

The rural food way

Mmmmm, smells like something fresh and tasty!
This is the smell of the Balkan!

- Do rural areas still feed the cities?
- ▲ How do rural food systems work?
- Who produces what food, how and for whom?
- ↷ Do rural people have access to local food? And visitors?
- What is the role of farmers in food systems?

The **RUSTIK** project has been seeking answers to these questions since December 2023. The goal is to understand whether food is a resource for rural development, but also to create a sustainable tool for access to local food.

The RUSTIK team from Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“, together with the Local Action Group Troyan-Apriltsi-Ugarchin (LAG TAU)), is conducting a series of studies to identify and get to know the actors in the food system of the three municipalities - Troyan, Apriltsi and Ugarchin. The aim is to:

- Encourage demand for and access to local foods;
- ▲ Make local food producers more visible;
- Identify key issues that require special support;
- ↷ Encourage creation and development of local food policies.

Since April 2024, our team has held more than 60 meetings with food producers and processors, restaurateurs, and representatives of local food-related communities. Over 400 residents and visitors to the region have already completed questionnaires sharing their experiences and attitudes to local food. Two restaurants are running an experiment to inform diners about the local suppliers they work with and to record local food sales against overall sales. In short, RUSTIK has received and continues to receive support from various communities in its quest to promote local food as a resource for territorial development.

We have already shared some of our preliminary finds [here](#). In this post we will tell you about some of the most important finds from Ugarchin.

It is not a secret neither for locals nor for visitors that Ugarchin, placed in the company of Troyan and Apriltsi, fails to attract the necessary attention, mostly because it has not become a tourist destination. Not so, however, when it comes to food. In Ugarchin we found:

- One of the largest producers and traders of dried wild mushrooms, fruits and herbs in Bulgaria and the largest producer, trader and exporter of wild truffles. When you eat porcini mushrooms in butter in the restaurants in Troyan and Apriltsi, they almost certainly come from Ugarchin, from the production workshop of the families of Tihomir and Tsvetozar Michevski - https://hide.bg/about_us;
- ▲ Of the three municipalities in which we conducted the study, Ugarchin has the best demographic balance in terms of youth population. The food producers we contacted are young people who have either stayed or returned to build on what their parents created and develop it further, or have developed other businesses from which they use the funds to invest in food and drink



production. In the Bistro „Pod oreha“ you can not only see how this happens, but you can also taste locally sourced food prepared according to traditional recipes. The Pastuhovi family, who will welcome you at „Pod oreha“, also grow organic cherries, which you can pick yourself in early summer.

- Lesidren is undoubtedly the most economically developed village in the municipality and this is due to two food enterprises - a dairy with the same name „Lesidren“ and a meat processing enterprise with its own closed production cycle - cooperative „Doverie“. The two together employ over 80 people in the village and are looking for more.

<https://koopdoverie.com/>

<https://mandralesidren.com/>

- ▮ Agriculture is indeed the most economically important sector in Ugarchin, and grain production has the largest share, both in terms of turnover and jobs created. However, the production of foods other than cereals is what stands in the sustainability of the family economy in the municipality. Plums, cherries, wild berries, sheep, bees....this is the unknown food of Ugarchin, some of which reaches Troyan and Apriltsi, but visitors hardly learn about it.

- Family farms perform a very important but unknown social function - they create employment and a way of life for people with special needs. In the villages near Ugarchin you can still see a small home farm that is self-supporting thanks to sheep farming, taste the delicious sheep cheese, but also smell the specific smell that we often frown at, but without which the production of real food is impossible;



- ▮ The Sopot dam, which is a kind of border between the municipalities of Troyan and Ugarchin, opens the opportunity for fish delicacies, for fishing and tourism lovers.

