

NARRATIVE LABELS (PP5 - GRDF)

Work Package 4 Market-driven pilot initiatives

Activity 4.2.3 Realization of narrative labels

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MedSNAIL NARRATIVE LABELS is an initiative implemented in the framework of MedSNAIL and inspired by Slow Food methodology -an international grassroots organisation that promotes traditional food with a strong focus on the preservation of biodiversity and respect for local land and culture.

This initiative works to strengthen the productive network of Gozo, MedSNAIL pilot area in Malta, making visible the attributes of local products through a distinctive labelling system that values their origin, production process and elaboration.

This action aims to raise awareness among local citizens of the added value of these local products beyond their industrial labelling, highlighting the way in which they have been produced and processed. In addition, this initiative brings these local products closer to consumer profiles that are aware of responsible and local consumption, as well as introducing them into new sales channels.

Producers who have participated in this initiative are committed to the preservation of the local identity and its ecosystems.

The products selected for narrative labeling respond to traditional harvesting and processing methods, are closely linked to the pilot area where MedSNAIL has been developed or have been directly proposed by the producers most involved in the project activities.



Other

Melħ tax-Xwejni (Artisanal sea salt from Xwejni, Gozo)

E. Cini, iż-Żebbuġ, Gozo

<https://xwejnivalsalt.com>

Product

Melħ tax-Xwejni is sea salt consisting of fine crystals. It is slightly off-white in colour. It has a complex flavour profile which is due to its mineral composition.

Territory

Xwejni is located on the northern coast of Gozo. Its rocky coastline is composed of relatively flat expanses of sedimentary limestone rock formations overlooking the open sea. The basins and channels are cut in the rock itself, and this has been done by hand over many years. Being close to the sea, they regularly face severe winter storms with high wave which often cause damage to the salt pans, which means that they require regular off-season maintenance. The history of Gozitan salt pans goes back to Phoenician times. The Xwejni salt pans are arguably one of the oldest (if not the oldest) still functioning salt pans in the world, and as such are an important part of Gozo's cultural heritage.

Production

The salt production season runs during the hot summer months, from June till the end of August, although this may be extended somewhat depending on the weather. Sea water is pumped into pools that are larger, deeper and closer to the sea than the actual salt pans. The purpose of these pools is to reduce the sea water by evaporation to produce a more concentrated brine. The brine is then pumped into the shallower salt pans, where it is left to dry out in the sun until the salt crystallises. This two step process ensures that the salt is ready for collection after just seven days, thereby resulting in a fresh collection every week.

Harvest

Salt is harvested once a week throughout the production season, although weather conditions may sometimes interfere with the process. The product is collected manually using brooms and brushes with thick bristles. Each pan is swept and the salt gathered into a small heap. All the small heaps are then transferred to a big heap on a flat surface. After every harvest, each salt pan is again filled with brine to produce a fresh batch of salt.

Processing

The big heap of salt collected from all the pans is covered with cloth and left to dry for about 24 hours. The salt is packed into 30-kilogram bags and stored. No further processing is done, and no additives are used. The salt is simply weighed out into its final packaging and labelled.



Vegetables, fruit, legumes and their processed products (oil, wine...)

Għasel t'Għawdex (Gozo honey)
Ramla Valley Estates (Nadur, Gozo)
<https://ramlavalley.business.site/>

Product

Għasel t'Għawdex is an amber substance, solid at room temperature, with a sweet but complex flavour. It is used as an ingredient in numerous confections and desserts, as well as to sweeten drinks. It is also used as an accompaniment to other food products such as cheese.

Territory

Ramla Valley Estates is a family run country estate situated in the fertile valley of ir-Ramla l-Hamra bay in Nadur, Gozo, Malta. Gozo favours honey production because of its Mediterranean type climate, characterised by high insolation and long periods of clement weather.

Cultivation

The honey bees forage for nectar, which they collect from flowers. The bees then refine the nectar through regurgitation and enzymatic activity, and during storage in the hive. The sugar content is concentrated through evaporation of water, until the final product is very viscous. The bees store the honey in the hive, where it is consumed by the larvae and by adult bees in times when other food sources are not available.

Harvest

The frames containing the honey are placed in a honey extractor to remove the honey, which is then filtered and left to settle in a settling tank.

Processing

Once the settling process is concluded, the honey is bottled. The product is not treated in any way to preserve it.



Vegetables, fruit, legumes and their processed products (oil, wine...)

