LAG TRADIZIONE DELLE TERRE OCCITANE

INSIDE THE FLAVOUR OF BIODIVERSITY IN THE OCCITAN VALLEYS

Typical products and local varieties
A TRAVEL BOOKLET

IL TUO TERRITORIO
VIVO PERCHÉ VARIO

Benvengut!

The Occitane Valleys welcome you. Here, on the slopes of the Alps — between historic and art-filled towns and high-altitude trails, stone hamlets and forests — you can find whatever you're looking for: outdoor sports, music and fairs, history, traditions... **A world of flavour and local specialities** rooted in community life and the surrounding environment: a world as unique and diverse as the rural landscape itself.

This booklet invites you on **a journey into this agri-food biodiversity** — but it's just the beginning. The rest is yours to explore!

THE BEAUTY OF BIODIVERSITY IS THAT YOU'RE IN IT

A mountain product, the rediscovery of an ancient variety or native breed, the safeguard of a tradition. These may seem like distant, minor stories – but they're deeply connected to us: we are part of them, too.

Greetings, we are LAG. This booklet is an initiative of the Local Action Group **Tradizione delle Terre Occitane**, a public-private partnership supporting rural areas. The project is part of a wider campaign promoting agri-food biodiversity and local supply chains, launched by the four LAGs of the Cuneo province in collaboration with the Cuneo Chamber of Commerce.

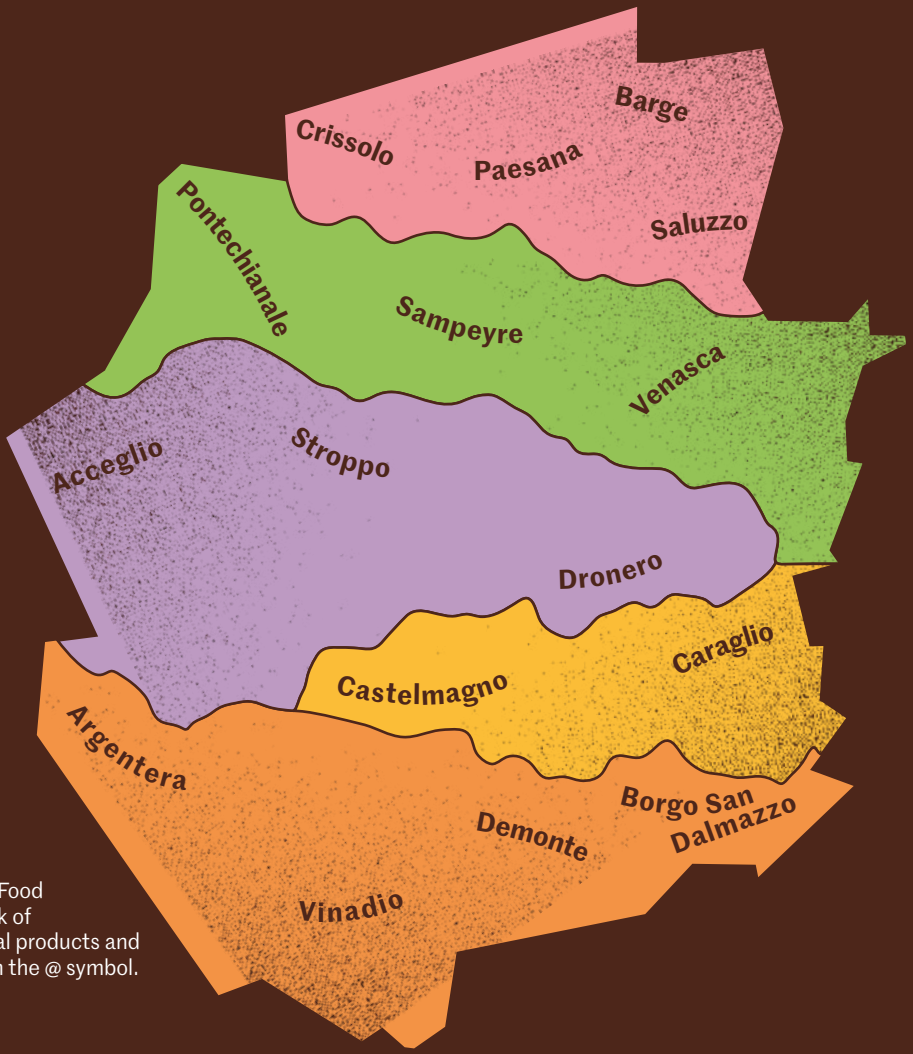
Variety is life. In the fields, in shops, at the table

