Explore the world of Mediterranean dairy products
LACTIMED aims to foster the production and distribution of typical and innovative dairy products in the Mediterranean by organising local value chains, supporting producers in their development projects and creating new markets for their products.

The project is implemented under the ENPI CBC MED Programme, and is financed, for an amount of EUR 4.35 million, by the European Union through the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument.

From November 2012 to May 2015, ANIMA and its 11 partners will organise a hundred operations targeting the various stakeholders of the dairy chains of Alexandria and Beheira (Egypt), the Bekaa and Baalbeck-Hermel (Lebanon), Bizerte and Beja (Tunisia), Sicily (Italy) and Thessaly (Greece).

This brochure aims at highlighting the Mediterranean typical dairy products, an eloquent reflection of the territories they come from, their rich identity, biodiversity, traditions and men’s know-how.
Egypt is one of the largest producers of milk in Africa and the Middle East, accounting for 16.3% of the dairy product market value. Cheese comes out on top with 38.8% against 28.4% for fresh milk. The milk sector is a large part of the food chain. It sector includes raw milk production and its transformation into products such as milk for consumption, butter, cheese, yogurt, concentrated milk, milk power and ice-cream.

Settled in the west of the Nile Delta, the El-Beheira Governorate is bordered to the north by the Mediterranean sea, to the west by Alexandria and Matrouh and to the south by Giza and El Menofia. Alexandria sits in the northwest of the Delta and stretches some 70km across the coast, bordered to the north by the Mediterranean, to the east by Beheira and to the west by Matrouh. The Alexandria and Beheira region is reputed for its rich soils and particularly diverse agriculture and the value given to its traditional dairy production skills.

Beheira is by far the most important governorate in terms of agricultural land, estimated at over 682 hectares. Its strategic geographical location and warm climate are only two of its many advantages: it also holds top position in fruit and vegetable production and attracts a lot of investment in agriculture and tourism. One of the dairy sector’s main strengths is its access to large quantities of cow and buffalo milk. The region enjoys a high demand for milk, profitable opportunities for the sector, particularly in milk collection, and promising perspectives for traditional Egyptian dairy products (particularly for the Ras/Romi cheese and milk-based desserts) on Middle Eastern and African markets.

Fresh milk in Egypt is mostly used to prepare traditional products such as cheese (White, Ras and Mozzarella), yogurt, Rayeb, Labneh, cream, butter and ice-cream. In Egypt, traditional lunch consists of a block of soft cheese and a slice of bread and dairy products play an essential role in the Egyptian diet. Egyptians are large consumers of yogurt, which, along with yogurt to drink, is seen as the most dynamic sector of the dairy industry and accounted for 20% of the total market value in 2012. Traditional Egyptian milk desserts are produced locally by small traditional operates and are often produced on site by hand. The most popular of these are served in the shop (Roz bel Laban, Achoura and Mehalabeya). There is also a high demand for traditional specialty dairy products, such as Ras cheese, Domiati cheese and cold dairy desserts (Mehalabeya, Om Ali, Ashoura, Roz del Laban).
LABAN RAYEB OR LABAN MATRAD: Curdled milk speciality, can be drunk fresh or used to make Karish, which itself is used to make Mish. Smells like buttermilk, slightly sour to taste.

LABAN ZABADY: Traditional yogurt made from buffalo or cow milk. Extremely smooth, white to off-white when prepared from cow milk. Characteristic taste and full, pleasant, slightly sour aroma. Firm and thick consistency.

KARISH CHEESE (KARTESH OR KAREISH): One of the most popular fresh cheeses made from skinned buffalo or cow milk.

MISH CHEESE: Made from fermented cheese kept in brine for several months or years. Dates back to 3200 B.C. When fully mature is yellowy-brown with a strong salty, sharp flavour. Can add Kosba (sesame paste), Morta (precipitate remaining from boiling butter), fennel, red pepper, chilli, aniseed, khella, thyme, black cumin, etc.