Ġulepp tal-Ħarrub (Carob syrup)

Ta' Mena Estates, Xewkija Gozo

<https://tamena-gozo.com>

Product

Ġulepp tal-Ħarrub is a dark brown, syrupy liquid, very sweet and with a strong and very particular smell and flavour. It is used as a cordial when diluted with cold or hot water to produce a refreshing drink. It is also used in karamelli, traditional sweets mostly associated with Lent and Easter. Ġulepp tal-Ħarrub is also prized as an expectorant, and hence its popularity as an elixir for coughs. The product is produced in small quantities using traditional recipes that may vary slightly between families, and that have been handed down through the generations. Other than some added sugar, no artificial flavouring, preservative or colourings are used in this product.

Territory

With its typical Mediterranean type of climate, Gozo favours the growth of the carob tree. Given the limited size of the territory, however, the total carob harvest is small.

Cultivation

The carob (*Ceratonia siliqua*) is a flowering evergreen tree or shrub of the legume family, Fabaceae. It is native to the Mediterranean region and the Middle East. The plant has been cultivated since antiquity, and was well known to the ancient Greeks. In the Maltese islands, the tree was introduced thousands of years ago. It is known in Maltese as *siġra tal-Ħarrub*. The plant is very ubiquitous on the islands, and is an important member of the communities that characterise the habitat known as *maquis*. The edible fruit comes in the form of pods, and is an important fodder for livestock. However, in times of extreme hardship, as during the Second World War, the locals used to eat dried carob pods as a supplement to rationed food.

Harvest

The carob pods mature in midsummer, and are traditionally harvested starting from the middle of August through to early September, before the first autumn rains.

Processing

The pods are washed in plenty of water, and any impurities removed. They are then broken into smaller pieces and roasted to caramelize the sugars and develop the flavours. The roasted pods are then placed in a cauldron, covered with water, and left to soak overnight to soften. They are then boiled in the same water to extract the flavours, after which the resulting liquid is strained and the pods pressed to extract as much of the liquid as possible. Sugar and cloves are then added, and the liquid boiled again to a syrupy consistency. The syrup is then poured into sterilised jars and sealed. The used pods are returned to the soil as a natural fertiliser.



Vegetables, fruit, legumes and their processed products (oil, wine...)

Ilma Żahar (Orange Blossom Water)

Lawrence Bajada, Xagħra, Gozo

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Product

Ilma żahar is a clear, watery liquid with the fragrance and taste of orange blossoms. It distilled from an infusion of the leaves and blossoms of the Seville orange tree variety (*Citrus x aurantium*), known in Maltese as Laring tal-Bakkaljaw. The Bajada family is the last in Malta to maintain the tradition using exclusively traditional methods. The current producer is himself a third generation member of the family, but it is probable that his lineage of Xagħra ilma żahar distillers goes back over 100 years. The product is used to flavour confections, most notably kwareżimal, a traditional Lenten cake, and qagħaq taz-zokkor. It is often added to black coffee. Ilma żahar is also believed to have some therapeutic properties, particularly as a digestive, although this has not being empirically confirmed. Some people add it to bath water, and some use it as an air-freshener to cover the smell of cooking.

Territory

The village of Xagħra is located on a plateau with an average elevation of 66m. It is one of the earliest inhabited parts of Gozo, being home to the Ġgantija megalithic temples, which date back to 3600 BCE. The surrounding valleys are small but productive. Xagħra has a history of ilma żahar production, with up to ten producers being known to have been operating in the village in the past. Its historical heritage and natural beauty spots make the village a popular tourist attraction.

Cultivation

The trees are grown organically in the producer's orchard, right next to his home and workshop. They are propagated from seed collected from the same stock. Whole oranges are sliced in half and placed cut-side down on top of a layer of soil in a planter. The resulting saplings are grown for two years in the planter itself, after which they are transferred to their final location in the ground. A tree will start to blossom after another four or five years. Only natural fertiliser is used. The trees are watered regularly during the hot, dry summer months. The leaves are hosed down with water to help cool down the tree and to wash away any parasites.

Harvest

The orange blossoms and leaves are normally harvested during April and May. In some years, an early spring may cause the tress to come out of dormancy earlier, while on occasion the blossoms may be destroyed by strong winds wind. By late May, again depending on the weather, the fruit starts to form and the harvesting season is over. The harvested material is processed immediately to preserve freshness.