Behind the definitions for "agri-food biodiversity" lies a universe of real values and shared benefits. Local foods embody a model of agriculture that **protects the environment**. In pastures, we find animal welfare, scenic beauty, **food quality**. In a healthy, seasonal and varied diet, there is our **personal well-being**. Everything is connected, as the saying goes.

Good for you, good for the world around you

The stories collected in these pages speak of sustainability and a harmonious relationship with nature – but also of **work and entrepreneurship**, traditions evolving into innovation, the **economic and social life of a community**. Biodiversity is all of this: a sense of belonging, culture and – of course – a matter of pleasure.

The varieties and breeds protected by the Slow Food Presidium, the internationally renowned network of communities committed to preserving traditional products and production methods, are marked in the text with the @ symbol.



STURA VALLEY

A land of abundance, for history and nature

Some visit it for the **natural parks** that lap the valley, the Maritime Alps Natural Park and the river park dedicated to Gesso and Stura. Others come for the **monuments and architecture**: better the imposing fortresses or the Sanctuary of Sant'Anna, the highest in Europe? Whatever the reasons, along the 60 km to Colle della Maddalena **a landscape of countless stories**, traditions and panoramas opens up – a whole world in one valley.

What to visit

MILITARY FORTRESSES, from the Forte Albertino to the Alpine Wall structures.

ECOMUSEUM OF SHEPHERDING, at the heart of community life.

LOU VIAGE AND LA ROUTO: routes in the footsteps of Occitan culture and pastoralism.

FOR INFO

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SAMBUCANA SHEEP@

Well, a more local story is hard to find. The Sambucana is an **indigenous sheep breed**, able to adapt to the steepest alpine pastures — it's named after the high valley village of Sambuco. It is bred for its lean, delicate **lamb meat**, thanks to the sheep's diet of hay and fresh grass. The rest of the **milk** is used to make *toumo* (cheese), while the **wool** is praised for its thermal properties. Nothing goes to waste.

One "original" animal, three productions

And yet it was in danger of disappearing. They had become a few dozen, then a collective effort led to their revival. Now, the Sambucana sheep is at the heart of the local economy, safeguarded by a consortium.

@ Slow Food Presidium

SALMON TROUT

It's not just mountain or cycling enthusiasts who make their way up the valley. The Stura and its streams are the ideal habitat for trout, a coveted **river fish**. More often than not, trouts are farm-raised and later **smoked over alpine softwoods**. And no, the "salmon" designation doesn't refer to a species — it simply describes the pink hue of the flesh, which is linked to a diet rich in natural pigments (like those found in carrots).

When biodiversity flows from the water

What about anchovies, then? It might come as a surprise that this key ingredient in Piedmontese cuisine (see *bagna caoda*) comes from the sea. The explanation lies in the old salt trade routes that crossed the Cuneo valleys on their way to Liguria.

MOUNTAIN SNAILS

Around Borgo San Dalmazzo, heliciculture – the exact name for **snail farming** – is a long-standing tradition. Here, snails are hand-picked in summer and fed **aromatic herbs** until late autumn. Once a staple in local inns and a protein-rich travel snack, they remain a tender delicacy for the most discerning palates.

