

**TECHNICAL FILE SETTING OUT THE
SPECIFICATIONS WITH WHICH IRISH
POTEEN/IRISH POITÍN MUST COMPLY**

Food Industry Development Division
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

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1. NAME AND CATEGORY OF SPIRIT DRINK INCLUDING THE GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATION:

1.1. NAME:

Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín

1.2. CATEGORY OF SPIRIT DRINK:

The name “Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín” applies to spirits distilled on the island of Ireland including Northern Ireland and which complies with the requirements of Regulation (EC) No 110/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 January 2008. Adherence to these stipulations enables such spirits to comply with the requisite category other spirit drink, i.e. Product Category ‘Other spirit drink’ Annex II of the Regulation (EC) No 110/2008 and merit the Geographic Indicator: Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín as outlined in Annex III of the Regulation (EC) No 110/2008.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE SPIRIT DRINK INCLUDING PRINCIPAL PHYSICAL, CHEMICAL AND ORGANOLEPTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PRODUCT

“Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín” is a traditional Irish distilled beverage, with no definitive official date recorded as to when it was first produced. The word Poitín stems from the Irish (Gaelic) word "Pota" for Pot, this refers to the small pot still used by Poitín distillers. It is a spirit distilled on the island of Ireland, including Northern Ireland, traditionally brewed, fermented and distilled from cereals, grain, whey, sugar beet molasses and potatoes.

The maximum methanol content of “Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín” shall be 30 grams per hectolitre of 100% vol. alcohol.

Where maceration takes place this may include apple, pear, berries including blueberries, mint, wildflower bogbean, ginger and other indigenous plants up to 10% of the product.

2.1. PRINCIPAL CHEMICAL CHARACTERISTICS:

2.1.1 ALCOHOLIC CONTENT:

The illicit nature of “Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín” meant there were no official controls over the alcohol content, which led to a variety of strengths being produced. Since 1997, modern day “Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín” is a minimum of 40% alcoholic strength by volume, with some products as high as 90%.

2.1.2 PRINCIPAL ORGANOLEPTIC CHARACTERISTICS:

“Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín” distillate is a clean, clear spirit that is light, smooth and robust in character. It retains the flavours and aromas from the original raw materials used and the production process. This can include raw cereal, cooked grain, fruity esters and spice.

3. DEFINITION OF THE GEOGRAPHICAL AREA CONCERNED:

Production of “Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín” must take place in the geographical area of Ireland.



4. THE METHOD FOR OBTAINING THE SPIRIT DRINK:

STAGES IN THE PRODUCTION PROCESS:

There are three stages in the production process for “Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín”. The processes specific to the most widely-used ingredients are outlined below.

4.1 STAGE 1: BREWING:

The brewing process will vary depending on the type of raw materials used. The different types of processes are outlined below in section 4.1.5. The brewing stage will produce a balanced fermentation medium (wort), containing fermentable sugars.

4.2 STAGE 2: FERMENTATION:

The mash produced at the brewing stage can be fermented as a clear liquid or as a ‘solids-in’ fermentation. For a clear liquid (wort) the mash will be filtered in a lauter tun or mash filter to remove the solids. For a ‘solids-in’ fermentation this solids separation step is omitted.

At the start of fermentation yeast is added and during the course of the fermentation the yeast will convert the fermentable sugars into alcohol and other flavour congeners. The resultant liquid is known as ‘wash’.

4.3 STAGE 3: DISTILLATION:

“Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín” is traditionally distilled in small pot stills and this allows the separation of the spirit and congeners from the fermented wash. More recently a variety of stills have been used including hybrid and column stills. In order to maintain the typical character of the distillate no subsequent treatments, such as activated charcoal filtration, are permitted.

A batch of wash is added to the still and heat is applied. The wash boils resulting in an alcohol and congener rich vapour rising up the neck and then into the condenser where it is condensed into a liquid called ‘Low Wines’. Distillers may apply particular cutting strengths in order to influence the character of the distillate.

“Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín” must be distilled at a strength not exceeding 94.7% by volume in such a way that the distillate has an aroma and taste derived from the materials used.