Processing

The producer uses tools and equipment that have been handed down through at least three generations. The still is made of copper and maintained using traditional methods. The harvested tree branches, having both blossoms and leaves, are cut into manageable pieces and carefully stacked tightly in the kettle. They are then covered with one bucket of water. The kettle is heated over a wood fire that is carefully maintained to ensure a controlled, steady distillation rate over the course of about seven hours of distillation time. The rising steam is condensed using a simple condenser filled with cold water, and the condensate is collected in a glass bottle. The yield is about four litres of product from one full kettle. The resulting orange blossom water is then transferred into a corked glass carboy where it is left to age in order to clarify the liquid and develop the fragrance. After one year of ageing, it is carefully decanted into glass bottles, leaving behind any sediment. The bottles are then sealed with a cork stopper and labelled.



Vegetables, fruit, legumes and their processed products (oil, wine...)

Kunserva Ħelwa (Sweet tomato paste matured in the sun)

Ta' Mena Estates, Xewkija Gozo

<https://tamena-gozo.com>

Product

Kunserva ħelwa is a thick but spreadable paste having an intense red colour and a distinctive smell of cooked tomatoes. The product is made using local tomato varieties that are prized for their flavour and aroma. Both salt and sugar are added to enhance the flavour and improve the product's keeping qualities, but its higher sugar content makes it sweeter than its counterpart the kunserva mielħa, or salty tomato paste. Kunserva ħelwa is traditionally used as a spread on bread, either alone with just a little olive oil, salt and black pepper; or accompanied by other toppings such as canned tuna, olives, capers and salad vegetables. It can also be added to sauces and braised dishes to improve colour and flavour.

Territory

With its typical Mediterranean type of climate, Gozo favours the growth of tomatoes. Local varieties used to make kunserva are grown in limited quantities, as much of the land is given over to types that are more suitable for canning.

Cultivation

Tomato plants are grown in rich soils with excellent drainage properties. They require regular watering during dry spells. Tomato seeds are sown in small planters in April, and after a few weeks they are ready for transplanting to suitably prepared open fields.

Harvest

Harvesting of the tomatoes occurs during July and August. Malta is one of very few countries in Europe where tomatoes are picked exclusively by hand. This is in part due to the exceedingly small holdings and to the topography of the land, both of which are not suited to mechanical harvesting. Handpicking, however, does allow the farmer to inspect every tomato individually, and to discard any that are below par.

Processing

The tomatoes are washed, chopped and cooked, with the addition of salt and sugar. The mixture is processed into a smooth pulp, spread out onto stainless steel trays, and left to dry naturally in the sun to a thick consistency.



Vegetables, fruit, legumes and their processed products (oil, wine...)

Żejt taż-Żebbuġa (Extra Virgin Olive Oil)

Ramla Valley Estates (Nadur, Gozo)

<https://ramlavalley.business.site/>

Product

Żejt taż-Żebbuġa, an extra virgin olive oil (EVOO) originating from the producer's own olive groves, is a robust, slightly cloudy, oily liquid with a greenish tinge. It is characterised by naturally relatively low moisture content. Careful harvesting by hand and cold pressing ensure a fragrant aroma and a rich taste of 100 per cent unfiltered oil. The product is internationally acclaimed, having a complex flavour profile that includes notes of grass, artichoke and green apple, with a peppery finish. It is also used as a basis for aromatic extra virgin olive oils such as basil, chilli, rosemary, garlic, lemon, and bay leaf.

Territory

Ramla Valley Estates is a family run country estate situated in the fertile valley of ir-Ramla l-Hamra bay in Nadur, Gozo, Malta. The family has been working these fields for generations, with the current owners being the 7th generation custodians of this important heritage. They continue to cultivate the fields in a traditional way, being careful to work hand in hand with nature. They produce a variety of local artisanal products known for their distinctive flavour and character which are due in part to the sandy soils found in the valley.

Cultivation

The olive tree *Olea europaea* L. has been cultivated in Malta and Gozo for millennia. A number of cultivars are known from the islands, yielding fruits that are suitable both for consumption and for the making of oil. With 97 per cent of olive tree cultivation concentrated in the Mediterranean basin, Gozo is ideally suited for olive oil production. Given the limited size of the territory, yields are relatively small.

Harvest

Olives are harvested by hand during September and October, with the use of pneumatic combs.

Processing

The olives are cold pressed on the same day of collection, solely by mechanical means using the producer's own olive mill.