Among the local specialities, there's even a mollusc

Crousét, ideal for sauces

FOR 10 PEOPLE

① **1 kg flour**
② **3 egg yolks**
③ **1 tablespoon olive oil**
④ **a pinch of salt**
⑤ **½ litre lukewarm water**

In Occitan, *crousét* means "hollow" – and the reason is clear. Once the dough is prepared, it's rolled into thin logs and cut into 1-2 cm chunks. Each little cube is then pressed with the thumb and dragged across a rough surface. The result is a plump, ridged pasta with plenty of folds – ideal for absorbing the sauce. Tip: try them with leeks and cream or *bagna grisa*, a local sauce made from aged cheese and cream, melted into a sauté of onion, garlic and milk.

GRANA VALLEY

Up towards the Sanctuary, there is something for everyone

On the map, it's the shortest, but the valley carved out by the Grana stream is **second to none for variety and richness** – quite the contrary. Past the lowland orchards, the road winds through a green gorge, then suddenly opens out onto **wide pastures framed by peaks**. Here, the majestic shrine dedicated to San Magno, protector of cattle, awaits pilgrims, hikers and gourmets under its colonnade.

What to visit

SAN MAGNO SANCTUARY, completed in the 18th century, over 1,700 m above sea level.

TERRA DEL CASTELMAGNO ECOMUSEUM, dedicated to the culture around the "king of cheeses."

CURNIS AUTA, the trail along the ridge of the mountains.

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CARAGLIO GARLIC@

Sweet, mild, easy to digest: it would seem anything but a description of garlic, but not here. In Caraglio and the surrounding area, garlic is a collective source of pride. Credit goes to an ancient variety with a **small, intensely aromatic bulb** and to a local family who preserved the original seed. And so a crop that still involves **manual processing** has become a symbol of belonging.

From endangered variety to success story

Rotating benefits the field. Garlic is cultivated in rotation with other plants: corn, potatoes, lentils. This way, the soil remains rich in nutrients and is kept productive without chemical intervention.

@ Slow Food Presidium

TRADITIONAL GRAINS

Yes, in Valle Grana there is no lack of grains. And not just common wheat: **rye, barley, oats** and **buckwheat** have been key crops here since the Middle Ages – so much so that the valley takes its name from them. Sowing wheat together with rye produces ***barbarià***, meaning "barbarised" – excellent for bread, cakes and pasta, such as Barbarini, a local version of tagliarini.

So many cereals to rediscover, in old and new specialities

Better get together. Farms, workshops and shops are all united to promote products made from historic grains. This cooperative initiative has resulted in projects and businesses driven by youths.

FINE BLACK TRUFFLE

Hunting for truffles is a six-legged job. Two belong to the *trifolao*, the truffle hunter (from *trifole*, the Piedmontese word for truffle), and four to the dog, whose highly-developed sense of smell is key to finding these **prized underground fungi**, renowned for their intense aroma. In a way, truffles themselves are the result of teamwork: their abundance depends on the soil's qualities but also on their symbiosis with certain tree species – **hazel, hop-hornbeam, downy oak**.

A hidden gift,
born of the generosity
of the forest

Madernassa pear cake

FOR 6 PEOPLE

① **100 g butter**
② **100 g white sugar**
③ **2 eggs**
④ **150 g plain flour**
⑤ **50 g unsweetened cocoa powder**
⑥ **3 Madernassa pears**

What makes this recipe special – though similar to other pear cakes – is the flavour of the Madernassa, a rustic variety originally from the Roero area and now embraced by Valle Grana, known for its crisp pulp and ideal for cooking. It's best to use some of the pears in the batter, made with butter, sugar, eggs, flour and cocoa, and some to decorate the top. Sprinkle it with sugar and bake for about an hour.

MAIRA VALLEY

Among the many surprises of the wildest valley

Venturing through a sequence of deep canyons and sudden clearings, discovering an exceptional **natural and historical heritage**. Beneath the gaze of the rugged peaks, oak and chestnut woods and conifer forests give way to **medieval churches, villages and archaeological sites**. Each basin, each side valley is an opportunity for discovery: you come for the hikes, you return for the flavour, the beauty, the culture.

What to visit

ROCCA PROVENZALE,
the pointy rock on the valley top.