DOMIATI CHEESE: Egypt’s most popular soft cheeses made in brine that dates back to around 332 B.C. Salt is added directly into the cheese at the first stage of production. It is salty and delicate when fresh and sharper and firmer when aged.

ISTANBULI CHEESE: Cheese made from pasteurised buffalo milk. Crumbly, white cheese that has a remarkably fresh, delicate flavour lifted by spicy notes from being studded with Jalapeno chillies.

ROZ BI LABAN: Traditional Egyptian rice pudding thickened with corn flour and sprinkled with raisins and cinnamon.

MEHALABEYA: Dairy pudding served cold, perfumed with rose water or orange blossom and garnished with pistachios, chocolate, mango, etc.

ASHOURA: Traditional Egyptian dessert served cold made with corn-starch, wheat and sugar. Its name comes from the tenth day of Muharram, the period in which it is traditionally prepared. Sprinkled with lightly toasted raisins, walnuts and cinnamon.

SAMN BALADI: Clarified butter, is golden yellow when made from cow milk and green-white when made from buffalo milk.

Rumi is Egypt’s main pressed cheese. It comes from Kefalotyri, introduced into Egypt by the Greeks and belongs to the same family as Pecorino Romano and Manchego. Rumi is made from cow milk and whole buffalo milk. Peppercorns are sometimes added. It is then aged for 3-4 months in a cellar at its natural temperature. The 10kg disks can be sold whole or sliced. It has a distinctive aroma and is more or less salty depending on its maturity. Egyptians eat it with wholemeal pita bread, baladi bread and a cup of hot tea. In both countries its name (Gebnah Torky) means “head”. It is likely that the Ras cheese came from the Balkans and arrived in Egypt during the first stages of the industrial revolution after 1818.
The Thessaly region in central-eastern Continental Greece, with a surface area of 14,037km², 50% of which are plains, is home to 9.5% of the country's crop and livestock farms (over 76,500 farmers). Thessaly is very attached to its cheese production tradition inherited from the nomadic or semi-nomadic origins of most of its farmers and cheese makers (Sarakatsani, Vlach, and others).

As elsewhere in Greece, pastures and small ruminants abound across the region as do traditional dairy products (yogurts, desserts, cheeses) made from sheep and goat milk. Demand for the most emblematic of these, such as Feta PDO, traditional sheep milk yogurt and drained cow milk yogurt, is growing. Although goatherds are decreasing slightly, sheep farming (mostly Chios and Karagouniko breeds) is flourishing thanks to increasing demand. There has been a certain decline in dairy cow numbers (exclusively Holstein) with cow farms becoming more efficient and profitable. Between 2005 and 2010, the share of milk in the region’s agricultural GDP rose from 8 to 10%. Thessaly is a making a name for itself as a major dairy player, producing nearly 20% of the country’s milk and over 30% of the national Feta production.

This upholding of traditional cheese-making techniques, passed on from generation to generation, also leaves its mark on local cuisine, inseparable from its territorial identity.

Greece produces a large range of dairy products, cheeses in particular. Out of the 84 PDO products, 21 are cheeses. Among these only one is exclusively made in Thessaly: the Graviera Agrafon. Yoghurt (cow, sheep or goat) is also one of the many traditional dairy products made in Thessaly, along with butter, creams, rice pudding, and more. There are five main types of Greek cheese: cheese in brine like classic Feta and Mpatsos; soft cheese like Galotyri and Kopanisti; and low in fat whey cheeses, like Anthotryo and Mizithra. Although several cheeses, such as Feta, are produced in several regions the richness of the Thessaly pastures gives them unique organoleptic properties. Cheese is an essential part of Greek cuisine, making Greece the largest consumer of cheese in the world (around 30kg per annum and per capita)!
Typical dairy products

**TELEMES:** White to yellow fromage blanc, soft to semi-hard cheese with or without holes; aged three months. Rich aroma, pleasantly delicate and slightly sour to taste.

**ANTHOTYROS:** Cheese made from sheep and/or goat milk. Fresh or ripened, semi-soft to semi-hard conical or spherical, dry and white cheese. Fresh variant less sharp and creamier.

