

PROGRAMME

Local
Food
Matters!



International workshop

Finding the good balance between hygiene rules,
small-scale production and quality

20-22.03.2014 Bitola
Macedonia

www.slowfood.mk www.forum-synergies.eu





International workshop: “Local Food Matters!”

Finding the good balance between hygiene rules, small scale production and quality

20-22 March 2014

Trnovo, Bitola, Macedonia

*co-organised by **Forum Synergies** and **Slow Food Bitola***

in cooperation with PREPARE, Terra Madre Balkan, SWG, Essedra project.



1.BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Legislative framework and options for implementation - Introductory remarks

There is a growing interest of farmers and consumers in local food. Also the European Union is promoting local food systems. EU legislation on hygiene rules, which is also implemented in accession countries, has already led to the closing of small dairies and slaughter houses in many regions. Ever growing investment costs demanded as a pre-requisite to meet hygienic standards for on farm food processing are pushing more and more farmers out of production of local food. This process is accelerating and severely counteracts the growing claim for local high quality food.

The implementation of existing EU legislation on hygiene rules has created so far very heterogenic implementation on the ground. It is designed primarily for industrial food processing. But in fact it leaves a considerable margin of manoeuvre for the national, regional and local food authorities. So local food production can be dealt with in a proportionate way! However in most member states and accession countries of the EU, this flexibility is rarely applied thus forcing many producers of traditional quality food out of business.

The Western Balkan region as an example

This international workshop will take place in Macedonia in the heart of the Western Balkan region. We will analyse potential threats and opportunities for local and sustainable food systems in a region which is preparing for accession.

The organisers of this workshop will bring together farmers, consumers, civil society organisations, small food processors, veterinaries, national governmental food administrations and responsible staff from the European Commission. We will organise field visits, exchange of good practices and hold panels on good administrative and legislative practice in EU member states, including new ones.

The conference is based on a number of previous initiatives such as the Conference on Local Agriculture and Short Food Supply Chains, organised by the European Commission in 2012; the conference organised by the Latvian Rural Forum (member of PREPARE) on local identity products including branding of local food produced by rural communities; and activities of Slow Food Macedonia and Slow Food Balkan (Essedra project).

Expected results

This event will encourage positive legislation and application of the flexibility for artisanal and small scale food products. It will provide a basis for the flexible setup of hygiene regulations in EU accession countries. Constructive dialogue between the producers, authorities and policy makers in charge for the hygiene rules on EU and EU accession countries will be initiated. It will provide establishment of cooperation channels among EU and non EU stakeholders on different levels. It will empower CSOs networking on the common standpoints for small local food production and their contribution through the civil dialogue in EU context.

In short, the workshop shall discuss and provide answers to the following three questions:

1. How to promote the use of the already existing flexible provisions among competent authorities?
2. What practical examples of flexible approaches which satisfy legal obligations can be found in the EU member states?
3. What can competent authorities and concerned farmers and producers do to improve legal and practical conditions for local food production so as to enhance cooperation between governments and stakeholders?



2.PROGRAMME

20 March 2013

Arrival of participants at Trnovo (Registration and Diner: Hotel SumskiFeneri)

- **19:30 Evening presentation**
Presentation of the workshop by Forum Synergies and Slow Food Bitola
Presentation of the participants
- **20:00 Evening dinner organised by Slow Food in Macedonia**
Presentation and tasting of local products

21 March 2013

- **9:00 - 13:00: "Macedonian Food Realities"**

Field visits: producers and participants will exchange on the problems faced and the solutions they would suggest to improve the situation.

- **Group 1:** cheese producer (Belo meko sirenje), honey producer and red paprika producer (Bukovo pepper).
- **Group 2:** cheese producer (Belo meko sirenje) and Krushevo's sausages producer.
- **Group 3:** Prespa dried fish Cironki and agrotourism Villa Dihovo.

Lunch at a local food restaurant

- **15:00 - 16:30: "Better rules for local products and local food chains: how to preserve local food quality and diversity?"**

Panel: Panelists will exchange with the audience on the lessons learnt in member states and on the European level and will identify the action needed in new member states and accession countries.

