

# National Inventory

of origin-linked Products  
in Albania, Bulgaria and  
the Republic of Macedonia

# Introduction

Of the 1,481 products listed in the European Commission's Database of Origin & Registration (DOOR), a mere 29 come from Balkan peninsula countries (excluding Greece). This very limited figure cannot be explained by the common socialist heritage shared by these countries at different stages, as other nations with communist regimes in their past like Poland or the Czech Republic have 39 and 35 registered products respectively. Neither can we blame a lack of food traditions and biodiversity in the Balkan peninsula, as Greece alone accounts for 103 origin-linked registered products.

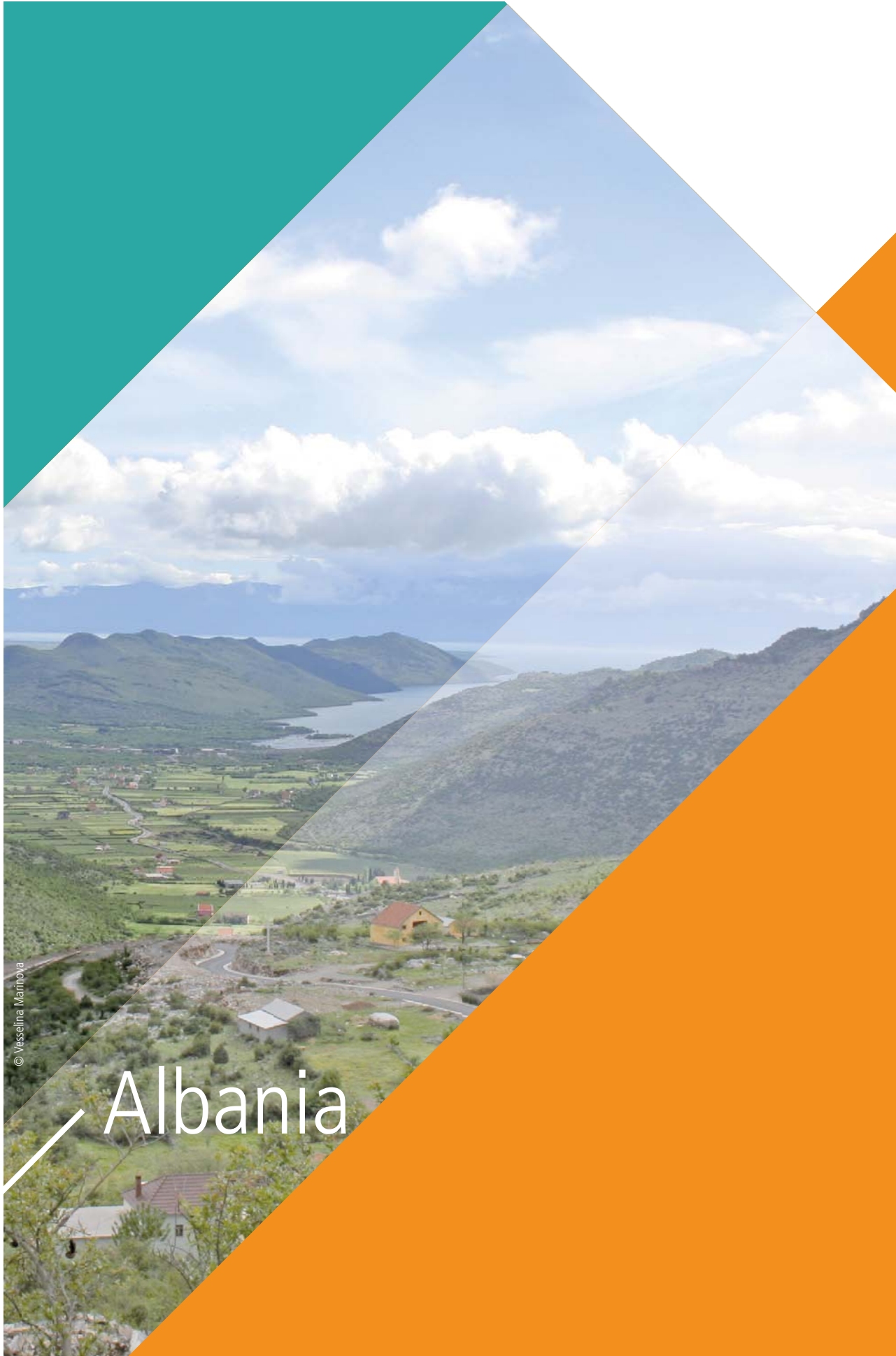
The following narrative information sheets describe origin-linked food and agricultural products from the Balkan peninsula that could be protected through EC quality schemes, highlighting potential geographical indications (GIs) in one of the areas of Europe that has least exploited the contribution of origin-linked products to rural and agricultural development strategies.

The information sheets are the result of field research carried out by Slow Food in three Balkan peninsula countries: Albania, Bulgaria and the Republic of Macedonia. These countries were selected based on the capacity of Slow Food's local networks, as well as the locations of other previous FAO projects in the region. Bulgaria, Albania and Macedonia also represent different levels of EU integration, with Bulgaria already a full EU member and the other two official candidate countries.

This inventory is based on the questionnaire developed by FAO within the framework of the FAO-EBRD project in Montenegro by the local implementer REDD. This version combines the two questionnaires from the FAO methodology (see the Quality&Origin Web Tool (QOW), <http://www.fao.org/food-quality-origin/webtool/about-olq/it/>) integrating most of the product identity form—the whole of the QOM's Questionnaire 1—and a few questions from Questionnaire 2 to measure the size of the value chain. We have further added three more questions developed specifically for these inventories by Slow Food and three others proposed by FAO. Following FAO approval the questionnaire was explained and sent to the selected local experts who carried out the research:

- Aren Rexha, agronomist (Albania)
- Dessislava Dimitrova, associate professor at the Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research of the Bulgarian Academy of Science, and Teodora Ivanova, assistant professor at the Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research of the Bulgarian Academy of Science (Bulgaria)
- Emilija Nedelkovska, Anita Glavevska and Elena Karovska, responsible for Slow Food's Ark of Taste inventory in the Republic of Macedonia (Republic of Macedonia)

Data collection was carried out through direct field visits undertaken between June 1 and September 15, 2015.