4.4 STAGE 4: BOTTLING:

The three production stages for “Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín” as outlined in 4.1 take place on the island of Ireland. Bottling may take place outside Ireland. Where “Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín” is bottled offshore, it is shipped in inert bulk containers.

The subsequent water used in the final product may be distilled, demineralised, permuted or softened in accordance with Annex 1 of Regulation 110/2008 in order to preserve the organoleptic characteristics of the “Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín”. Any bottling taking place outside of the island will be subject to company controls and verification by the control body, which will ensure the products’ safety and integrity.

4.5 PRODUCTION PROCESSES FOR SPECIFIC RAW MATERIALS:

4.5.1 CEREALS:

A range of cereals can be used but the most common are barley and malted barley. The cereals are initially milled and then mixed with water to make a mash. This mash is put through a brewing programme to extract and convert the cereal starch into fermentable sugars. Malted barley can be used as a source of diastase but other natural enzymes may also be used.

The mash produced at the brewing stage can be fermented as a clear liquid after removal of spent grain solids or alternatively as a 'solids-in' fermentation. For a clear liquid (wort) the mash will be filtered in a lauter tun or mash filter to remove the solids. For a 'solids-in' fermentation this solids separation step is omitted.

At the start of fermentation yeast is added and during the course of the fermentation the yeast will convert the fermentable sugars into alcohol and other flavour congeners. The resultant liquid is known as 'wash'.

The distillation process is as set out above in section 4.3.

4.5.2 POTATOES:

Potatoes are traditionally used unpeeled and a small amount of malted barley may be used. Whole or chopped potatoes are cooked initially in water in order to gelatinise the potato starch after which more water is added to form a mash and then cooled to approximately 66⁰C. At this stage some milled malted barley may be added and the mash is allowed to liquefy and saccharify where the potato starch is converted to fermentable sugars. The malted barley can be used as a source of diastase but other natural enzymes may also be used.

The distillation process is as set out in section 4.3.

4.5.3 SUGAR BEET MOLASSES:

Sugar beet molasses is a by-product of the sugar industry and contains varying amounts of ash and fermentable sugars. The level of these sugars can be adjusted with the addition of water to allow fermentation with yeast. After fermentation the ethanol can be distilled in as outlined in section 4.1.3, resulting in a clear spirit that contains the flavour and aroma found in the raw materials used.

The distillation process is as set out in section 4.3.

4.6 ADDITIONAL PROCESSES:

4.6.1 MACERATIONS AND INFUSIONS:

Flavouring derived from maceration and infusion processes are a traditional feature of “Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín”. Such macerations and infusions are made with indigenous Irish ingredients such as fruits, spices, berries, herbs and other naturally occurring plant materials which may result in a change of colour. There are specific labelling requirements for “Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín” that have used maceration or infusion processes, the detail of which are outlined in section 9.

4.6.2 FLAVOURINGS:

Only flavourings which are consistent with indigenous Irish ingredients and naturally occurring plant materials are permitted. Commercially prepared flavourings meeting this condition may be sourced outside Ireland.

4.6.3 LIMITED STORAGE IN CASKS:

Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín produced using at least two of the specific raw materials from the ingredients list in section 2, one of which must be non-cereal, may be held in wooden casks for a period not exceeding 10 weeks following production. There are specific labelling requirements for this practise, the detail of which is outlined in section 9.

5. DETAILS BEARING OUT THE LINK WITH THE GEOGRAPHICAL ENVIRONMENT OR THE GEOGRAPHICAL ORIGIN:

5.1 DETAILS OF THE GEOGRAPHICAL AREA OR ORIGIN RELEVANT TO THE LINK

1. The word Poitín stems from the Irish (Gaelic) word "Pota" for Pot, this refers to the small pot still used by Poitín distillers.
2. Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín” is distilled from Irish ingredients, which traditionally have included cereals, grain, molasses, sugar beet, whey and potatoes, and which a minimum of 50% must be sourced in Ireland.
3. “Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín” has an infamous history in Ireland, having gained somewhat of a notorious reputation of being an illicit spirit whose production was illegal from 1661 to 1997 due to excise regulations. It is traditionally a clear, non-aged spirit.