"Implementation of hygiene rules for local and small-scale production: the Austrian example"

· *DI. Christian Jochum, Head of Agricultural marketing and special crops, Chamber of Agriculture, Austria*

Round table and questions to:

- *Branka Tome, Policy Officer - Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development - European Commission*
 - *Sonja Srbinovska, Professor in Faculty of Agricultural Science and Food, Skopje, Republic of Macedonia*
 - *Jelena Dugum, Senior Adviser, Ministry of Agriculture, Croatia*
 - *Aris Adler, Latvian Rural Forum / Project on Local Identity Product (LIP),, Latvia*
 - *Michele Rumiz, Terra Madre Balkan / Essedra project, Italy*
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- **17:00 - 19:30 "Understanding & Improving rules for local and sustainable food systems"**
 - *Working groups: What are the issues, challenges and solutions identified after the field visits and panel discussion? - Exchange of best practices*
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- **19:30 - 21:00 Diner**

22 March 2013

- **9:00 - 13:00: What's shaping up? Negotiation process and role of stakeholders**

 - Feed-back from working groups
 - Common analysis and proposals related to hygiene regulations
 - Conclusions
-
- **13:00: Lunch at Trnovo**



3.MACEDONIAN FOOD REALITIES

Introduction

Republic of Macedonia is situated in the south-western part of the Balkan peninsula and is the crossroad of the two major paneuropean transport corridors (VIII and X), which connect central Europe with the Adriatic, Aegean and the Black sea.

Around 48% of the total area of Republic of Macedonia is agricultural land (1.063.000 ha), from which around 1/3 is accounted for as arable. The majority of this land are fields and gardens, then orchards, vineyards, and grazing land. Around 51% of the total agriculture land are pastures.

Around 20 % of the arable land is owned by the state, around 200.000 ha. As a result of the intense process of distributing the land to individual farmers since 2000, the state has lowered this number to around 15.000 ha.

Past agricultural politics– unsustainable agriculture and food production

Until year 2000, and particularly in the past political system of Macedonia, the agriculture and food production was organized as large scale industrial production. This organization meant large scale production with massive usage of chemicals, hybrid seeds and introduced animal breeds and little to none caring about the state of the arable land and the sustainability of the production. All of that resulted in diminished yield, big pollution and unsustainable food resources. This policy lead to the abandon of local food production: people left the villages to leave in towns and work in industrial facilities. However, since 2007, the redistribution of state owned arable land to individual farmers has created better circumstances for sustainable and foremost sustainable production. The state now has to enforce the law of organic production and rural development according to European standards.

Specific problems and negative sides:

- Ownership of arable agriculture land and proving the ownership of a farmer's property.
- Financial difficulties with the legalization and regulation of the legal status of the land
- Luck of farmer cooperatives and producer's associations which will give a voice to them for their needs and problems
- Difficulties in contacting with the authorities and policy makers

- Increased imports of foreign products and low stimulation of home small-scale production

The country's agriculture and food production is facing major challenges and structural reforms on adapting the European legislation and requirements.

Small-scale farmers are struggling with the new common agricultural policy and related policies for competitive and sustainable agriculture to defend strong, sustainable diverse rural communities and sustainable rural environment.

Policies to improve competition and support the agricultural and food production sector

- Modernizing and improving the technological and market infrastructure in order to increase added value and reach European standards;
- Making efforts to strengthen the integration of the agro producers, both horizontal and vertical
- Creating ways to reach the production resources, especially land and capital. As a result, costs should be reduced, productivity of production factors should be improved and the developing potential should be increased.
- Implementation of Good Agriculture and Hygiene Practice for small-scale farmers and producers
- Small scale producers don't have enough quantity or quality of their production
- Adaptation of the Good Agriculture and Hygiene Practice for small farms and small scale producers

Creating a new agricultural policy – Slow Food proposals and recommendations

Create a new agricultural policy, with new priority aiming at developing rural areas, agriculture and unconventional food production in accordance with the tradition.