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# Albania





## Tropoja black plums

**Product name:**

Tropoja black plums  
(Kumbulla e Zeze e Tropojës)

**Category:**

fresh fruit, processed fruit

**Production area:**

Tropoja, Puke, Mat and Dibër municipalities

**Estimated number of producers:**

140

**Estimated quantity produced:**

1,600 tons

**Estimated economic value of the production:**

€ 686,400

Tropoja black plums are a variety of plum (*Prunus domestica*) cultivated in the northeastern Albanian municipality of Tropoja since the beginning of the 16th century. There is a strong connection between the plums and the livelihoods of the local people, and still today the fruit are processed into jam, *hoshaf*, compote and *raki* (brandy). Tropoja black plums are also traditionally sold after being dried in the sun or the oven. The plums are baked in traditional ovens, made of two connected rooms, with a fire on one side and the plums on the other. This technique is locally considered a true art and a specific feature of the Tropoja area, although only a handful of people still process plums this way. These days the technique is at risk of dying out.



Compared with other cultivars, Tropoja black plums have a 20% higher sugar content, stronger consistency of the crumb and better resistance to disease and pests. This variety possesses remarkable curative properties and its compote is traditionally believed to be an excellent treatment for respiratory diseases. Currently around 140 small- to medium-scale producers have this plum as their primary source of income, and around 600 to 800 seasonal workers are employed during the harvesting season, when the plums are picked by hand. The product is highly valued on the market, and the sales volume has significantly increased over recent years, from 431 to 1,600 tons. However, this geographical indication is threatened by genericization: Further away from the area of origin, consumers are often misled by similar products, labeled under the Tropoje black plum name, which in fact are other varieties cultivated in different regions.



## Boboshtica mulberry raki

**Product name:**

Boboshtica mulberry raki  
(Rakia e manit të Boboshticës)

**Category:**

processed fruit

**Production area:**

Boboshtica, Drenove and Trebicke

**Estimated number of producers:**

500

**Estimated quantity produced:**

600 hectoliters

**Estimated economic value  
of the production:**

€430,000

The Korça area, the driest region of Albania, is characterized by a transitional Mediterranean climate. Here, the villages of Boboshtica, Drenove and Trebicke have a long tradition of mulberry production, mostly transformed into *raki* (*raki* or *rakija* is the fruit brandy popular throughout the Balkans). Mulberry trees are gently shaken to collect the fully ripened fruits, which are then placed in large wooden vats and left to ferment for up to seven days. The must is then distilled twice using discontinuous distillation in copper alembics, and then cut with distilled water to obtain a pleasant final strength of 45% abv. This unique *raki* has a light green color and a delicate aroma of mulberries and herbs, and is famous throughout Korça and in neighboring municipalities. However, Boboshtica mulberry *raki* is often not easy to find for sale. Quantities are limited, and most producers process this product at home and sell it on the informal market. If local small-scale producers were given the tools to legally produce and sell their brandy, they could switch their production from homemade to artisanal and production could easily increase, making a significant contribution to livelihoods in the three villages involved.





## Vlorë Kalinjot olive

**Product name:**

Vlorë Kalinjot olive (Ulliri Kalinjot i Vlorës)

**Category:**

fresh fruit, oil

**Production area:**

southwest Albania  
(Vlorë, Mallakastër, Himarë and Selenice)

**Estimated number of producers:**

28,000

**Estimated quantity produced:**

25,000-35,000 tons

**Estimated economic value  
of the production:**

€9,000,000

Olive trees cover about 60,000 hectares in Albania, or 8.7% of the country's arable land, and 40% of these hectares are planted with Kalinjot olive trees. Although the Kalinjot variety is widespread throughout coastal Albania, it is in the region of Vlorë that it produces the best-quality fruit.

Several academic studies have shown that the Kalinjot olive cultivar is endemic to southwest Albania, where olives have been cultivated for the past 20 centuries, dating back to the Greek and Roman settlements. Kalinjot olives grown in the Vlorë region have a high oil content in grains due to a relatively high mesocarp/endocarp ratio. The large drupes can be pickled, cured or pressed into olive oil.

Given the number of producers involved and the quantity produced, establishing a protected geographical indication for the Vlorë Kalinjot olive could make a remarkable contribution to rural development in the targeted communities, which currently make relatively little income from this activity. Vlorë Kalinjot olives are sold raw or pressed into unrefined oil to big international companies who usually market them as their own production.







## Korça Gogozhar pepper

**Product name:**

Korça Gogozhar pepper  
(Speci Gogozhare i Korçës)

**Category:**

fresh vegetable

**Production area:**

Korça municipality  
(Dishnice, Goskove, Porodin and Zemblak)

**Estimated number of producers:**

300

**Estimated quantity produced:**

250,000 tons

**Estimated economic value of the production:**

n/a

With its semi-continental, relatively dry climate, as well as with its medium-clayey and slightly alkaline soil, the Korça area is traditionally considered excellent for growing peppers, for which it is renowned throughout the country. The pepper variety known as Gogozhar was introduced to the Korça plateau by migrants in the early 1930s, and has since become an important ingredient in the local cuisine. This bright-red pepper has a round shape typed slate with four to six ribs, with 6- to 8-mm thick flesh. This makes it very resistant to transportation. The pepper is also perfectly suited for pickling or baking, stuffed with cottage cheese or cream, which is how it is served in local restaurants. Currently there are about 300 small- to medium-scale producers of Gogozhar peppers, and three companies that process the variety into pickles. Overall, around 1,000 people are involved in the harvesting and processing season. The variety is consumed largely in its region of origin, though current trends show increasing interest and market opportunities also in other regions of Albania.