**GALOTYRI:** One of the oldest cheeses produced by Thessalonian traditional methods. Made from sheep and/or goat milk and aged for two months. Soft, malleable texture (spreadable), rind-less, fresh and creamy. Sharp, refreshing, pleasant flavour and aroma.

**MANOURI:** Rind-less, generally cylindrical cheese made from whole sheep and/or goat milk. Light fragrance, delicate butter flavour.

**MIZITHRA:** Made from the whey of sheep, goat and/or cow's cheese. Fresh or aged, rind-less spherical cone cheese.

**XINOTYRI:** Slightly tangy cheese made from sheep and/or goat cheese. Lumpy or smooth yoghurt texture. Very low in salt.

**KEFALOTYRI:** Cheese made from sheep and/or goat milk in cylindrical moulds. Rich, creamy aroma, slightly salty with spicy notes.

**MPANTZIOS:** Semi-hard to hard white cheese made from sheep and/or goat milk in brine. Also eaten fried to release its full aromas.

**TSALAFOUTI:** Fresh, smooth and creamy cheese made from sheep and/or goat milk, almost like yoghurt. Made at the end of summer when the milk is very rich. Pleasantly salted and very slightly sour.

**NIVATO:** Spreadable fromage blanc with a slightly lumpy texture. Ancient cheese from the Elassonas mountains made entirely from goat's milk. Light, long-lasting salty and slightly sour flavour.

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The number one of Greek cheeses, Feta is made from sheep and/or goat milk left in brine and produced exclusively in Macedonia, Thrace, Epirus, Thessaly, Central Greece, Peloponnese and on the island of Lesbos. The breeds of animals that produce the milk have adapted to the region and feed mostly on natural vegetation, which gives the cheese its characteristic flavour, particularly in Thessaly with its rich biodiversity. Feta is a soft cheese aged for at least two months. It has a pleasant, slightly sour flavour and a strong aroma. It can be eaten on its own, as part of a meal or with fruit. It is also used to prepare pastries and traditional dishes. Organic Feta is also produced from organic milk. Feta has been held the European GPI label since 2002. The animals' fodder of wild grasses, flowers and herbs means they produce one of the creamiest and most flavoursome milks in the world. It has notes of thyme, marjoram and pine. Feta is firm, compact and crumbles easily. It is rind-less and full of minute holes. Both goat and sheep versions have a salty tang and are rich in flavours that evoke the pasture. Goat milk Feta: white, very fresh flavour with notes of wild herbs. Sheep milk Feta: slightly richer and creamier, ivory white.
Sicily, the largest island in the Mediterranean (23,327km²) sits between the tip of the Italian boot and Cap Bon in Tunisia and is surrounded by the Ionian, Tyrrenian and Mediterranean seas. Its rich and fertile land, its geographic location and clement climate make it an excellent agricultural environment. Its 1,734,00 hectares are mostly made up of mountains and hills.

Sicilian dairy and cheese production dates back to the Greco-Phoenician period and some products as far back as the pre-Hellenistic era. For a long period of time agricultural products were the only form of money between the diverse populations, an ancient tradition that has bequeathed Sicilia with the vast palate of distinctive cheeses it enjoys today. The Sicilian landscape stands out for its vast natural pastures (Italy’s third largest region, with 76% of its livestock in pasture), high-quality forage, notable animal diversity and large sheep and goat herds (second largest region in Italy). Cow milk (mostly Frissonne and Brune breeds, favoured for their productivity) is highest in demand. Sheep milk (in particular Pinzirita and Comisana breeds) production is slightly waning while goat (Maltese, Girgentana, etc.) and buffalo milk production continue to climb. Sicily’s organised and prosperous dairy sector is built around distinctive, traditional products deeply attached to the Sicilian region and its generous terroir.