Supporting measures are mainly focused towards stimulation of the sustainable food production in a rural area, because the market development is mostly determined by a minimum quantities, quality and types of products, in this case organic and traditional food products. The second priority is stimulation of the market development, which means raising awareness and professionalizing export activities. To develop different activities, advantage will be given to cultures typical for the region in order to make them competitive enough for the foreign markets.



3.1. Biodiversity, security for the future

Story of Bukovska piper (Bukovo pepper)

On the slopes of the Mountain Baba in southwestern Macedonia, is the village of Bukovo, known for its centuries-old tradition of growing a particular variety of peppers and making ground spicy paprika, locally known as “Bukovska piper”. It is derived from a specific local variety of peppers *Bukovska*, cultivated at plots close to the village, where large quantities of clean water and fertile soil are obtainable. Red peppers are harvested in August and September and then string up with the needle and thread in the form of arrays, in order to dry better. The drying process has remained unchanged: the red peppers are first hung for ventilation and drying, and then subsequently dried, baked & coarsely ground crushed in traditional wooden bowls called "Kutle." Once reduced to powder, the product is called Bukovska piper.

Risk of disappearing...

In comparison with the period before 1950, the varieties of Bukovka peppers are more and more replaced by other varieties like: Gorgosh, Segedinka (from former Yugoslavia) and nowadays, commercial hybrid seeds from Western European countries. In the past, paprika was grown on the agricultural land near the village without any problem; today cultivating them is more difficult. Residents attribute it to the reduced humidity of the air throughout the summer and smaller amounts of water in the rivers, but the experts add that the problem is in the use of the introduced seeds.

There is also a risk of generalization (basically when everybody claims the paprika they produce is from Bukovo, although it is not), and of expropriation (when a private claim the name for a company, and real producers from Bukovo cannot use the name no longer).

Another problem is that farms and farmers are not always registered in the Official Agriculture Registry – “Farm Register”, and they still don’t have appropriate conditions for the production of the spice.

Solutions

Local Slow Food convivium in Bitola and Slow Food Foundation for biodiversity recognize the quality of this authentic variety of paprika and spice and start to develop Presidium Projects. Also the activities

that must be included are:

- Policy supporting small - scale farmers in rural area
- Implementation of High Nature Values Farming Measures
- Trainings for farmers (GAP, GHP, PDO...)
- Developing the collaboration between producers (cooperative)
- The support and implementation of this kind of measures would provide economic benefit for the producers and safeguarding of the local biodiversity.



3.2. Legalisation of the production

Story of Belo meko sirenje(White brine cheese)

Pelister is the most southeast Alpine characteristic mountain in the Balkan, endowed with flora and fauna, that provides perfect conditions for development of livestock breeding. Long time ago it has been recognized by a number of semi-nomadic pastoralists who settled here and enabled the development of the sheep graze on the rich variety of grasses and herbs in the meadows of the mountain. All dairy products are made from the milk of a local breed of sheep, the Pramenka.

Today many families in local villages (Dihovo, Trnovo, Nize Pole) still make dairy products within Pelister park including Belo Sirenje cheese, and the thick, yogurt-like *Kiselo Mleko*. During spring and summer, *Belo sirenje* is produced with a very high quality, made from fresh unpasteurized sheep's milk. *Kiselo mleko* is inoculated with starter culture from previous batches. Curd should be set in 1-1,5 hour and is then cut into 2-3 cm cubes. Pressed curd is then cut into 10X10 cm pieces and salted by immersing in salt brine of 18% solution overnight, and then dry salt is placed on the surface of the cheese pieces.

The next morning the cheese is packed in tins immersed in 10-12% salt brine and then put in a maturation room with temperature between 10-15°C.

Where is the problem?

Belo sirenje with its exceptional quality reaches good price of 5 euros and overall production sales all most without a problem. The problem is that direct sale on the farm is illegal business through. Recent regulations in Macedonia don't allow such sales, such as the Standards for Food Safety. If these regulations are implemented for these farmers, it will be impossible for them to produce cheese, which means the disappearing of traditionally produced cheese and the loss of and living for farmers. Because

the existing regulations for the production of cheese from raw sheep's and goat's milk does not regulate issues in a way that would facilitate their work.