SANTA MARIA ASSUNTA IN ELVA
and its late Gothic frescoes.

PERCORSI OCCITANI,
a network of almost 180 km of trails.

FOR INFO

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MOUNTAIN POTATOES

Not all potatoes are the same. Those from the Occitan valleys are full of flavour and **keep for longer**. Most importantly, at higher altitudes, the tubers benefit from a cool climate and “loose” soil — meaning well-drained and less compact. In short: less irrigation needed and **no chemical treatments**. To enjoy them at the table the traditional way, all that’s left is to choose the recipe.

A classic staple
in its ideal environment

GOATS AND CHEESES

It is the goat — a remarkable animal — that has no fear of steep slopes or rugged mountain terrain. Those who practise pastoralism here, as in other valleys, often pair it with **cheese production**, an equally fascinating craft. Depending on the methods and **ageing times**, from a few days to several months, goat’s cheeses range from tangy to sweet: biodiversity served on the cheese board.

If the mountain thrives
thanks to the herd

When the farm diversifies. Livestock farming is often at the heart of an enterprise that goes beyond cheese, embracing food service, hospitality, educational experiences — a conscious choice for economic diversification.

OFFICINAL PLANTS

Gentianella, **yarrow**, **génépy**, **wild thyme** – and the list could go on. These are some of the medicinal herbs found throughout the valley, used in pharmacy and cosmetics, as well as in herbal teas, infusions and, in a very different spirit, liqueurs. Among the stars of this Occitan bouquet there is also **saffron from the Terre del Monviso**, and – over in Valle Stura – the fragrant (and much-photographed) **lavender**.

In their scents, the essence of a place

Colour brings fertility. With their blooms, medicinal plants provide nourishment for various pollinators, also known as pollinating insects. A benefit for other crops, too.

Mountain potatoes and alhòli

FOR 5 PEOPLE

① **10 medium-sized potatoes**
② **2 egg yolks**
③ **180 ml olive oil**
④ **2 garlic cloves**
⑤ **salt**

The name says it all: *alhòli* is a Provençal sauce made by crushing garlic (*alh*) and slowly adding egg yolks followed by olive oil (*ueli* or *òli*). When it reaches a mayonnaise-like consistency, the sauce is ready to bring out the full flavour of boiled potatoes. *Bon apetit!*

VARAITA VALLEY

Travelling into the green: from orchards to the forest

If they call it the "**Emerald Valley**" there must be a reason. From the valley floor meadows to the high-altitude forests and pastures, the road climbs towards Colle dell'Agnello – the third-highest pass in Europe – through **endless shades of lush vegetation**. A paradise for hikers and cycling enthusiasts, but the villages, with their deep ties to Occitan musical culture, are just as fascinating.

What to visit

COLLE DELL'AGNELLO, rising to the altitude of 2,744 metres.

OCCITAN MUSIC AND COSTUMES, between village festivals and dedicated museums.

VARAITA TREKKING: 12 stages for 12 days.

FOR INFO

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COSTIGLIOLE ROUND APRICOT

Sweet in flavour, intense in aroma and abundantly juicy. With its easily recognisable **yellow skin** and firm pulp, the Tonda di Costigliole (Costiglione Round) is a great example of **adaptation to its environment**: cultivated since ancient times, this variety withstands low temperatures well and has a late bloom, thus avoiding spring frosts. And so, apricots can grow – and with such flavour! – even at the foothills of the Alps.

When an ancient variety bears fruit, and flavour

CATTLE FARMING

The sound of the cowbells announces their presence: the herd is coming! More than a tradition, farming is a symbol of the Cuneese region, a matter of identity. Here, cow's milk gives life to the **Toumin dal Mel**@, in soft, fragrant discs. But the sight of cattle grazing is familiar in all the valleys: tasting the **Nostrale**, made from raw milk in the mountain pastures, or the famous and celebrated **Castelmagno**@ from the Valle Grana is a must.