## Reç chestnu

**Product name:**

Reç chestnut (gështenja e Reçit)

**Category:**

fresh vegetable

**Production area:**

Korça municipality  
(Dishnice, Goskove, Porodin and Zemblak)

**Estimated number of producers:**

200

**Estimated quantity produced:**

600 tons

**Estimated economic value  
of the production:**

n/a

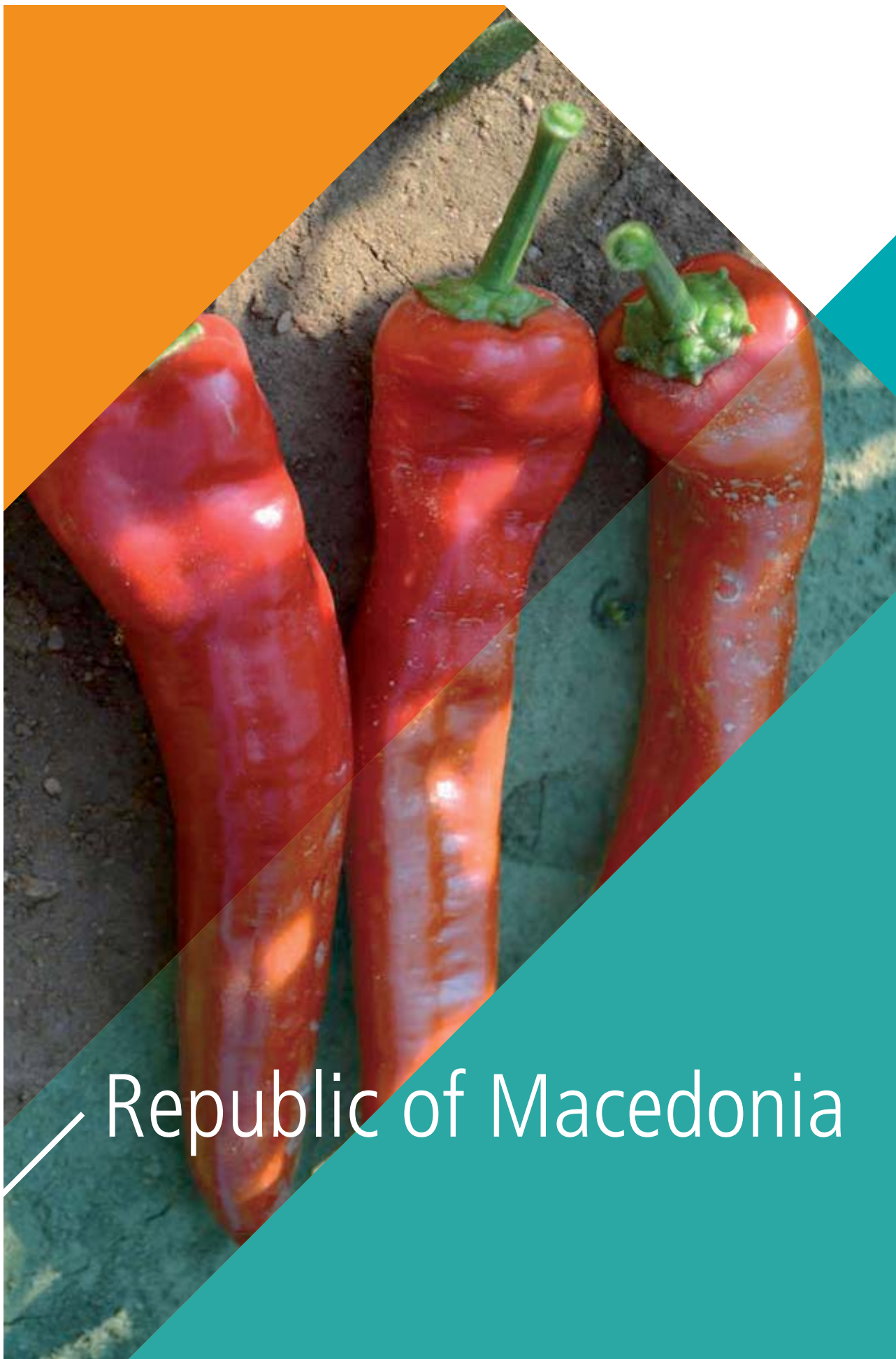
As it is often the case with chestnuts, the trees in the hills surrounding the Reçi area were first introduced to supplement the local diet when grain cultivation was not sufficient to meet the needs of the local population. Zeqir Zeneli began the large-scale planting of chestnuts here in the early 18th century. He is believed to have brought the variety from nearby Ulcinj, now in Montenegro.

The Reç chestnut trees produce relatively large nuts, with a medium-brown skin and creamy-white flesh. They are easy to peel and the fruits do not contain hulls inside the crumb, whose sugar content is 1.5% to 2% higher than other chestnut varieties common in the country. Currently around 70% of the local population collect the chestnuts, which are usually sold in bulk in the Skodra Lake area and

in Tirana, where Reçi chestnuts are widely considered to be of high quality. Because of the lack of protection for this geographical indication, local and national traders sell similar chestnuts under the "Reç" name, leading to significant economic damage for the community of producers of authentic Reç chestnuts.







