

# PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION OF PUMPKIN SEED OIL IN GORIČKO

## TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY PRACTICES

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*Food is not only a component of the material world, but it also plays a vital role in economic, social, and symbolic practices. In the past, food production and consumption on the part of the Slovenian population strongly depended on regional origins and the local economy. Some such regional products include olive and pumpkin seed oils. Pumpkin seed oil has had a special role in the diet of the inhabitants of the Goričko region. Today it is an important factor in economic development as well as an expression of regional affiliation and local cuisine. The Styrian-Prekmurje pumpkin seed oil from the north-eastern part of Slovenia has been protected in the European Union with the Geographical Indication-PGI.<sup>1</sup>*

Keywords: Goričko region, agriculture, pumpkin seed oil, food culture, heritage

*Hrana ni le sestavina materialnega sveta, temveč ima pomembno vlogo tudi v gospodarskih, socialnih in simbolnih praksah. V preteklosti je bila proizvodnja in poraba hrane prebivalstva na Slovenskem močno odvisna od regionalnega izvora in lokalnega gospodarstva. Med regionalne proizvode sodita tudi oljčno in bučno olje. Bučno olje je imelo v prehrani prebivalcev Goričkega posebno vlogo in je danes pomemben dejavnik gospodarskega razvoja, pa tudi izraz regionalne pripadnosti in lokalne kulinarike. Štajersko-prekmursko bučno olje iz severovzhodne Slovenije je v Evropski uniji zaščiteno z geografsko označbo-PGI.*

Ključne besede: Goričko, kmetijstvo, bučno olje, kultura prehrane, dediščina

### INTRODUCTION

Goričko is a mostly hilly region in the far north-eastern part of Slovenia along the Hungarian and Austrian border. The region got its name from its hilly relief as well as from the *gorice*, as vineyards are called in Goričko. For centuries they were an essential source of income for the local population. At the end of the 19th century, phylloxera almost destroyed vineyards and caused significant emigration among the local population. It is estimated that as much as one-third of the population in Goričko migrated from the region by the end of the nineteenth century, while some people would also leave Goričko occasionally for seasonal work abroad (Novak 1947: 14; Baš 1961: 6; Trstenjak 2006: 32).

Geographical, cultural, and historical Goričko was located between different nations and their political formations. Until 1919, the region of today's Goričko belonged to Železna županija (Vas megye). After the First World War, Goričko became part of the Yugoslavian and Slovenian territory, but it was poorly connected with central Slovenia and its administrative and economic centers. This is why the economic development of this part of Slovenia was less advanced in comparison to other regions (Baš 1961: 69).

In 2003, Goričko Nature Park was established as a protected area in order to attract new opportunities for development to this remote but culturally rich and biologically very diverse Slovenian region, opportunities associated primarily with sustainable economic

growth and tourism. Past measures and the creation of the Goričko protected area also had a significant impact on local agriculture. In this paper, I explore how the establishment of Goričko Nature Park influenced a regionally characteristic agricultural activity: the production and the promotion of pumpkin seed oil.

In the first part of the article,<sup>1</sup> I discuss some of the geographical, historical, and cultural features of the Goričko area as well as explain the research methods and material used to address this question. I then proceed to discuss the history and the methods of producing pumpkin seed oil in Goričko and examine how the establishment of Goričko Nature Park and related tourism affected this economic activity. To do so, I analyze three selected cases of oil mills in Goričko Nature Park. In the last part of the text, I provide examples of both traditional and modern uses of pumpkin seed oil in the Goričko diet. I also portray understandings of pumpkin seed oil as a typical local product and part of local heritage, of which the inhabitants of the Goričko region are very proud and to which they are very attached.

## NATURAL AND CULTURAL FEATURES OF THE GORIČKO REGION

Goričko is an agrarian landscape, covered by mixed forests, fields, and extensive meadows that provide excellent feed for livestock; therefore, cattle breeding, pig breeding, and poultry are economically important. Fruit-growing was more prevalent in the region in the past, though high-altitudinal orchards with various fruit species – especially apple trees, pears, and plums – are still preserved and produce quality fruit for making spirits, cider and fruit juices. Agricultural land is divided into small plots with hamlets of smaller farms. The fertility of the land is poor; ethnologist Vilko Novak wrote that while the average family in Ravninsko needs to process six *orals* of soil for their own needs, a peasant family in Goričko needs at least twice as much, that is, twelve *orals* (Novak 1947: 15).<sup>2</sup>

The tradition of food self-sufficiency and the associated agricultural activity have been preserved in this area for a more extended period than in most of the Slovenian territory; some estimate it lasted until the end of the twentieth century (Huber 2014: 172). Local farmers used to produce the food they needed for everyday meals, while fewer food products were available for sale. The activities that were necessary for the farm families' own needs prevailed. Pumpkins for the production of pumpkin seed oil, which are mainly cultivated today, were an important regional staple of the local diet. Pumpkin seed oil was used for dressing salads and dishes from legumes to oysters, as well as for baking and seasoning. In the 1970s and 1980s, residents of Goričko started to work in the nearby industrial plants – especially in Murska Sobota. At this time, Goričko's agricultural landscape began to lose

<sup>1</sup> This article was written as part of the project *Zavarovana območja ob slovensko-madžarski meji. Izzivi sodelovanja in trajnostnega razvoja / Protected Areas along the Slovenian-Hungarian Border: Challenges of Cooperation and Sustainable Development* (J6-8254, 2017–2020) funded by the Slovenian Research Agency.