Solutions

Inspired by this problem, Slow Food Macedonia launched the campaign: “To protect biodiversity of milk”, whose goal is to address the problem of small-scale production of traditional cheeses from rural areas.

- These days our Food and Veterinary Agency published a first draft version of new regulation for free (on farm) selling of small quantity of animal products, but this is only first step with many open questions after that.
- Implementation of the Policy and flexibility regulation support to small - scale farmers and cheese producers in rural area
- Support for improvement of hygienic condition of production according to hygiene regulation
- Implementation of High Nature Values Farming Measures and support for the local breads



3.3. Loss of the identity

Story of Krushevski kolbasi (Krushevo's sausages)

In the small mountain town of Krusevo, which is the highest town in the Balkan (situated at an altitude of 1,350 metres), lies a lot of tradition and history. Krusevo is a living museum, famous for its traditional architecture, cultural sites, and legacy as the site of the great 1903 Ilinden uprising against Ottoman domination. Owing to its high elevation, Krusevo is also one of Macedonia's prime winter sports destinations. Today an enormous number of tourists enjoy this treasure which include gastronomic heritage as part of the culture of the local citizens in Krusevo. The gastronomic brands that are famous: *Krushevo's lokum, sausages and pita.*

The traditional and famous *Krushevo* sausage is prepared in a standard way, but the special taste or the secret lies in condiments and skill – says the butchers. These sausages are prepared in local butcher shops, from the pork and beef and many spices which gives the characteristic taste – chilly and served as a specialty. The meat, which should be large minced or fine chopped, with addition of leeks and dried

herbs spice: *bukovec*, black pepper, pimento, mint, and salt. After drying of few days, they are finally ready to be sold in the local butcher shops. Local citizens are using them in variety of traditional dishes.

The main “secret”

Despite the spices and the skill, the main role is the quality of the meat. Nowadays, the choice of meat comes to buy imported frozen meat or meat from animals raised in intensive farms and fed with commercial feed without consideration of their welfare. Above all, the butchers are forced to respect the existing national hygienic rules for food safety, so they are unable to use meat from the local small-scale farmers of the area, where there are no existing registered slaughterhouses. As there is no opportunity to use meat with real quality, they don't have the possibility to produce sausages with authentic taste and lose the identity. In this context, it is impossible to register *krusevo* sausages as a product with designation of origin.

Solutions

Slow Food wants to initiate protection of the geographical origin of this type of product, but previously some criteria have to be fulfilled:

- More easily and enabling registration of facilities for slaughter with a request for a minimum hygienic conditions,
- Support the small producers to use the services of a new local slaughterhouse would open as their service,
- Support for legal business operation and easier achievement of the requirements of the regulations for the production and hygiene of manufacture
- Support for branding and PDO procedures.



3.4. Awareness of sustainability

Story of Cironki (Prespa dried fish)

The region of Prespa, in the Southwest Macedonia, has developed in the 1970s as a tourist destination. With an abundance of rare fauna and flora, the area was declared a Transnational Park in 2000. Prespa is the only place where you can see fishermen using “pezovola” nets to fish.

Fish caught for making Prespa's specialty Cironki is Belvica (Latin name *Alburnusalburnusbelvica*).

To make *cironki*, *belvica* are fished (usually overnight), usually caught with *pezol* or *pezovola* nets, types of circular nets with lead weights used both near the lakeshore as well as in the middle of the lake. Once caught, the fish are salted in a ratio of one kilogram of fish to 300 g of salt. The salted fish are placed into a barrel, and then topped with *orach* (also known as “saltbush”) leaves and a large stone plate to press the fish. After one week of salting, the fish are threaded and hung in the summer sun to dry for one to two weeks. The fish can then be stored for up to two years.

Cironki is different from many other salted and dried fish products because the fish is not cleaned first; instead the internal organs and skin are included in the drying process. The cleaning is done immediately prior to consumption. To eat *cironki*, the fish are first soaked in hot water to desalinate and swell. The skin and internal organs are then removed.

For what reason is this at risk of disappearing

A reason for disappearing of this specialty is connected with the uncontrolled hunting of the fish “*Belvica*” during the spawn period. Another very important fact for disappearing of this indigenous fish is the pollution of the Prespa Lake. Every year, young people are leaving this village to find a better place for living in the cities, left behind thousand years old tradition of production of “*cironki*”.