Republic of Macedonia



# Bukovo pepper

**Product name:**

Bukovo pepper (Буковска Пипер)

**Category:**

fresh vegetable, spice

**Production area:**

Bukovo, Bitola municipality

**Estimated number of producers:**

16

**Estimated quantity produced:**

300 kg

**Estimated economic value of the production:**

€3,000

Peppers play a central role in Balkan gastronomy, and are particularly important to Macedonian cuisine. They are one of most cultivated and consumed vegetables in the region and are enjoyed with most meals. Bukovo, a small village situated a few kilometers from Bitola in southern Macedonia, has been famous through history for producing the best peppers, typically ground into a spice and added to soups and grilled meats. The region is so famous for its peppers that now in Macedonia the term *bukovec* is used to refer to any spice made from dried and crushed peppers. Cultivated from self-produced seeds (from the variety commonly known as ancient seeds), the Bukovo pepper has an elongated shape, a fine but meaty flesh and thick skin. After harvesting, the peppers are tied in long wreaths and left to dry first in the sun and then, when autumn arrives, in ovens at a low temperature for a few hours. When the peppers are ready, they are ground in traditional wooden mortars called *kutle* into a coarse powder, which is then sieved. This work is typically carried out on winter days, during a break from working in the fields. Intense ruby red in color, ground Bukovo pepper is sweet, aromatic and slightly spicy, with a long, pleasant finish.

So far, this geographical indication has not been protected, and suffers from unfair competition from other cheaper peppers, cultivated on the plains, which are sold on the market under the same name. This pepper could represent a remarkable tool for rural and agricultural development in an area suffering from severe depopulation due to constant and increasing rural-to-urban migration.





# Bistra kashkaval

**Product name:**

Bistra kashkaval (Бистра кашкавал)

**Category:**

cheese

**Production area:**

Mount Bistra

**Estimated number of producers:**

2

**Estimated quantity produced:**

8,620 kg

**Estimated economic value of the production:**

€155,160

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Mount Bistra is located in western Macedonia and belongs to a group of mountains in the Sharplaninska area, home to some of the highest peaks in the Balkan peninsula. In this region, shepherding and cheesemaking are still based on ancient traditions that date back to the Mijaks, a nomadic tribe that settled in the area in the 5th and 6th centuries. The production of cheese in the mountain pastures is an important economic activity, closely linked to the local identity, and has the potential to contribute to a revival of the entire region. Amongst the many dairy products of the area, kashkaval, perhaps the ancestor of all stretched-curd cheeses, is one of the most interesting. Evidence shows that Galichnik kashkaval, along with Pirok kashkaval, were the most renowned in the whole peninsula, and records show it was even being imported to the USA in the early 20th century. However, in the last decades the number of dairies processing this cheese has dramatically decreased. Currently only two *mandras*, one in Galichnik and one in the town of Lazaropole, still process the milk collected by the many shepherds grazing their herds in the mountain pastures. The reasons for this decrease can be found in the mass rural-to-urban migration that occurred in the last decades, as well as the lack of flexibility from the relevant national authorities in applying the European Union's hygiene and safety standards and regulations. Yet this product could represent an excellent protected geographical indication, due to its long history and its potential: The total area of the pastures within the defined area is around 12,707 hectares, and more than 40,000 sheep could be reared here. Cheese produced by the two existing dairy companies is entirely sold on the national market, and an increase in production could easily meet the growing demand for this high-quality cheese.







## Wild fig slatko

**Product name:**

Wild fig slatko (Слатко од диви смокви)

**Category:**

processed fruit

**Production area:**

southeastern regions of Macedonia

**Estimated number of producers:**

32

**Estimated quantity produced:**

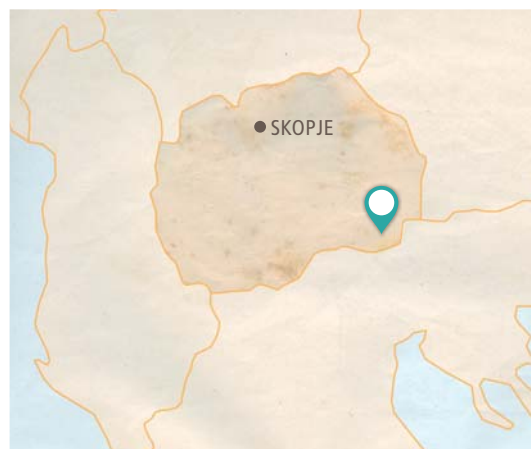
6,200 jars of 370 grams each

**Estimated economic value of the production:**

€25,000

The southeast of the country, from the Macedonian side of Lake Dojran to beyond the River Vardar on the Greek border, is home to many fig trees. A particularly large number of wild trees, whose green, pear-like fruit hardly ever reaches full maturity, grow on state land in the municipalities of Bogdanci, Gevgelja, Dojran and Valandovo. This glut prompted the local people to find a way of making the unripe wild figs edible and palatable, resulting in a recipe for a preserve called *slatko* ("sweet" in Macedonian). The local women carefully preserve the details of the recipe and its long and laborious process. Traditionally, the men pick the fruit as soon as they start to ripen. To make the preserve, the figs are first boiled nine times to eliminate their milky sap. Only then do the fruits start to release their sugars and can be drained. Separately, a syrup of water and sugar is prepared, to which the figs are then added. The resulting slatko is boiled for another hour, before lemon is added to preserve the figs' color. When the fruit has cooled and absorbed the syrup, the preserve is poured into glass jars.

Wild fig slatko has a herbal, spicy aroma, with slight caramelized notes. It is sweet on the palate, with a lightly astringent finish. Since 2010, 32 women have joined the Ekorosales association specifically to promote and improve wild fig slatko production, and thanks to the support of the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity, which established a Slow Food Presidium for this product, the community today relies on a detailed production protocol that combines the traditional recipe with standardized quality and hygiene. The quality of the product has already captured public interest, and the product regularly sells out when showcased at international events and fairs.





