

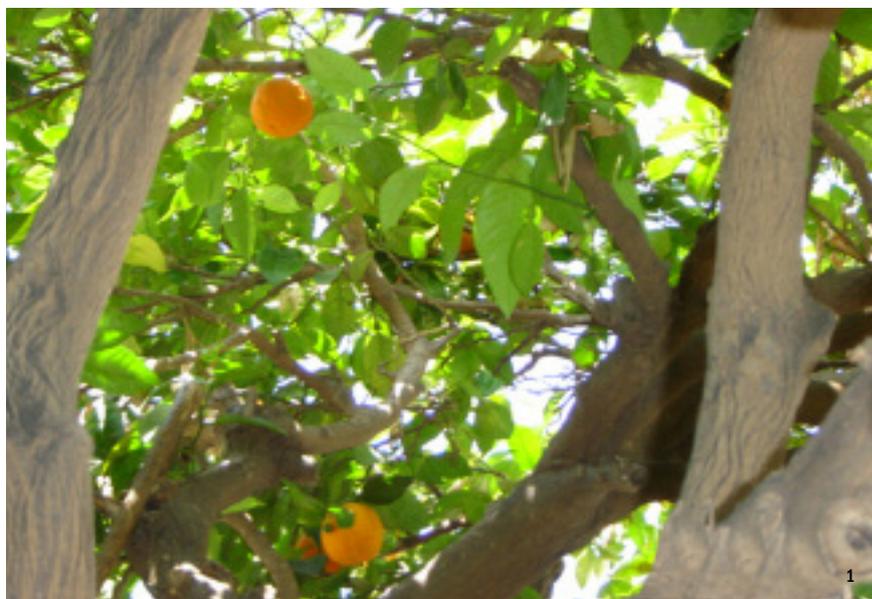
Protecting the Authentic Produce of Lebanon

The Ministry of Economy and Trade

Inventory Products Potentially Eligible for PDO's and PGI's* in Lebanon

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When a product acquires a reputation extending beyond national borders, it can find itself in competition with products which pass themselves off as the genuine article and take the same name. This unfair competition not only discourages producers but also misleads consumers. That is why, in 1992, the European Union created systems known as PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) and PGI* (Protected Geographical Indication).*



Lebanon has numerous reputed high-quality agricultural and handcrafts products. To take full benefit of these products' reputation and in the context of the conclusion of the Free Trade Agreement between EFTA States and Lebanon, Lebanon has expressed a strong interest to receive support in order to develop a strategy for the protection of its Geographical Indications (GIs). This is timely as Lebanon is in the process of drafting intellectual property legislation in the context of its accession to the WTO. For this reason, Switzerland is supporting Lebanon in the implementation of a strategy for the protection of Lebanese GIs at the Ministry of Economy and Trade through the identification of potential GIs and the elaboration of a relevant regulatory framework for the protection of GIs in Lebanon.

Geographical Indications, considered as 'products of terroir', are perceived as natural and authentic because they make reference to a limited area where natural conditions and know-how of producers provide special characteristics to the product.

The first product of origin in Lebanon which represents the typicity of the area of origin was the product of goat milk. Goats feed on natural pastures composed of herbaceous strata of shrub and woody plants in the large highland villages (Jurd). It is the concentration of the aromatic medicinal plants that determines the quality of the produced milk. The produced goat milk was initially preserved in different forms: in Bcharré, as Darfiyé Cheese Bcharré, and in Baalback, Chouf and Chebea, the goat milk was preserved as Labneh Anbris (Sirdalé).

The reference to a special "know-how" and "method of production" is important too. A GI product is linked to the region's history and culture. This is how Labneh Taenayel, Labneh Chtoura, Baladi Cheese Chtoura, and Shanklish Rahbeh became well-known and potentially eligible to be protected as GI.

In the Bekaa, the increasing demand for Labneh Chtoura, Labneh Taenayel and Baladi Cheese Chtoura has encouraged people of the region to extend their knowledge in order to develop their know-how. In North Lebanon, the region's reputation for Shanklish started when the Shanklish was aged in the caves of Rahbeh before being sold all over Akkar.

1- Orange Blossom Maghdoucheh.
2- Banana Damour.
3- Olive Trees, Koura.



The perceived proximity between consumers and products seems to be associated with the GI products. These are products of quality of origin where the consumer can refer to a certain producer in a specific geographical area to ask for "Kishek Baalback" or "Thyme South Lebanon (Zaetar Litanie)" or "Mouloukheya Arabsalim" or "Mouloukheya Kafarroumen".

The typical Arabian food, "Kishek Baalback" is influenced by the microflora and the richness of medicinal plants in the highlands of Baalback which confer to the kishek its typicity. The Thyme South Lebanon (Zaetar El Litanie), widely used in bakeries for "Manakish" (traditional Lebanese breakfast), grows widely in mountains and regions that surround the Litanie River. It possesses a high percentage of essential volatile oils where the flowers of the thyme determine its flavour and aroma.

The Geographical Indication product is a product bought along with the image of the geographical area: the landscape, the way people talk, dress, and behave. Olive Oil Koura, Olive Oil Hasbaya, Olive Oil Zgharta and Olive Oil Tyre are well differentiated. Each has its geographical characteristics.

Hasbaya olive oil has a special taste which is certainly due to the environment of the geographical area of the Hasbaya province. On the other side of the country is situated the largest olive oil producing region, "Koura".

The taste and typicity of this olive oil varies with the elevation of the region. Both Olive Oil Zgharta and Olive Oil Tyre are valued in the country as you may buy the image of the region with each product.

Handcrafts can also be a Geographical Indication because they reflect the history of a region in which a particular handcraft was initiated and evolved. "I buy blown glass Sarafand from Sarafand because I know that the Phoenicians lived in this special area and developed this craft by creating the most beautiful colorful and different shapes of blown glasses," as Lebanon consumers put it.

There is no doubt that the making of blown glass in Sarafand was one which the Phoenicians eagerly seized. Also in the south, but this time in 1770, the Haddad family in Jezzine created the "cutlery Jezzine" with a special handle made of a bird figurine with closed wings. In the 1480s, the governor of Tripoli established Khan el Saboun (a place which looks like a cave and in which Tripoli soap used to be produced and aerated). In turn, Amchit and Beit Chabeb are other regions known for their baskets and bells respectively.

Geographical Indications rely on a special taste, flavor, aroma and typicity that cannot be found elsewhere. Lebanon's climate and geography influence most of its agricultural products, especially fruits like Apricot

Baalback, Peach Bekfaya, Pears Danniyeh, Table Grapes Bekaa, Apple Kafardebian, Apple Mayrouba and Apple Baskenta.

The apricot of Baalback is characterized by an accentuated flavor and increased sugar levels while the peach of Bekfaya is distinguished by its very juicy, firm and higher quality. In North Lebanon, the pears of Danniyeh differ in colour, sweetness and size compared to common pears. "Mayroubi ya Touffah", "Damoury ya Moz" and "Adlouni ya Battikh" are Arabic expressions meaning that you cannot find these products except in Mayrouba, Damour and Adloun. In the late 19th century, Maghdoucheh gained a reputation for its orange blossom water and table grapes whereas Lebanon's fertile Bekaa Valley was reputed for table grapes and potatoes grown intensively there.

The protection of GIs rewards Lebanese traditions. It prohibits the transfer of GI products to non-local producers and the use of the name on "similar" goods originating from outside the designated geographical area. It encourages preservation of biodiversity, local know-how and natural resources, and contributes to social cohesion.

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