

ALPINE FOOD HERITAGE CHARTER

Preamble

We, people who care about the future of the Alps, endorse safeguarding of Alpine Food Heritage through shared responsibilities and its inscription on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

We understand Alpine Food Heritage as the set of sustainable production and consumption practices, knowledge and skills, productive landscapes, and traditional food produced in Alpine regions through relying on the commons, shared goods and services as well as on mutual assistance.

We believe it is crucial for the future of the Alps, as it:

- provides the basis of Alpine cultural identity and a way of life,
- contributes to the resilience of Alpine communities,
- motivates people to live in Alpine rural areas,
- preserves productive landscapes and biodiversity,
- fosters the sustainability of the Alps,
- boosts the attractiveness of Alpine regions.

The aim

The Alpine Food Heritage Charter is a participatory and shared document that calls on every citizen, association, company, institution, and authority to assume responsibility in ensuring the safeguarding of Alpine Food Heritage and to support its nomination to the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Alpine Food Heritage

The Alps are one of the greatest mountain ranges in Europe, stretching across Austria, Slovenia, Italy, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Germany, France, and Monaco. Commonly referred to as Europe's mountain heart, they are characterized by high pyramidal peaks, glacial valleys, ribbon lakes and fast-flowing rivers. These features, together with unique climate and soil conditions that depend on altitude and sun exposure, create extraordinary biodiversity, nurtured through pastoral and agricultural activities of humans who settled here as early as in Palaeolithic times.

Over centuries of living in these peripheral areas, with their challenging weather conditions, scarce agricultural land and dispersed settlements, Alpine communities developed specific livelihood strategies and managed to maintain them through the transmission of knowledge and way of life to succeeding generations. Communities have been producing and consuming locally, migrating seasonally from lower to upper areas and back, practising agriculture in harmony with nature, relying on transhumance and food conservation, sustainably using

natural resources, striving for self-subsistence, and carefully using material goods. They have depended on the sharing of goods and services, relied on mutual aid, and developed multi-functional skills. The combination of self-sufficiency with an openness to other cultures and an ability to accommodate innovations from other areas has shaped Alpine landscapes and resulted in the development of an extraordinary food heritage in Alpine areas. Supported by the growth of Alpine cities, hubs of technological and social innovations with a booming tourism and catering industry promoting critical consumption, this heritage contributes to the competitiveness and attractiveness of Alpine territories as sustainable settlements.

Alpine Food Heritage is one of the most important markers of this particular (macro)regional identity. Being community-based, it creates strong links among very diverse people, reproduces common values, and embeds a certain quality of life. It is a mix of region-specific tangible (productive landscapes, outbuildings, crops, dishes, kitchen devices and utensils) and intangible aspects (farming, wine-growing, breeding, hunting, freshwater fishing and beekeeping traditions, cooking and conservation methods, recipes, eating customs, social connotations, family and community relationships, rituals and festivals). The mixture of diverse traditions has resulted in a versatile mixed food culture. Varieties of long-lasting bread, sour vegetables, cheese, smoked or salted meat and long-lasting meat products, Alpine herbs and fruits, and sweet dough delicacies are among the most renowned examples of dishes which, given the specific manners of their production and consumption, preserve Alpine cultural values and characterize the uniqueness of this region.

Alpine Food Heritage is at risk of losing its distinctiveness

Urban sprawl, mass tourism, heavy traffic, air and water pollution, intensified farming, and global warming have a negative effect on the quality of life of the inhabitants and threaten traditional ways of living in the Alps. Despite remaining the most densely settled mountains in the world, the Alps currently face depopulation and abandonment of higher-altitude areas, causing a decline in traditional farming lands and occupations as well as a loss of knowledge and skills, traditions, practices, and values shaping Alpine Food Heritage. The safeguarding of Alpine Food Heritage is thus essential to preserve the culture and identity of the inhabitants of the Alps, to re-establish a sustainable way of living that respects the fragile environment, to promote and preserve the quality of Alpine landscapes, and thereby to ensure sustainable development of the Alpine regions for the benefit of current and future generations.

In 2003, UNESCO adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which supports communities, groups, and individuals in identifying and defining their intangible cultural heritage, and raises awareness about the need for its safeguarding. Alpine communities from Austria, Slovenia, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, and France thus jointly endeavour to convince their states for a serial nomination of Alpine Food Heritage on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Commit to Alpine Food Heritage safeguarding

Overcoming these challenges, supported by the inscription on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, can only be achieved through the active involvement of citizens, communities, associations, businesses, institutions, and authorities in the Alps and beyond, and their commitment to heritage safeguarding. Everyone can assume and share the responsibility for the future of Alpine Food Heritage.

As farmers and food producers, we can

- continue with the production of locally specific food, preserving vital rural landscapes and biodiversity while favouring local varieties of seeds, plant species, and animal breeds;
- follow ecological principles in farming and food transportation to provide healthy food to consumers and contribute to environmental sustainability;
- valorize the products by charging fair prices that respect the dignity of our work and highlight differences compared to mass-produced goods;
- cooperate with local restaurants and tourism businesses in short supply chains to promote local food culture;
- preserve, take pride in, and promote traditional farming practices, food conservation know-how, recipes, and cooking techniques, as well as dishes that constitute the basis of Alpine Food Heritage.