4. Specific distilling skills have been created and developed based on the particular ingredients used in distillation.

5.2 SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SPIRIT DRINK ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE GEOGRAPHICAL AREA:

5.2.1: HISTORY AND REPUTATION:

Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín” is a traditional Irish distilled beverage. The word Poitín stems from the Irish (Gaelic) word "Pota" for Pot, referring to the small pot still used by “Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín” distillers. It is traditionally distilled from cereals, grain, whey, sugar beet molasses and potatoes.

Owing to its illicit heritage, there is no definitive record of when “Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín” was first produced in Irish history. Archaeological records suggest distilling was at least a domestic operation around 1400 and that the associated stills ranged from half gallon to 100 gallons. In 1556 a licence issued by the Lord Deputy under the Great Seal was necessary to make spirit.

However, with the introduction of excise duty in Ireland in 1661 and legal restrictions on distilling, the authorities sought ways of simplifying tax collection. Regulation by the authorities was designed to encourage the use of large commercial stills. It was also a requirement that such stills be registered. For many years that followed, spirits could be produced by:

- (a) specified persons (based on property valuations) could distil for household use, however, it was stipulated that the stills used had a maximum capacity of 12 gallons;
- (b) tavern keepers who were permitted to distil for sale on their premises;
- (c) commercial distillers who distilled for general sale.

As restrictions increased so too did the practice of illicit distillation. “Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín” was generally produced in remote rural areas, away from the interference of the law. It was common practice that stills were set up on land boundaries so the issue of ownership could be disputed. The purpose of this was to avoid the payment of duty. In 1731 an Act [5 George 2,c.3, section 13-14] was passed to “prohibit distilling in the mountainous part of the Kingdom, remote from any market town”. Accordingly, records in Ireland state that from 25 March 1732 stills could only be erected in market towns or towns within two miles of them.

Prior to the introduction of bottled gas, the fire to heat the wash was provided by turf. However, smoke was a giveaway for the police, so distillation generally took place during windy, broken weather in order to disperse smoke and avoid detection. In later years, the heat was provided by gas and this reduced the risk of being discovered by the police while distilling.

In Ireland in the 1780s stills with a capacity of less than 200 gallons were banned and larger stills were incentivised by receiving a duty rebate. From the 1780s until 1809 “Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín” grew and reached its pinnacle. 1809 saw the removal of the restriction on large stills and also on the duty rebate. In 1823 excise duty was cut in half and incentives towards illicit distillation started to decline owing to the complex relationship between the price of grain, level of spirit duties and police efficiency.

In the early 19th century malted barley was the main ingredient of “Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín”. However, the government applied a malt tax and unmalted grain was increasingly used. By 1880 molasses was commonly used and by the 1900s sugar, potatoes, treacle and even apples were used.

There are many articles in Irish literature referencing the production of poitín during this period and two extracts are detailed in Annex I – “In Praise of Poteen” by John McGuffin and “1000 Years of Irish Whiskey” by Malachy Magee.

Within the confines and limitations of illicit distillation traditional processes employed in the production were malting, brewing and distillation. The process produced singlings - which were re-distilled into doublings-sometimes using charcoal in the stills. Stills had four parts which consisted of a vessel, cap, arm and the worm. Typically stills had a capacity of 10-80 gallons. They were made of tin because of the high costs of copper at the time and also due to the risk of confiscation. However, the worm was made of copper. It was also common practice to hire the still for each operation.

The quality of the “Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín” was known to be highly variable depending on the skill of the distiller and the quality of his equipment. Vats for brewing used herring barrels, or post-famine American flour barrels. “Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín” at this time had a wide economic appeal and even church dues, tithes benefitted.