# Stanushina

**Product name:**  
Stanushina (Станушина)

**Category:**  
fresh fruit

**Production area:**  
southeastern regions of Macedonia

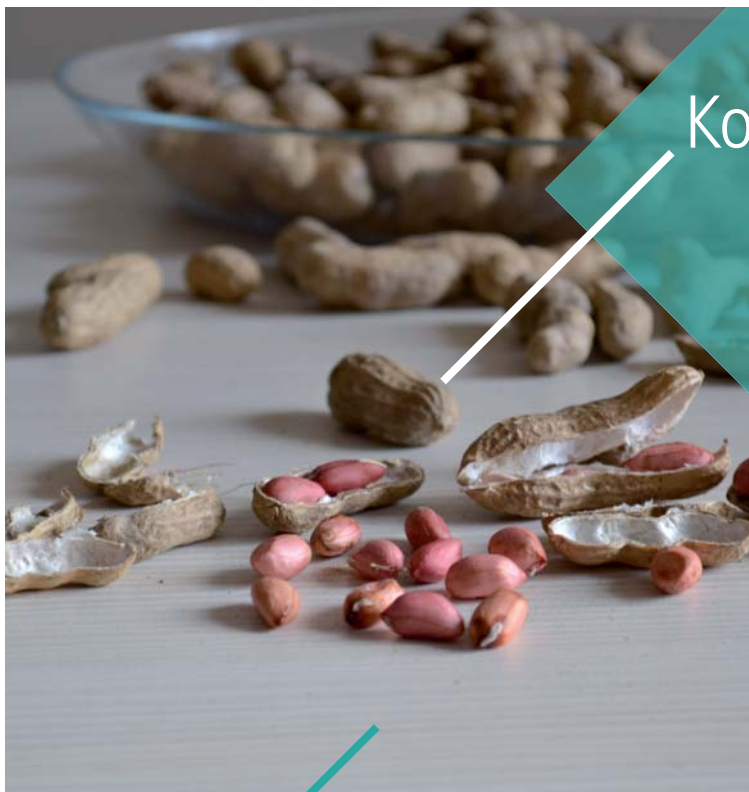
**Estimated number of producers:**  
32

**Estimated quantity produced:**  
n/a

**Estimated economic value  
of the production:**  
n/a

Located in the heart of the Republic of Macedonia, the Tikvesh region has long been known for its viticulture, with grapes cultivated here since the 13th century BC. Today this area accounts for 30% of the national production. Stanushina (also called Stranushina) is a grape variety grown here since Macedonia was part of the Ottoman Empire, and is named after its ability to adapt to steep slopes and dry, poor soils (*strmni strani*). The grape is mostly turned into a wine that perfectly expresses the terroir of the Tikvesh region, with an excellent balance of alcohol, tannins and acidity. Wine is not the only product obtained from Stanushina grapes. The variety is perfect for the production of madjun, an unusual concentrated syrup made with the addition of white clay, and *z'ta rakija*, a local brandy aged in oak barrels. The number of people who cultivate Stanushina grapes is decreasing as they are replaced by other more productive varieties, preferred by the big wineries that dominate the local market. However, 32 grape producers and two wineries still process Stanushina, and they are trying to preserve and promote this product on the local and national market. Protecting Tikvesh Stanushina as a geographical indication will help local producers to promote their product on the international market as well.





## Koleshino peanut

**Product name:**

Koleshino peanut (Колешино кикири)