Most of the fishermen’s from Prespa region are not registered in any kind of Fishermen Register of the Republic of Macedonia, because in this moment there is no legal concessioner of the Prespa Lake. Also they are not registered as food producers (of *Cironki*) in Food and Veterinary Agency because they produce in small quantity in home conditions for own use and the authority does not recognize this product like traditional local “brand”, which will attract more tourists to visit Stenje.

Solutions:

Need to recognize the authenticity of the product and solve the problem with fishing and its legality, a problem that is identical in many other places in Macedonia. For that purpose, this year Slow Food Macedonia started a campaign called Slow Fish Macedonia to strengthen awareness of the importance of local biodiversity fish, their numbers, and pollution of our lakes and rivers. This means that hard work will cover a range of different activities to build awareness among fishermen and local citizens. The common goal of locals, organizations and the authorities should be:

- After several years, the first time this month is an open contest for new concessionary fishing Lake Prespa
- Further Policy support to the Small-scale fishermen
- Training and rising of awareness for sustainable fishing of fishermen
- Improvement of hygienic conditions for production of *Cironki* with support for legal business operation and easier achievement of the requirements of the regulations for the production and hygiene of manufacture
- Establishment of collaboration between producers



3.5. Fake product, real problem

Story of local honey producers

In the territory of Macedonia honey was well recognized as a main sweet food since ancient time and was regularly used as a harvest product from the wild ("*brtvi*"). Later, particularly during the Ottoman Empire this product reached higher market values. This was a consequence of usage of honey in traditional oriental food. However, this momentum was trigger for introduction of more sophisticated beekeeping practices through which overall honey production will be increased. That is the moment when skeps were extensively introduced. Honey is important food product today, when public awareness is improved about food safety and health life style.

Macedonian native honey bee (*Apismelliferamacedonica*) as a native honey bee population is clearly determinate as best adaptive genotype to the environmental conditions, suitable for organic production of high quality honey.

The honey bee population in Macedonia is estimate on 90 000 colonies. According to the recent investigations the number of colonies belonging to the south of Macedonia population of *Apismelliferamacedonica*, considered as most "genetically uncontaminated" one, is estimated on 1300. Products such as honey, pollen, propolis, wax, royal jelly, apitoxin are used for home consumption.

Manufacturers against counterfeiters

The country annually produces 1500 tons of honey - but only 60 % of the honey producers manufacturing are registered. On the remaining 40 %, the quantity and kind of honey sold in the Macedonian market is unknown.

The Food and Veterinary Agency introduced regulations with restriction of max. 1000 kg for small producers who under the "home" hygienic condition of production are free to sell if they are registered, and their jars with honey labelled. The rest of them often produce honey dissolving or adding certain substances for its falsification. This honey is on the free market, and often much cheaper than natural and organic honey, which is a real threat to small producers of real honey, but also for the health of consumers.

Solutions

To overcome this problem requires regular inspections by the authorities and the removal of such manufacturers in the market, while small producers should receive full support. In this sense, Slow Food Bitolat organized several workshops on sensory recognition of real honey by consumers, and thus issued a brochure for this purpose. Other proposals are:

- Further and more wider application of GAP (Good Agricultural Practice), GHP (Good Hygiene Practice) and wider process of certification for sale and export of the honey
- Comprehensive control of the Food and Veterinary on the honey sold on the market, in order to eliminate unfair competition and reducing the cost and value of honey as a product.
- Honey is a safe product and not demanding strictly hygienic conditions of production, there should not have restrictions of max. 1000 kg for small manufacturers, as quantities broadly vary depending on the season.



3.6. Key link to co-producers

Story of a successful agrotourism business: "Villa Dihovo"

"Come as guest, leave as friend" is a motto of our friends, who are our heroes in this story. Located in Dihovo, a relaxing village in the foothills of Mt Pelister, Villa Dihovo is a friendly, family-run guesthouse serving homemade traditional food and drink, and offering plenty of outdoor activities for those wishing to explore the forested mountains, lakes and river immediately accessible from the village. Villa Dihovo offers a variety of home-cooked Macedonian specialties, made with fruits and vegetables coming from own private garden or products from local producers from the village. They also serve domestic brandy and wine in wooden barrels, as well a range of homebrewed beers. The price for accommodation and food is to be decided by the guests at the end of their stay.