The quality of meat, milk and cheese is a matter of well-being

Pastures are three times as good. For the animals, who live and feed better. For us humans, who receive healthier, tastier food. And for the environment, as they preserve grassy lands from invasive species.

@ The Toumin dal Mel and the Castelmagno d'Alpeggio are Slow Food Presidia.

MOUNTAIN CHESTNUTS

Where there are mountains, there are chestnuts – and here, chestnut cultivation is a source of pride. The most widespread variety is the **Bracalla**, large and doughy, already traded in the Middle Ages, with the **Garrone Rosso** dominating the Stura Valley and the **Ciapastra** in the Po Valley. Dried or ground into flour, these autumn fruits were the **basis of the local diet**. And even today the chestnut tree, tellingly known as the "bread tree," remains an economic resource for many hamlets.

The source of nourishment that keeps the woodland alive

It's about caring. The presence of chestnut groves brings a direct benefit: keeping the forests clean and safeguarding the land, helping to prevent hydrogeological instability.

Ravioles, the Occitan gnocchi

FOR 4 PEOPLE

① **1 kg potatoes**
② **300 g wheat flour**
③ **1 egg**
④ **a pinch of salt**
⑤ **250 g Toumin dal Mel**

Ravioles hold a place of honour in the local recipe book. They're prepared by mixing mashed boiled potatoes thoroughly with flour, eggs, salt and soft Toumin dal Mel cheese. Once the dough is smooth, shape it into finger-thick rolls, cut them into small squares, then roll each into a tapered stick (about 3-4 cm long) using your fingertips. Cook in boiling water and serve to taste with melted butter, cream or cheese.

PO, BRONDA AND INFERNOTTO VALLEYS

A generous landscape, in a thousand tales

Geography itself tells the story of this land's variety. The Po Valley climbs high, beyond **woods and stone hamlets**, under the watchful eye of the sharp-peaked Monviso. The Bronda opens out among the hills of Saluzzo, a **land of vineyards and orchards**. The Infernotto gently merges into the northern valleys, historically linked to the Waldensian community. One thing stays the same: the connection between nature and culture.

What to visit

THE PO SPRINGS at Pian del Re, in the heart of Monviso Park.

THE VILLAGE OF OSTANA and its restored alpine architecture.

THE CICLOVIA DEL VISO, a scenic bike ride up and down roads and trails.

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More info at the **Porta di Valle di Saluzzo e pianura**

APPLES AND OTHER FRUITS

An apple a day... But which one? This is the heartland of many renowned Piedmontese varieties – from the native **Grigia di Torriana**@, a russet perfect for baking, to the bite-sized **Apples of the Bronda Valley**. And the fruit bowl doesn't stop here. There are ***ramassin***@, small plums that are not afraid of steep terrains, and **berries** from the undergrowth: blackberries, raspberries, redcurrants, blueberries.

Well-being comes in many shades.

Grass and the balance of orchards. If an apple falls in the Bronda Valley, it lands softly. The grassy cover is an integral part of a balanced ecosystem, a sign of the soil's health.

@ The Grigia di Torriana is part of the Slow Food Presidium dedicated to the Ancient varieties of Piedmontese apples. Among the Presidia there is also the Ramassin della Valle Bronda.

SALUZZO WHITE CHICKEN@

The hen is a truly fascinating animal in this area. It's rustic, small in size and roams freely across the meadows, proudly displaying its **beautiful white feathers**. The Saluzzo White Chicken is valued for its tender, delicately flavoured meat, often served in salads. It's a clear example of **animal biodiversity** representing a model of non-industrial farming.

A guarantee of free-range life and natural feeding

@ Slow Food Presidium

WINES OF THE SALUZZO HILLS

The vineyards on these mineral-rich slopes quenched the thirst of the Romans. Yet, it took the initiative of a small group of winemakers to revive local production, eventually leading to the establishment of a dedicated Denominazione di Origine Controllata (DOC, Controlled Designation of Origin) in the 1990s – the most recognised quality certification. For the connoisseurs, two native grape varieties stand out: Pelaverga and Quagliano.