Sicily produces a diverse range of top-quality products thanks to the remarkable organoleptic properties of its milk. These products draw their character from their regional grounding, native animal breeds and traditional know-how. Indeed, Sicilian dairy production wins renown for its large variety of working methods, raw materials – for example some cheese makers use vegetable rennet such as fig sap – and key products, whether made from cow milk (Caciocavallo, Provola from the Nebrodi or Madonie Mountains, Tuma Persa, etc.), sheep milk, (Maiorchino, Pecorino Siciliano, Piacentinu Ennese, Canestrato), goat milk (from the Girgentana goat breed), or combinations of these (mixture of whey from cow, sheep or goat cheese). All in all, a windfall for Italian consumers: currently over 90% of the country eats cheese at least 2 to 3 times a week!
PECORINO SICILIANO PDO: Hard cheese made from raw sheep milk. Cylindrical cheese made from fresh, whole milk and clotted with lamb rennet. Pale-yellow rind, semi-hard. Retains the pattern of the reed baskets it is moulded in.

RAGUSANO PDO: Stretched curd cheese made from cow milk. Cheese made from raw whole milk clotted with lamb or goat kid rennet. Parallelepiped, smooth, thin, hard rind, pale yellow to straw-coloured, browns as it matures. Also comes in a smoked variety.

PIACENTINU ENNESE PDO: Pressed cheese made from raw whole sheep milk. A sprinkle of saffron is added to the cheese before it is pressed into reed baskets forming a cylindrical shape. Bright yellow dotted with black peppercorns.

VASTEDDA DELLA VALLE DEL BELICE PDO: Stretched curd cheese made from sheep’s milk. Ivory, smooth, rind-free cheese made from imperfect Pecorino that is reworked and stretched.


PROVOLA DES NEBRODI: Stretched curd cheese made from raw cow milk. The caciocavallo paste is kneaded according to traditional methods (accuppatina) into a oblong. Hard, smooth, pale-yellow rind with ivory white paste. Variants with butter and lime.

FIORE SICANO: Soft cow milk cheese (also called Tinnazzu t’i vacca) Created by chance after an incomplete fermentation of a canestrato, the cheese’s surface is covered in Penicillin-type natural mould that gives the thin rind its green-grey colour. White, soft and compact paste.

RICOTTA: Dairy product obtained from the whey of cow, sheep, goat or buffalo milk. Dairy product made from whey. Some varieties are dry cured, aged (Ricotta salata), smoked (Ricotta affumicata) or baked.

TUMA PERSA: Hard cheese made from cow’s milk. Raw milk clotted with goat kid rennet. Cheese moulded then left to age for 8 to 10 days before reaching an ochre colour that darkens during the “cappatura” (preservation in olive oil and ground pepper). Soft, light paste.

Caciocavallo Palermitano is a traditionally made from the remarkable milk of Cinisara cows. This breed of cows produces very little quantities of milk that is remarkably fragrant and rich in fat thanks to the typical vegetation of the mountain scrubland around Palermo.

The rectangular stretched curd cheeses are aged in cool, natural cellars on wooden shelves. After maturing for a year the Palermitano offers a long-lasting flavour, with hints of citrus, sage and straw, accompanied with a subtle spicy endnote.
The Bekaa Valley lies to the east of Lebanon between Mount Lebanon and the Anti-Lebanon Mountains, varying between 650 and 1000m above sea level. It covers approximately 4,000km², namely one third of the country. The Bekaa governorate, including the district of Baalbek-Hermel, is rich in fertile soils. Boasting the country’s largest pastures and natural plains, the region is home to extensive dairy farming. Nearly 75 to 80% of Lebanon’s cows, 45% of goats and 35% of sheep are raised in the region, which produces 188 tonnes of milk a day. The region alone covers 44% of the country’s total farming land and investments in farming and the dairy industry continue to grow. Dairy has long been a part of the Bekaa Valley’s history, known as Lebanon’s dairy basin.