What is here wrong?

Examples like Villa Dihovo, exist in other regions in Macedonia, but they are in small number to generate local economies which will be part of our local food system model. Macedonia has enormous potential of rural tourism which is not used enough. Rural tourism is like playing game with senses

Future steps...

Slow Food Macedonia at the moment develops a project for labelling "recommended by Slow Food" agrotourism and traditional taverns called "*gostilnica*" small, familiar restaurants which have strong connection with local territory and the best promoters and suppliers of food produced in the area.

Our authority must to start to work more intensively with this kind of small-scale business operators

because they can be an important chain of our local economy. At the same time authorities should provide a specific and clear regulation for this kind of operators to cover production and hygienic conditions for the purchase, preparation and serving local food.

This project aims to offer additional support to the local network of food producers, producers of wine and other drinks, farmers, artisans, hosts and restaurateurs who have always been important to everybody who gravitate around these people and their businesses, in a tight and rich network of relationships which are themselves a discovery for the traveller.

This purpose requires proper strategies, educating not only the agrotourism business staff but developing awareness of all of us on the importance of tourism. The stories always sell, it is debatable, but they must be adapted to the client. Some enjoy the stories, others in fact. The area of interest of visitors must be a priority in our access.



4.SOME SUGGESTIONS

To go further, here are some suggestions:

Provision for flexibility in the Hygiene package (European Commission):

http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/biosafety/hygienelegislation/docs/faq_all_business_en.pdf

http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/biosafety/hygienelegislation/docs/faq_all_public_en.pdf

Conference on Local Agriculture and Short Food Supply Chains, organised by the European Commission in 2012:

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/events/small-farmers-conference-2012_en.htm

Workshop on EU food hygiene Regulations and 'slow' cheese production - principle and practice organised by Essedra in Cheese

<http://see.efncp.org/networking/events/2013/20131002/>

The case of France: flexibility measures specifically designed for 'small dairies' and their application - Yolande Moulem, Policy Officer at FNEC (French Association of Goat Farmers).

Romania - an example of successful NGO intervention in food hygiene policy - Ben Mehedin, Fundatia Adept



5. ORGANISERS AND PARTNERS

ORGANISERS

Forum Synergies: Forum Synergies is an international non-profit association of European organisations, engaged citizens, and active practitioners engaged in sustainable rural development. Our mission is to link people, to support a constructive dialogue between stakeholders, to enable the exchange of experiences in sustainable practices and to promote synergies.

www.forum-synergies.eu

Slow Food Bitola: Slow Food Bitola is working to build a new gastronomic culture based on traditional Macedonian cuisine, protect agricultural products made by local farmers and pass on knowledge to future generations.

www.slowfood.mk/bitola

PARTNERS

The Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group South Eastern Europe (SWG): SWG is an International Intergovernmental Organization consisted of governmental institutions responsible for rural development in respective countries and territories of South Eastern Europe.

<http://seerural.org/>

Terra Madre Balkan is a network of all food communities and Slow Food projects in the Balkan Peninsula. Since 2010, Terra Madre Balkans has been fighting to save the gastronomic traditions and food biodiversity of one of Europe's most fascinating and least-known regions.

ESSEDRA project: "Environmentally Sustainable Socio-Economic Development of Rural Areas" Project was launched in 2012 by Terra Madre Balkans network. It aims to support the integration process of the Balkan countries and Turkey into Europe, and to create conditions for these countries to preserve their identity, demonstrated by their amazing food diversity and artisanal food.

<http://www.essedra.com>

PREPARE: The PREPARE partnership is a group of European and national non-government organizations whose aim is to strengthen civil society and to promote multi-national exchange in rural development, with a main focus on the new EU member states of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as accession countries and the "new neighbours" of the enlarged EU.

<http://www.preparenetwork.org/>

Project supported by :