In a glass,
ancient roots and
contemporary courage

What makes wines "heroic"? Wines are labelled heroic when they come from grapes grown in extreme environments, which make it difficult to work in the traditional way. At altitude, for example, or on steep slopes.

Flan of seasonal vegetables with fondue

FOR 6 PEOPLE

① **vegetables**
② **4 eggs**
③ **1 glass of broth**
④ **25 g butter**
⑤ **1 tablespoon durum wheat flour**
⑥ **200 ml milk**
⑦ **100 ml cream**
salt and spices

Do you love vegetables? In the Occitan valleys, choices are endless and every chef can create their own combination of leeks, carrots, cabbages, pumpkins, courgettes – as long as they're in season. The vegetables are sautéed, simmered in broth, mixed with beaten eggs and béchamel sauce, then blended, placed in moulds and baked in a water bath for about 30 minutes or less (around 180 °C). Finally, the most important element for a great fondue: cheese, strictly local.

MOUNTAIN HONEYS

Just like with milk, the flavour of the product depends on what the "producer" — in this case, the bees — feeds on. Up here in the mountains better speak of *honeys* in the plural: from **single-flower** to **wildflower varieties**, and those made from the **nectar of trees**, like chestnut honey, known for its bitter note. Plus, **"honeydew" honeys** made when bees feed on substances left behind by other insects. Some honeys are extremely rare: a good yield of fir honeydew, for instance, may only come once every few years...

So, why settle for just one flavour?

Bees — both allies and indicators. Quite simply, they make pollination between flowers possible: that's why bees are so essential. Their presence is a sign of a healthy environment.

WILD MUSHROOMS

Chanterelles, the hen-of-the-woods and the Honey mushroom: to each their shape — there's more than **porcini** to discover. Take the exquisite **Caesar's mushrooms** with their orange caps, or ***crave***, the local name for "porcinelli" bolete mushrooms. They show up unannounced in conifer and broadleaf forests, thanks to ideal climate conditions, and contribute to **enriching the soil**. *Chapeau!*

A kingdom of fantastic varieties, serving the ecosystem

Do you enjoy mushroom-picking? You can find the Funghi delle Vallate Piemontesi throughout the valleys, from Stura to Infernotto. But remember: forage responsibly and follow the rules!

FOOD - MY TOP 10

GRADE

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MAS PARAULAS EN OCCITAN

MY WORDS IN OCCITAN

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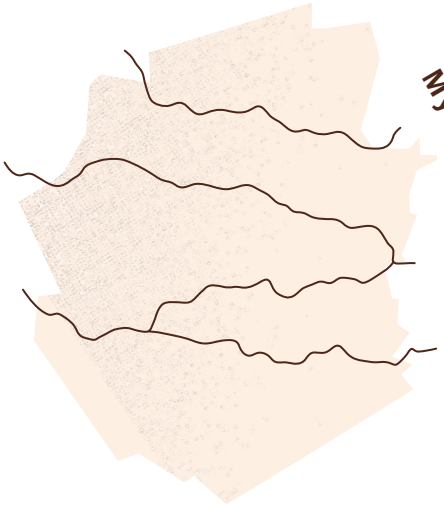

My itinerary

Who I met

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What I visited

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This booklet is a production of the
LAG Tradizione delle Terre Occitane

as part of the campaign
Il tuo territorio – Vivo perché vario

Special thanks to the Unioni Montane (Mountain Unions)
of the LAG territory.

Editorial project, words and graphics
Bellissimo

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To learn more about the agri-food biodiversity of these areas, we recommend the ***Atlante dei Sapori delle Terre del Monviso e Valli Occitane***, freely available for download on the Terres Monviso website.

For further information on LAG activities,
visit **tradizioneterreoccitane.com**

A project of

LAG Tradizione delle Terre Occitane

In collaboration with

CAMERA DI COMMERCIO CUNEO

Funded in the framework of

REGIONE PIEMONTE

Sviluppo Rurale Piemonte 2023-2027


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