The old style of “Irish Poteen/ Irish Poitín” distilling was from a malted barley base for the mash. In more recent times, some distillers deviated from using malted barley as a base of the mash bill due to the cost and availability. This led to many distillers switching to the use of treacle, corn and potatoes. Historically the spirit was renowned for retaining its smoke/malt flavour and this was considered to be one of the defining characteristics of “Irish Poteen/ Irish Poitín” at that time. This is not a flavour which one would expect to find today as turf fires are no longer used to heat stills owing to technical advancements. Today the flavour is derived from the base ingredients used.

Towards the end of the 20th century the Irish Authorities permitted legally distilled product intended for export to be described as Poteen/Poitín. Product was sold and stocked in Shannon and Dublin Duty free in 1971. Irish Poteen/ Irish Poitín was

available on the Irish home market since 1997. Since that time the possibility of taking advantage of modern technology including column distillation has been available to producers. Since then it has been a small, but growing industry. “Irish Poteen/ Irish Poitín” is now exported to numerous countries worldwide, with exports expected to grow to 1 million cases by 2025.

Poitín cake is among the recipes in Mary Kinsella’s ‘Irish Country Kitchen’ recipe book. It is currently used as an added flavour in Fitzpatrick’s Homemade Ketchup which is for sale in one of the largest Irish retailers and several delicatessens. Its international reputation has risen. In a 1999 episode of the popular BBC television show ‘Ballykissangel’, Paul Dooley is sentenced to 50 hours of community service for serving poitín. In 2016 Irish Poteens produced by two separate companies won gold and double gold awards at the IWSC awards in San Francisco.

5.2.2: STILLS:

The word Poitín stems from the Irish (Gaelic) word "Pota" for Pot, this refers to the small pot still used by “Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín” distillers. A variety of stills have been used since 1997. The size of the still used in the production process helps impact a distinctive flavour and aroma profile to the “Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín”.

5.2.3: HUMAN FACTORS:

Individual experience and expertise is essential in the production of “Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín”. Of particular importance are the distillers. The distillers manage the “Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín” production process. This is where science and art complement each other. The distiller needs to be aware of the individual components of the distillate and the impact of each element of the entire production process on the finished product including equipment selection, maintenance and troubleshooting, best practices for distillate production, post-distillation processing, as well as blending and bottling.

The entire distilling process must be directed with instinctive skill and judgement. The traditional touch of the distiller is needed to produce “Irish Poteen/ Irish Poitín” as a multitude of base ingredients may be used in its production. For example, a verified Poitín distiller in the West of Ireland adds foraged bogbean to his recipe as did his grandfather to distinguish his poitín from others produced in the region.

The detailed processes for the production of Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín vary between producers but the distiller’s biggest challenge is to ensure consistency of style and distinctiveness to meet the requirements of discerning consumers. The distiller will need to be aware of the effect of the various combinations of ingredients, macerations and infusions in the distillation process on the final product.

6. ANY REQUIREMENTS LAID DOWN BY COMMUNITY AND/OR NATIONAL PROVISIONS AND/OR REGIONAL:

6.1 LEGISLATION:

Spirit Drinks: Regulation (EC) No. 110/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15th January 2008, Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 716/2013 of 25 July 2013 laying down rules for the application of Regulation (EC) No 110/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the definition, description, presentation, labelling and the protection of geographical indications of spirit drinks.

National legislation enforcing these including SI No 429/2009 – European Communities (Spirits Drinks) Regulation 2009 amended by SI No 118 of 2013 European Communities (Spirit Drinks) (Amendment) Regulation 2013 and any subsequent amendment or replacements.

Colours: Regulation (EC) No 1333/2008 of 16th December 2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council on food additives and amendments. And Commission Regulation (EU) No 231/2012 of 9 March 2012 laying down specifications for food additives listed in Annexes II and III to Regulation (EC) No 1333/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council and amendments.

Flavouring: Regulation (EC) No 1334/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 on flavourings and certain food ingredients with flavouring properties for use in and on foods and amending Regulation (EC) No 1601/91 of the Council, Regulations (EC) No 2232/96 and (EC) No 110/2008 and Directive 2000/13/EC.