**Category:**

fresh fruit

**Production area:**

Koleshino, Novo Selo municipality

**Estimated number of producers:**

20

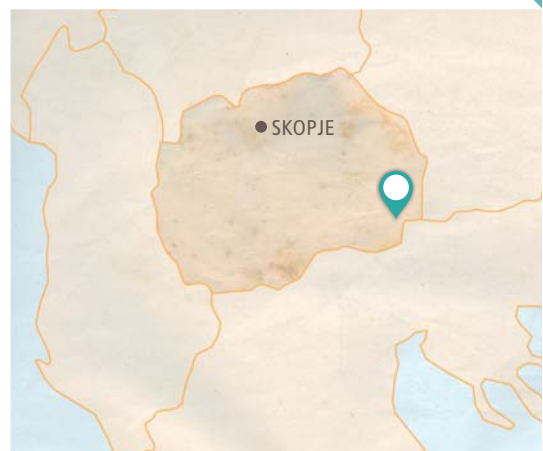
**Estimated quantity produced:**

3,000 kg

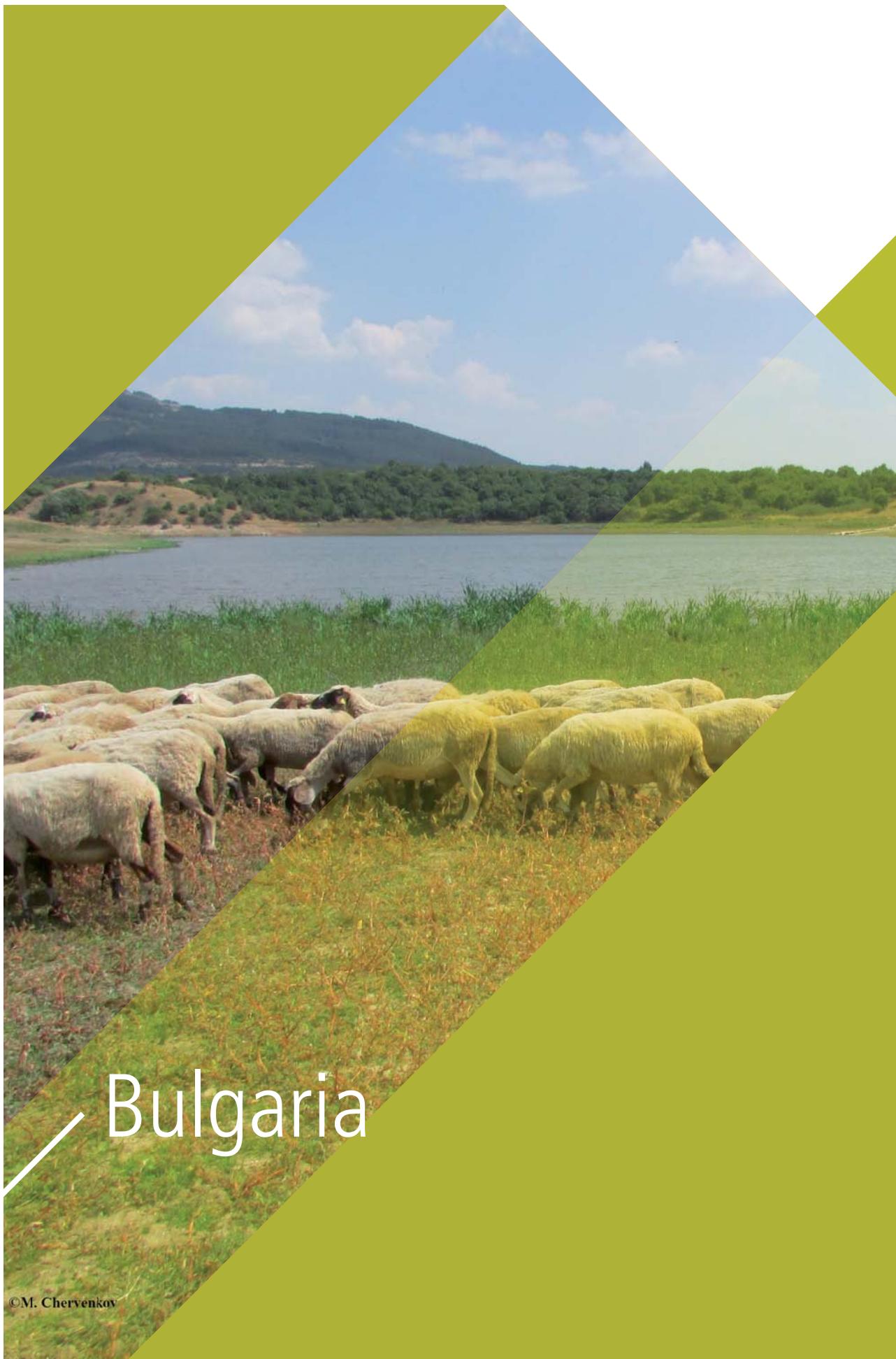
**Estimated economic value of the production:**

€9,000

Most people in the Republic of Macedonia associate the city of Strumica with peanuts, though few know that this fame originates in a nearby small town called Koleshino. Peanuts have traditionally been grown here, on the fertile slopes of Mount Belashica, for at least 80 years, and the knowledge related to their cultivation has carefully been passed down ever since. The plants are sown in rows and the peanuts are harvested by hand or with machines. The peanuts are small, with a pleasant taste and a purplish-red exterior. Once common throughout the Strumica region, Koleshino peanuts are now produced only in small quantities, primarily for domestic consumption, making them very difficult to find on the market. Consumers in the Strumica region and in Novo Selo recognize the reputation of these peanuts, although they are not aware of the connection between the product and its terroir or that this is a geographical indication. The product could build its own quality niche market both locally and nationally, though a long-term intervention would be needed in order to increase and standardize production of the peanuts, and to promote them on the market.







— Bulgaria



## East Balkan swine

**Product name:**

East Balkan swine  
(Източнобалкански свине)

**Category:**

fresh meat

**Production area:**

Smyadovo municipality, Shumen district

**Estimated number of producers:**

50

**Estimated quantity produced:**

75 tons

**Estimated economic value  
of the production:**

n/a

Some theories date the introduction of pig farming to the eastern Balkans to as far back as 2,500 years ago, when Greeks from the city of Megara, on the Ionian side, settled along the Black Sea coast of what is now Bulgaria. What is definite is that this breed has been documented here since the late 19th century, and in the 1970s it had a solid presence in the eastern Balkan mountains, with a population of over 5 million animals. This number has now fallen dramatically to a mere 4,000, mainly because the breed is not suitable for intensive farming. These animals can only be raised on extensive farms; they must be fully integrated with the local environment and allowed to graze freely in the oak and beech forests of Shumen, which offer the perfect conditions for pig rearing.

East Balkan pork has intrinsic features that make it suitable for a quality-oriented market niche. The marbled meat is rich in intramuscular fats. East Balkan pork has been shown to be very nutritious, containing both Omega-6 and Omega-3 essential fatty acids which contribute to the reduction of triglyceride levels and increase the level of "good" HDL cholesterol. In addition, the meat of the adult pigs is firm and well-structured, making it very suitable for the preparation of cured delicacies such as sausages, blood sausages and Elena ham. The East Balkan breed is still reared by 50 farmers, 19 of whom have established an association to improve the pig's protection and promotion. Protecting this geographical indication while providing ad-hoc support targeting access to slaughtering and processing facilities could make this product a driving force for local development, in an area highly affected by rural-to-urban migration.