As citizens of the Alps, we can

- support Alpine farmers and artisan food producers by buying their crops and produce;
- visit local markets to take advantage of the varieties of local products;
- prepare Alpine dishes at home and transfer the knowledge to younger generations;
- form or join local heritage communities, volunteering in activities aiming to preserve and promote Alpine Food Heritage;
- encourage local institutions and authorities to support safeguarding of Alpine Food Heritage.

As tourists in the Alps, we can

- respect the natural environment to preserve biodiversity and the quality of rural landscapes;
- ask Alpine restaurants to serve locally produced traditional food;
- attend Alpine food festivals and other events to support local communities;
- visit local museums to learn about Alpine food and other cultural heritage;
- promote Alpine Food Heritage and food festivals by spreading the word to friends and communities worldwide.

As cultural and educational institutions, we can engage in

- safeguarding local Alpine Food Heritage through studies, documentation, analysis, and promotion;

- fostering the transmission of Alpine Food Heritage by organizing forums and cultural events as well as by providing performative spaces;
- improving common knowledge on Alpine Food Heritage by educating people about local traditions and their own potential for heritage safeguarding;
- transmitting knowledge to younger generations;
- supporting Alpine heritage communities by helping them recognize and valorize their food heritage and motivating them to take an active part in heritage activities;
- helping Alpine communities to preserve rural landscapes as their living space and the basis of local identity;
- cooperating with similar institutions inside and outside the region or country in common actions addressing Alpine Food Heritage;
- convincing the authorities of the need to safeguard Alpine Food Heritage and support heritage communities.

As scientific institutions, we can engage in:

- researching Alpine Food Heritage, especially its effects on human health, cultural identity and way of life, biodiversity, landscape preservation, and sustainable development;
- studying connections between rural and urban Alpine areas to understand the rural-urban dynamics in food production and consumption;
- cooperating with cultural, education, and tourism organizations as well as media to ensure better transmission of knowledge to the field;
- collaborating with diverse scientific communities to provide transnational multidisciplinary insights into the importance of Alpine Food Heritage;
- pressuring the states and the European Union to fund multidisciplinary research, transnational programs, and applied projects supporting the development of Alpine regions.

As tourism organizations, we can

- promote traditional Alpine restaurants and festivals as tourist attractions;
- create thematic tourist packages focusing on Alpine farming and artisan food production, processing, preparation, or tasting while highlighting the relationship between the quality of food production and the quality of rural landscapes;
- foster regional and transnational Alpine food routes or trails;
- support local communities organizing food-related activities and events.

As media, journalists and influencers, we can

- spread the word on the uniqueness of Alpine Food Heritage;
- promote Alpine farmers and food producers, processors and retailers;
- cooperate with local communities and cultural organizations to innovatively promote their activities;

- inform local businesses and authorities about the potential of Alpine Food Heritage for regional identity, local economy, and sustainable development.

As food processing businesses and retailers, we can

- buy and sell food produced in the Alpine area, supporting traditional farmers and food producers;
- set fair prices for Alpine Food Heritage products;
- use promotional strategies that highlight special characteristics of these products by telling their stories and educating the taste of consumers;
- support initiatives such as territorial brands and local networks that promote Alpine Food Heritage;
- respect the rights of heritage communities when branding the products or registering geographical indications.

As restaurants and chefs, we can

- buy ingredients produced in the Alps to support local farmers and food producers;
- contribute to the promotion of Alpine Food Heritage by offering dishes that are inspired by Alpine traditions, using authentic ingredients, and respecting the rhythm of the seasons;
- learn traditional recipes from Alpine communities and acknowledge the role of tradition bearers;
- support initiatives such as territorial brands and local networks that promote Alpine Food Heritage.

As local and regional authorities, we can

- facilitate the access of Alpine communities, associations, institutions and businesses to know-how on food heritage preservation, transmission, and promotion;
- adopt adequate measures to protect Alpine Food Heritage in our region and support local farmers, artisan food producers, and heritage communities in their endeavours to preserve and promote it;
- actively support the network of actors aiming to inscribe Alpine Food Heritage on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and connect them to national authorities.

As national authorities, we can

- work with local and regional authorities in the Alps to support safeguarding of Alpine Food Heritage and create sustainable ways for its use in the local economy;
- adopt measures supporting sustainable development of Alpine regions in our country;
- cooperate transnationally for the recognition of the Alpine Food Heritage as a common heritage worthy of safeguarding and holding a crucial role for sustainable development of the Alps;

- support the nomination of Alpine Food Heritage on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and promote the endeavours of Alpine communities transnationally.

We, people who care about the future of the Alps, believe in the urgency of safeguarding Alpine Food Heritage for the identity, way of life, landscape, biodiversity, and sustainable development of the Alps. When we share responsibility, it is safeguarded more efficiently.

Preserving Alpine Food Heritage is our responsibility, too.