The Lebanese mountains that frame the Bekaa plain (eastern slope of Mount Lebanon and western slope of Anti-Lebanon) are home to scrubland, vegetation, cherry trees, plum trees and wild vetches suitable for sheep (Awassi) and goat farming. The Bekaa region has 1,500 dairy cow farmers for over 18,000 cows, and approximately 150 creameries with a predominance of small traditional dairy operations (SMEs and micro-enterprise). The dairy sector is well established and organised and also reflects its ancestral know-how: several dairy farms date back centuries showing how the trade is passed on from generation to generation.

Typical dairy products in Lebanon (particularly Anbaris, Darfiyi, Chanklich, and goat Labneh) are traditionally prepared from goat and sheep milk, the latter being the consumer’s preference. Indeed, consumers pay particular attention to the nutritional properties of milk and endeavour to seek out and buy typical regional products. Demand is also national and international, mostly from the Lebanese diaspora. Regional integration and a willingness to preserve specific skills play a key part. Many people, even more so in rural areas, make their own Laban or Labneh, which are a key part of Lebanon’s cultural heritage. Changes in consumer tastes also influence the diversity of products like Labneh, which used to be slightly sour and has progressively been produced with more neutral flavours.
**LABAN**: Soft, homogenous cheese made from pasteurised cow, sheep or goat milk. Eaten by itself or with certain traditional dishes (like Sfiha), particularly in summer.

**AYRAN**: Dairy drink made from cow’s milk, very popular in summer as a refreshing drink. Goes very well with thyme pita or mincemeat.

**FROMAGE BALADI**: Cheese made from cow, sheep or goat milk. Soft, homogenous and easy to cut. It can be put in brine to last longer and give it a very sharp flavour. Used in Lebanese mezzes.

**AKKAWI**: White to pale-yellow cheese made from cow or sheep milk, like a pressed Baladi. Semi-hard and homogenous. Is used in certain traditional deserts such as Knafi.

**HALLOUMI**: Whitish to pale yellow, semi-hard cheese made from fresh or pasteurised cow, sheep or goat milk. Presented as rectangle folded in half. Can be eaten fresh or grilled.

**DOUBLE CREME**: Pale, very soft cheese made from cow or sheep whey. Popular at breakfast and dinner.

**MCHALLALI**: Off-white to pale yellow semi-hard, compact and stretchy cheese strung into a plate. Made from cow, sheep or goat milk.

**KECHEC**: Off-white powder mixture made from thick yoghurt (Laban), salted cow, goat or sheep milk and ground bulgur wheat with a distinctive aroma. Remarkable nutritional values and preservation qualities. Key ingredient for many traditional recipes.

**CHANKLICH**: Cheese made from sheep or cow milk coated in thyme, cumin and spices. Presented in brown or greenish balls and used in Lebanese mezzes.

**DARFIYI**: Round farm-produced white cheese made from goat’s milk and stored in a goatskin pelt. Mostly farm-produced. Very strong flavour with a slightly bitter note loved by adults, gourmet-lovers and eco-tourists.

*Labneh*

**A vital part of Lebanese culinary culture, Labneh is a white, soft cheese made from cow or goat milk. It comes in several varieties: Labneh balls from goat milk, garlic Labneh, Labneh balls preserved in olive oil, and more recently, Labneh with herbs, etc.**

**More that just a cheese, it is a central part of Lebanese cooking and is a component of many mezzes.**

**It is easy to spread and typically eaten for breakfast or dinner. Most Lebanese families eat Labneh every day and often make it themselves, particularly in rural areas.**
With their natural resources and favourable climate, diverse landscapes of mountains, valleys and verdant plains, the Bizerte and Beja governorates together form an economic hub based on agriculture. With only 5% of the national population, the Bizerte Governorate produces 13% of the country’s dairy production, namely 132,000 tonnes per annum.

Forage, crops and natural pastures flourish in the region that enjoys more rains than the rest of the country. Bizerte, Nabeul, Beja and Jendouba governorates are home to more than 50% of Tunisia’s cattle making it one of the largest milk production areas in the country. Goats are also present in large numbers, whether local, Maltese, Damascus or alpine breeds.