# Razloga navpavok-meurche

**Product name:**

Razloga navpavok-meurche

**Category:**

cured meat

**Production area:**

Razlog municipality

**Estimated number of producers:**

4

**Estimated quantity produced:**

200 kgs

**Estimated economic value  
of the production:**

n/a

Anyone familiar with the food of the Balkans knows how difficult it is to find cured meats that are not smoked. Meurche—a cured meat encased in a pig’s bladder and preserved under ashes—is one example. Gorno Draglishte is a small town in the valley that separates the Vidin mountains, the highest in Bulgaria, from the Rila massif. In the past, each family would butcher its sole pig before Christmas. The pigs would have been reared in a semi-wild state and fed a diet based on acorns and nettles. Although the men would slaughter the pig, the preparation of navpovok-meurche was a task reserved solely for the women, who would unite in groups for the occasion. The recipe was complex and required great patience. The best cuts of the pig—the fat, leg and shoulder—were roughly cut into small cubes and mixed with salt, pepper and spices (cumin, dried dill seeds and leaves and coriander). The mixture was then packed into the pig’s bladder and stomach, and lightly pressed to obtain a flat, round sausage, weighing up to 2 kilos. The region’s harsh winters and bitter winds meant the meat could be cured without being smoked. Navpovok-meurche would be hung up to dry in the attics of traditional wooden houses. In late spring, when temperatures started to rise, it would be moved to the cellar and preserved in a special wooden container, completely buried in ashes, where it would age for up to 16 months. Navpovok-meurche was reserved for special occasions and mostly eaten uncooked, accompanied by a glass of *rakija*, the local brandy. Traditionally navpovok-meurche was kept until September, when the farmers could enjoy it after their hard work in the fields, harvesting potatoes and corn. Today only a handful of producers still preserve this tradition. However, the uniqueness of this product makes it a good candidate for investing resources, so as to preserve this geographical indication from extinction.







# Samardala

**Product name:**  
Samardala (САМАРДАЛА)

**Category:**  
processed vegetable

**Production area:**  
Thracian valley, central and east Bulgaria

**Estimated number of producers:**  
over 500

**Estimated quantity produced:**  
1.5 tons

**Estimated economic value  
of the production:**  
€40,000-60,000

Samardala—a rare plant subspecies (*Nectaroscordum bulgaricum* Janka, also known as *Nectaroscordum siculum* subsp. *bulgaricum* (Janka) Stearn or *Allium bulgaricum* Janka)—was first described as a separate species in the lily family in 1873 in the Dobruja region. The plant has a strong leek-like aroma and the many traditional tools available for samardala processing and still in use for home production testify to its centuries of use in the local cuisine. Samardala is largely cultivated in home gardens or gathered in the wild, and then usually processed into a powdered spice. This spice can be found on nearly every table in the region, as common as salt or pepper. It is traditionally obtained by pounding freshly cut samardala leaves (picked before flowering) with fine Black Sea salt in a special wooden container called a *chutura* (чутура), carved from a single tree trunk, with a *cheryaslo* (черясло), a long thin steel pestle. The resulting paste is air-dried in the dark so as to preserve the dark green color. The drying period lasts from a few weeks to more than a month depending on the weather. Two big industrial producers exist, along with several small-scale producers who sell their spice on the local market. The product's reputation is already established on the national market, yet no clear definition or production protocol exists for the cultivation and processing of samardala. Establishing a protected geographical indication could foster this process, and allow several small-scale farmers to further benefit from this ancient culinary tradition.





## Sofia lamb

### Product name:

Sofia lamb (Агнешко месо от Софийска (Елинпелинска) овца)

### Category:

fresh meat

### Production area:

originally western Bulgaria, specifically the municipalities of Elin Pelin, Botevgrad, Samokov, Gorna Malina and Svoge; currently also in Pernik, Kyustendil, Plovdiv, Pazardzhik, Kardzhali and Blagoevgrad

### Estimated number of producers:

30

### Estimated quantity produced:

total population of around 3,000 animals

### Estimated economic value of the production:

n/a

Sofia sheep, also known as Elin Pelin, have been reared in western Bulgaria for centuries, and used for wool and as a source of milk for the production of traditional Bulgarian white cheese in brine, yogurt (*kiselo mljako*) and other dairy products. Most importantly, though, this breed is known for the quality of its fresh meat. The meat is also cured, used to make sausages such as *pastyrma* (cured with local herbs) and *syzdarma* (fried and/or boiled lamb, seasoned and packed in an animal stomach). Western Bulgaria is also the region where traditional *sudjuk* sausages are prepared with 15% lamb from Sofia sheep. After years of decline during the 20th century, when the Sofia sheep nearly died out, since the beginning of the 2010s this breed has gained new popularity, and the number of animals has started to increase. This is due both to the quality of its meat, and the fact that Sofia sheep have a low risk of developing disease and a high fertility rate.

Protecting this geographical indication would boost its promotion on the national market, increasing demand for this product. The number of animals is still too small to sustain a significant increase in market demand, yet recent years have shown a constant upward trend in the number of Sofia sheep, and the quantity of meat available on the market.





## West Stara Planina lamb

**Product name:**

West Stara Planina lamb (Агнешко месо от Западностаропланинска овца)

**Category:**

fresh meat

**Production area:**

high plateaus of western Stara Planina (Balkan Mountains), Pernik and Montana

**Estimated number of producers:**

25

**Estimated quantity produced:**

total population of around 2,600 animals

**Estimated economic value of the production:**

n/a

The West Stara Planina sheep is an indigenous Bulgarian breed from the western area of the Stara Planina, or Balkan Mountains. It belongs to the group of sheep breeds with long, thin tails. The main area of distribution is around the Sofia, Vratsa and Pernik regions as well as the municipalities of Slivnitsa, Dragoman, Godech, Svoje, Botevgrad, Berkovitsa and Tran. The sheep's head has a straight profile line and is covered with wool to the eye line. The ears are erect. The ears, the eye area and the muzzle have a specific pigmentation ("splotch-faced"), usually black, but shades of brown are also possible. The sheep has a rectangular, comparatively small body with a deep, broad chest. The tail is thin, reaching the hock joint, but not the ground. The West Stara Planina sheep is used for milk and wool, though it is best appreciated for its low-fat meat, ideal for the preparation of the traditional Bulgarian lamb-and-pork sausage known as *sudjuk*.



In recent years a constant increase in the number of West Stara Planina sheep has been recorded, as well as in the available on the market. Protecting this geographical indication could further boost its breeding and the promotion of its meat on the national market.





