from seed registered with the Seed Classification Scheme or equivalent. Seed potatoes are often delivered to farm in the preceding autumn. Physiological ageing of seed does not always occur but is essential for the earliest of crops.

This process involves storage of seed tubers in chitting houses or other frost-protected buildings where they are allowed to produce sprouts. Seed potatoes are placed in single layered boxes to allow light to reach each individual seed potato. Chitting houses are well ventilated to minimise the risk of disease and help prevent the temperature rising above 15°C. During cold weather the vents are closed and heat is applied to keep ambient air temperature above 10°C. By mid-February the seed potatoes will have a strong sprout of approximately 25mm.

##### ***Planting***

The soil is pushed up into shallow drills and the seed potatoes are planted by hand or by machine. The seed is planted between 6 and 14 cm which is relatively shallow in comparison to maincrop potatoes. This enables quicker heating of the soil and allows swift plant emergence. The small size of Ayrshire New Potatoes / Ayrshire Earlies at harvest, means they do not require very deep drills.

### ***Post planting management***

The plants begin to emerge in mid-March. Post emergence, from the start of May until the end of July, crop health should be monitored and health problems controlled appropriately. For example, the crop can be sprayed approximately every ten days to prevent and control blight. Due to the shallow drills, the plants are susceptible to drying out so close attention is paid to soil moisture levels and irrigation may be applied if available.

### ***Harvesting***

Following test digs, harvesting occurs from the beginning of May until the end of July. The haulms may be chopped to allow for easier lifting. The crop is either dug from the soil by mechanical lifters and picked off the ground by hand or harvested and lifted by one machine which separates soil and the potatoes are elevated into a trailer or potato box. They may also be dug by hand.

Ayrshire New Potatoes / Ayrshire Earlies are sold into local markets, retailers, supermarkets and to potato wholesalers throughout the UK. The potatoes are sold either loose or in trays/bags of various weights according to customer requirements. To ensure freshness and immature characteristics, the window between lifting and packing is minimised as far as is practically possible. This usually ranges from 24 to 48 hours, with the product typically being sold within 7 days. The latest date for sales of the PGI product to final consumers (shoppers and restaurant customers) is the last day of July.

## **4.6 Link & History:**

Ayrshire has been at the heart of the Scottish (and indeed UK) potato industry since the cultivation of the crop was first reported in Scotland in a commercial basis in 1793. The area provides some of the first potatoes of the year grown in Scotland and the Ayrshire New Potatoes / Ayrshire Earlies are renowned across the country for their quality, flavour, and as a symbol of the new season.

The production of potatoes in Ayrshire was a source of employment for a large proportion of the population in the West of Scotland including local people and many migrant workers usually from Ireland known as "tattie howkers". Traditionally, seaweed, a nutrient-rich material widely available along the coastal region, was collected (a process known as "wrecking") and spread on fields in the winter as a fertiliser. Manure was also used from the livestock for which the area is known. Potatoes were planted by hand and harvested using a "graip", the traditional Scottish word for "fork".

Due to its light sandy soil, sheltered beaches and early warming by the Gulf Stream, farms in Ayrshire, and particularly along the Ayrshire coast have always been able to plant their crop a few weeks earlier than in other parts of Scotland. The original crop cycle was planting in June and lifting in mid-autumn.

In 1857 two Ayrshire farmers (Dunlop and Hannah), visited the Channel Islands (where farmers had been planting early crops for many years) to study how they managed to grow potatoes so early in the year. Two years later, after some experimentation, Ayrshire Earlies were grown and sold on a commercial basis. The industry was helped by the completion in 1860 of the railway line,

which linked up Girvan with Glasgow. This provided the much needed transportation of both potatoes to Glasgow and beyond and to allow for the large quantities of manure required to fertilise the land to be delivered to the farms in the region (this was complimented by barge shipments from cattle transported from Ireland to Scotland). The train network also allowed potatoes to be lifted in the morning and on sale that afternoon in Glasgow and Edinburgh.

In 1881 a new method to help cultivate potatoes earlier called sprouting, was pioneered and this was taken up and implemented in the area by many Ayrshire farmers, thus allowing potatoes to be planted as early as February.

There is also a link with potato breeding in Ayrshire as Donald McKelvie, a Lamlash Grocer produced the many 'Arran' potato varieties in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Many associate the variety "Epicure" with Ayrshire as well. Though it was bred by James Clark in England, it is known for its earliness and capacity to withstand and recover from foliage frost damage. Other modern varieties may be used as Ayrshire New Potatoes / Ayrshire Earlies as well as traditional ones.

Peak potato acreage in Ayrshire occurred in 1918, when over 11,400 acres were grown. The harvesting process became more mechanised in the 1960s and fewer people were employed as a result.

For many years popular markets for the product have ranged from small local stores to large supermarkets and retailers. For example, the Co-op bought them from farms as far back as the 1940s.

## Reputation

Ayrshire Potatoes have the long-standing reputation of marking the start of supply of new Scottish season potatoes. Many factors are said to have influenced the flavour of the Ayrshire New Potatoes / Ayrshire Earlies including light coastal soil, mild climate, fertilisers and speed of delivery to markets.

Press coverage has been recorded as early as 1857 when the *North British Agriculturalist and Edinburgh Evening News* mentioned potato production being "extensively practiced along the coast on the light and early soils". Nearly 100 years later, an article entitled "South-West Earlies Win The Race" from The Glasgow Herald Agriculture Survey, (February 1, 1956) said "For almost a century the early potato crop has played a most important part in the farming economy of South-West Scotland".

In the Parish of Maybole growing early potatoes was said to be the "main occupation" in 1951 according to John Strawhorn and William Boyd's *The Statistical Account of Scotland*. Heather Holmes described early potatoes as being "synonymous with the county of Ayrshire" and their production to be a "specialised and intensive branch of Ayrshire farming" in her book "Tattie howkers". In 1901, it was reported in the *North British Agriculturalist* that in Girvan, the potato was "a most important one (product) in the district". The book "Old West Kilbride" by Molly Blyth has the subtitle "The Tattie Toon" because of its close connection with potatoes as well.

There was also an internet article on [www.farminguk.com](http://www.farminguk.com) in June 2006 which said “Synonymous with summer Ayrshire new potatoes are widely regarded as being one of the finest tasting potatoes available and is highly sought after during its eight week season”

Ayrshire New Potatoes / Ayrshire Earlies have been endorsed by famous chefs such as Jacqueline O'Donnell and Nick Nairn. Chef and cookery writer Christopher Trotter has expressed “There is nothing quite like an Ayrshire potato”.

#### **4.7 Inspection body:**

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#### **4.8 Labelling:**

Each box or bag of potatoes is marked with a farm identification number issued by North, East and South Ayrshire Councils which is specific to individual farms as specified at section 4.4.