



Prosciutto di Parma or “Parma Ham”



The earliest references to Prosciutto di Parma date back all the way to Roman times when, in 100 BC, Cato the “Censor” first mentioned the extraordinary flavor of the air-cured ham made around the town of Parma, Italy.

By law, this world-famous ham can be produced only in the gently rolling countryside surrounding the city of Parma in North-Central Italy. The air is dry and sweet with aromatic breezes from the Apennine Mountains that create the perfect conditions for the natural curing of the hams.



Consorzio del Prosciutto di Parma

The Consorzio was established in 1963 by 23 producers producing 53,000 branded hams who wanted to protect and promote their product throughout the world. Since then, the Consorzio has grown into a family of 156 Prosciutto di Parma producers supplying more than 10 million hams annually to markets all over the world.

Today's producers carry on a tradition that has been passed down through generations. The production of every Prosciutto di Parma is regulated by strict laws that define the quality and characteristics, represented by the Parma Crown branded on Prosciutto di Parma.



Exceptional Standards Mean Quality Product

In 1996, Prosciutto di Parma became one of the first products to be awarded the elite PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) status from the European Union. The PDO system is a European Community certification designed to protect the names and traditions of high-quality European foods, made according to traditional methods in a specific geographic region.

The PDO system provides consumers, retailers, chefs, restaurant leaders, distributors and culinary professionals with quality assurance and a guarantee that they are buying genuine product. To qualify, products must meet rigorous criteria, strict, legally binding production guidelines and quality standards.



Only Italy's Finest Pigs

To qualify for Prosciutto di Parma production, specially-bred pigs must be born and raised according to strict guidelines on approved farms in 11 regions of Italy. Their diet, a special blend of cereals, grains and whey from Parmigiano Reggiano production, contributes to the full-bodied, complex flavor of the ham as well as its particular nutty taste.

Each piglet receives a breeder tattoo within the first 30 days of its life indicating the farm on which it was raised, and can still be found on the end product that receives the Parma Crown.

Specialty Pork, Cured Slowly

Tradition dictates that the only ingredients in Prosciutto di Parma are specially raised Italian pigs, sea salt, air and time.

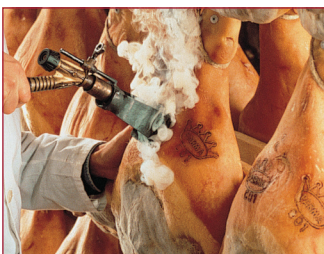
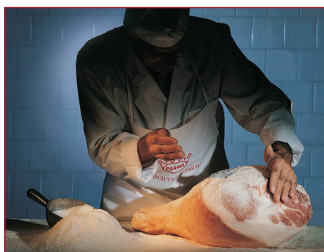
At the prosciuttifici (curing facilities) that dot the countryside, each ham is tagged with a button indicating the date it began curing. Next, highly experienced maestri salatori (salt masters) apply a minimal amount of sea salt necessary to produce a ham with the desired savory-sweet flavor profile. For that reason, Prosciutto di Parma contains less salt than most other cured hams.

For months, workers monitor humidity and temperature as the hams slowly develop their distinctive flavor. The following process unfolds:

1. Hams are held for 100 days in climate-controlled rooms to ensure the meat absorbs exactly the right amount of sea salt.
2. Afterwards, they are rinsed and moved to large airy rooms, where the windows are opened to aromatic breezes that dry and cure the hams, and impart a special flavor.
3. After about four months, the exposed surfaces of the meat are coated with lard to help control the rate of moisture loss.
4. The hams are then transferred to cellars for additional aging. Gradually the hams lose about 30% of their total weight - concentrating flavor.

A curing period of at least 365 days (400 days for U.S. imports) ensures that customers will be rewarded with perfectly cured Prosciutto di Parma.

As a final quality test, an independent inspector pierces the ham in several locations with a traditional horse bone needle, sniffing after each puncture. If the ham possesses the sweet-savory fragrance typical of Prosciutto di Parma, it is fire branded with the world-famous, five-pointed Parma Crown, which identifies it as genuine Prosciutto di Parma.



The Finishing Touch

Once branded with the Parma Crown, the hams are considered ready for market, although some are aged even longer – up to 36 months. Most hams are deboned before being shipped to their destination where retailers and chefs cut paper-thin slices to order. Prosciutto di Parma is meant to be served with a ring of fat around each slice of about 1-1½ inch thickness - this lends essential flavor and helps to keep slices fresh.

Prosciutto di Parma is also sold pre-sliced, but it can only be sliced and packaged in Parma under the Consorzio's supervision, and must include the Crown in the upper left corner of packaging. This easily identifiable mark offers an extra guarantee of authenticity.

Some chefs and cooks wrap fish or other seafood in Prosciutto di Parma before crisping on a grill or in a skillet. One of the simplest ideas remains the best: Paper-thin slices of Prosciutto di Parma, artfully draped on a platter, with cheese, nuts, bread or fruit.



Prosciutto di Parma is an all-natural product completely free of gluten, preservatives and GMOs.