Most operations are small, family-run farms showing the strong pull of tradition. Consumption of milk and dairy products has been steadily growing since the 1990s, increasing from 83 to 110 litres/person between 1994 and 2001!

Sheep (exclusively Sicilo-Sarde breed) and cow (mostly Holstein) farmer is well established, encouraging the production and consumption of typical dairy products. Cheese made from sheep milk (Sicilian, cooked or fresh, rigouta, testouri, etc.) stands for a large portion of production. The transformation of sheep milk, a technique passed on from father to son, is a part of the region’s traditions and is enhanced by fiercely guarded secret family variants.

The region’s dairy production mostly consists of cheeses (rigouta, testouri, etc.) and milk drinks (rajeb and iben), but also traditional butter, smen, yogurt and others. People in rural areas consume three times less dairy products than urban populations! The most popular product remains milk to drink (with consumption increasing 10% over the past 10 years) followed by yogurt, which is growing in demand and variety, and finally cheese. Indeed, Tunisia is one of the lowest consumers of cheese in the Mediterranean. It has four main categories of cheese: fresh cheese in brine made from cow and/or sheep milk; hard cheese like Gouda or Saint-Paulin; melted cheese; and cheese makers’ specialities, stretched curd or soft cheese with bloomy rind, among others, and are still produced in minimal quantities.
Typical dairy products

TRADITIONAL LEBEN: Refreshing drink made from fermented milk served with traditional dishes such as couscous. Ancient recipe. Customarily churned with a goat kid’s skin. Sometimes served with pieces of butter.

ZEBDA ARBI: Traditional butter made from cow milk after extracting the leben. Method inherited from pastoral traditions.

SMEN: Cooked fermented clarified butter made from Zebda arbi. Used in cooking or for pastries.

TESTOURI: Distinctive, hand-moulded cream cheese made from cow milk from the village of Testour (north Tunisia). Sometimes flavoured with pepper or parsley.

RIGOUTA MADE FROM COW MILK: Soft cheese made from cow or sheep milk and whey.

SICILIEN FROM BÉJA: Soft cheese made from raw Sicilo-Sarde sheep milk. Can then be preserved in brine, dried and grated.

TAYEB COOKED CHEESE: Rounds of cooked cheese made from Sicilo-Sarde sheep milk.

SHEEP MILK YOGHURT: Fermented Sicilo-Sarde sheep milk.

FROMAGE AFFINE LES TROIS FERMES: Matured cheese from Beja made with Sicilo-Sarde sheep milk and moulded into 2kg rounds.

Rigouta from Beja is an artisanal whey cheese made entirely from Sicilo-Sarde sheep milk. The presence of this breed in Tunisia is an illustration of centuries-old exchanges across the Mediterranean. To optimise the production of various cheeses, producers use the whey by-product to make rigouta by adding fresh milk. Rigouta is set in perforated cylindrical pots of 0.6 to 1.5 litres. It is very popular in Tunisia and can be eaten as is but is also used in many of regional dishes.

This distinctive cheese, which can also be made from sheep milk, is very popular. The method for making Rigouta from cow milk has not changed. The technique for transforming sheep milk is passed down from father to son, giving it a strong regional identity. However each producer adds their personal touch and subtle nuances to enhance their own Rigouta.
The 2007-2013 ENPI CBC Mediterranean Sea Basin Programme is a multilateral Cross-Border Cooperation initiative funded by the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). The Programme objective is to promote the sustainable and harmonious cooperation process at the Mediterranean Basin level by dealing with the common challenges and enhancing its endogenous potential. It finances cooperation projects as a contribution to the economic, social, environmental and cultural development of the Mediterranean region. The following 14 countries participate in the Programme: Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Palestinian Authority, Portugal, Spain, Syria, Tunisia. The Joint Managing Authority (JMA) is the Autonomous Region of Sardinia (Italy). Official Programme languages are Arabic, English and French.

The European Union is made up of 28 Member States who have decided to gradually link together their know-how, resources and destinies. Together, during a period of enlargement of 50 years, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedoms. The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and peoples beyond its borders.