Hygiene and Food Safety: Regulation (EC) No 852/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004, amending Regulations (EC) 178/2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 January 2002, Commission Regulation (EC) No 1019/2008 of 17 October 2008. And Regulation (EC) No 219/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2009.

Labelling Advertising and Presentation of Foodstuffs: Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2011 on the provision of food information to consumers, amending Regulations (EC) No 1924/2006 and (EC) No 1925/2006, of the European Parliament and the Council, and repealing Commission Directive 87/250/EEC, Council Directive 90/496/EEC, Commission Directive 1999/10/EC, Directive 2000/13/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, Commission Directives 2002/67/EC and 2008/5/EC and Commission regulation (EC) No 608/2004.

6.2 COMPETENT AUTHORITIES:

“Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín” is an all-Ireland geographical indication. The two Departments responsible for geographical indications in the two jurisdictions are: Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Kildare Street, Dublin 2, IRELAND, and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Area 7 E Millbank, c/o Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London, SW1P3JR, UNITED KINGDOM.

6.3 CONTROL BODIES AND CONTROLS:

Controls on “Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín” are based on meeting legislative requirements, implementing quality control systems and ongoing systems supervision of the control of the Geographical Indication “Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín” by the competent authorities.

Given that “Irish Poteen/ Irish Poitín” is an all-island geographical indication, verification of compliance with the provision of this technical file will be carried out respectively by the Revenue Commissioners (Ireland) and Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs (UK).

With regards to the bottling of Irish Poitín outside of the island of Ireland, where bottling takes place in another EU country, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine will provide the relevant details to those Member States to allow them carry out the necessary compliance checks as part of their multi-annual control plans.

Where Irish Poitín is bottled in a non-EU country, Department officials will, in consultation with the relevant authorities in that country, carry out selective site visits to ensure compliance with the technical file requirements.

7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF APPLICANT:

Applicant name: Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine
Address: Food Industry Development Division,
Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine,
Agriculture House, Kildare Street, Dublin 2, Ireland.
Telephone: +353 1 607 2371
Email: Spiritdinks@agriculture.gov.ie

8. SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION:

Spirit drinks must not be labelled, packaged, sold, advertised or promoted in such a way to suggest they are “Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín” unless they meet the relevant requirements set out in the technical file.

While the name became legal on the Irish market in March 1997, geographical protection did not commence until 20 May 2008 under Regulation No (EC) 110/2008. Products which were continually in production from 1997, which are traditionally distilled at a strength above 94.7% by volume, may continue to be placed on the market as Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín.

9. LABELLING:

The Geographical Indicator allows for both spellings, “IRISH POTEEN” and “IRISH POITÍN”.

All must bear the Geographical Indication “Irish Poitín” or “Irish Poteen”.

This must:

- appear on the front of the bottle and on packaging or materials used for display purposes during the marketing of the Irish Poitín/Irish Poteen;
- be prominent, printed in a conspicuous place in such a way as to be easily visible and legible to the naked eye and indelible;
- be printed in a way that gives equal prominence to each word making up the name of the category;
- be as prominent as any other description of the spirit on the container or packaging.

This must not be:

- overlaid or interrupted by other written or pictorial matter
- used in conjunction with any other words.

For “Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín” products that have flavourings derived from a maceration or infusion process, the product may bear an additional line stating the ingredient used, “Made from an infusion of...”

Reference may be made on the label to ingredients including any flavourings used.

Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín that has been stored for a period not exceeding 10 weeks after production shall indicate this on the rear label and shall be labelled “Stored/held in wood for weeks”. There shall be no reference to casks, maturation or ageing on labels, presentation, marketing/promotional or packaging material. The mix of raw materials used must be included on the label.

The phonetic spelling ‘Irish Potcheen’ may be used to aid consumers with the pronunciation of the product, as long as it is in addition to the Geographic Indication.

Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín which has an abv of over 70% requires additional information on labels to advise consumers of the strength of the product.

Spirit drinks must not be labelled, packaged, sold, advertised or promoted in such a way to suggest they are “Irish Poteen/Irish Poitín” unless they meet the relevant requirements set out in the technical file.