# Conclusions

This series of information sheets proves that there is as much potential for the development of protected GIs in the Balkans as in the rest of Europe. This is in line with what similar research has shown for other countries in the region such as Serbia, Montenegro and Croatia.

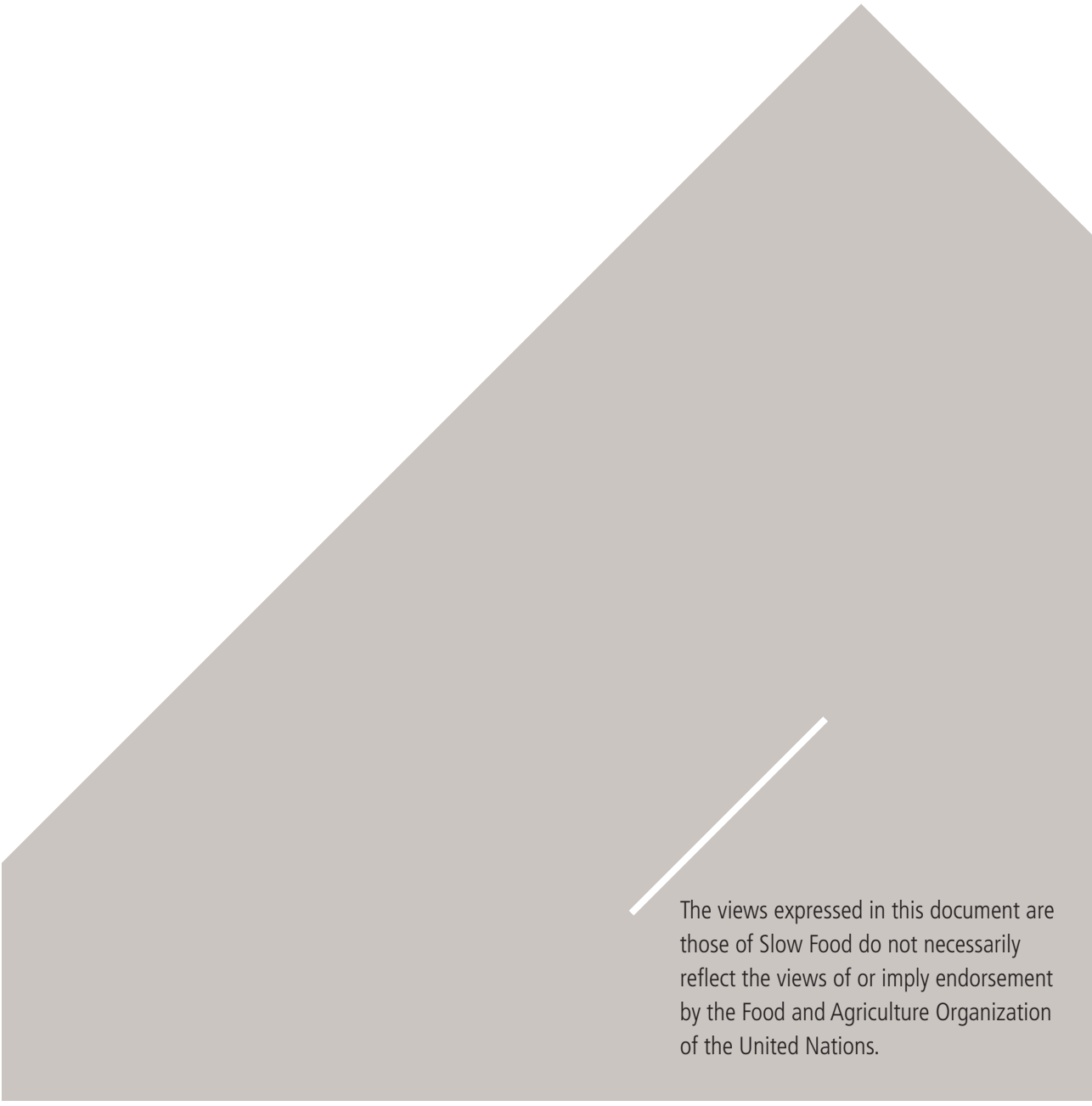
The purpose of these information sheets is not to explore what is preventing GIs from being developed in the region. However, we can confidently say that developing protected GIs in the region can make a real contribution to rural and agricultural development only if they are part of a wider action targeting micro- and medium-scale farmers, and supporting them in turning their homemade products into artisanal ones.

Examples such as nafpovok-meurche or Bistra kashkaval show that local food producers often face strict regulations that require them to make disproportionate investments in processing facilities. Registering a protected GI implies that the targeted production is legally recognized or authorized. This is not often the case in the Balkans, where several animal-related products are confined in the black or gray market. The relevant authorities at a national, regional or local level often do not make use of the margin of flexibility already built in to the current European legislation. Especially in accession countries like those of the Western Balkans, the national legislation for food safety and hygiene is often stricter than the EU rules, so local quality food products remain on the gray market because of the disproportionate financial input required to enter the market.

Other cases, such as the Koleshino peanut or Bukovo pepper, show that the community of local producers is unaware of the potential of their product—usually seen as a useless remnant of the past—and lack the confidence and self-esteem to make any kind of investment that could lead to a better capitalization of their gastronomic heritage. The decades of socialist regime, when farmers were only employees, as well as the general feeling of abandonment that dominates communities in rural areas, makes it hard for micro- and small-scale producers to develop entrepreneurship.

In general, each of the outlined products lacks adequate promotion at the national and international level, or both. Consumers are often unaware of these products or, when they do recognize their reputations, they often lack the ability to substantiate them, and to distinguish their quality features.

What is necessary, therefore, is a long-term process that takes into consideration three aspects: building the capacity of small-scale food producers, advocating with policy-makers and the relevant authorities about policy change and the creation of an environment that facilitates investments and raising awareness among the wider public about the economic, social, and cultural relevance of preserving these traditional origin-linked products.



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