<sup>2</sup> One *oral* is 5,755 m<sup>2</sup>.



Agricultural landscape near Križevci, 2019. Photo: Maja Godina Golija.

its character, with many agricultural areas becoming covered with forests. Residents also started to buy more food in stores.

The years of isolation and the decline of Goričko were also influenced by the changed political situation in Hungary and, consequently, the closed border after the Second World War; this made trade and contacts with the neighboring Hungarian region of *Őrség* more difficult. As a result, one can argue that in the last hundred years, the inhabitants of Goričko have had to satisfy most of their needs in their close surroundings, that is, within the family and village communities (Huber 2014: 172).

With the geopolitical changes of the last three decades—the fall of the Iron Curtain, the creation of the Republic of Slovenia in 1991, and the entry of Hungary and Slovenia into the European Union and the Schengen Area, borders were reopened, resulting in the greater mobility of goods and people in Goričko.

## NOTES ON MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

The production of pumpkin seed oil, the skill of pumpkin seed oil-making, and the consumption of pumpkin seed oil in the diet of Goričko inhabitants have not yet been adequately researched. Ethnological sources and literature only briefly mention the significance of production and consumption of pumpkin seed oil in Prekmurje as well as in the

Goričko region (Novak 1947, 1960; Bogataj 1989; Baš 2004). It is difficult to explain why this economic activity has not been better studied so far, given the vital role it has played in the social culture of the local population in the past.

For this reason, I present this living element of agricultural practice and heritage in Goričko. My main interest is the production of pumpkin seed oil and its uses in the regional food culture and economic development, especially in tourism. Pumpkin seed oil and modern pumpkin seed oil products (e.g., pastries, cakes, and liqueurs) are essential characteristics of the traditional and modern food of this area and part of its heritage, and it is presented as such to visitors of Goričko Nature Park. In this context, I understand heritage to be a metacultural process that accords universally recognized elements and practices of the past for the constitution of community and collective identity in the present (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004; Bajuk Senčar 2014).

My research of pumpkin seed oil in Goričko was carried out within the framework of the project *Protected Areas along the Slovenian-Hungarian Border* (see footnote 1). The primary goal of my research in this project was to identify and investigate the traditional agricultural practices and typical food culture elements that are used in the contemporary economy of Goričko and the promotion of Goričko Nature Park.

I started my ethnological research on pumpkin seed oil production with the study of literature on agriculture and food culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Prekmurje and Porabje (e.g., Košič 1992; Kozar-Mukič 1984, 1996, 2014; Novak 1947, 1960; Čabai 2000; Zadavec 1998). In the past months, I devoted my research as well to the study of archival and print material on this topic, which is archived at the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology at the ZRC SAZU, The University of Maribor Library and Pomurje Museum in Murska Sobota. I have also studied electronic sources on nutrition, typical dishes, and catering services in Prekmurje.

In my article, I examine traditional and modern productions of pumpkin seed oil in Goričko. I was interested in the history and economic importance of this agricultural activity, the preparation of dishes and food products with pumpkin seed oil, its inclusion in rituals, customs as well as social and economic events. Pumpkin seed oil is also one of the areas of intangible cultural heritage that contains a high level of human creativity and knowledge. In accordance with the related findings of ethnologists (Tellström 2006; Köstlin 2010; Tschoffen 2010; Godina Golija 2014), food – in our case pumpkin seed oil – provides an insight into their economic, social, and cultural value and plays a significant role in identifying and preserving local and regional identity as well as perceptions of healthy lifestyle and sustainable development. Through food, an individual defines oneself, one's mentality, and identity (Bourdieu 1984; Godina Golija 2012, 2014; Kotnik 2001; Mintz and Du Bois 2002; Wiegmann 2006).

This text is also based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out in Prekmurje in the years 2014, 2017, 2018, and 2019. I studied the production of pumpkin seed oil in the area of Goričko. Furthermore, I conducted narrative and semi-guided interviews with pumpkin

seed oil producers, oil mill owners, and farmers who grow oilseed pumpkins for their own needs in Bogojina, Vučja Gomila, Gerlinci, Gornji Petrovci, Križevci, Središče, and Prosečka vas. I employed the method of participant observation to study different phases of pumpkin seed oil production and preparation in oil mills in Gerlinci, Križevci, and Gornji Petrovci. I amassed an extensive amount of photographic material depicting the cultivation of pumpkins, the production of pumpkin seed oil in oil mills, its sale in oil plants, shops, and fairs, as well as its promotion. In addition to field research, I studied relevant ethnological, anthropological as well as historical literature on food culture.

I proceeded from the current theoretical starting-points claiming that pumpkin seed oil is more than just food that satisfies people's basic needs; it is an element of material culture with significant ethnological relevance (Godina Golija 2017). The production and promotion of pumpkin seed oil in Goričko is fortunately thriving, and the oil has become particularly important in various forms of sustainable tourism that are based on local tradition, geographical features, and ethnological heritage (Daugstad 2008; Poljak Istenič 2013; D'Auria and Lysaght 2015). In Goričko Nature Park, pumpkin seed oil is promoted as an essential element of regional cuisine and heritage, therefore also possessing great economic and symbolic importance for the local community.

#### SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PRODUCTION OF PUMPKIN SEED OIL IN THE GORIČKO REGION

The history of growing pumpkins in Prekmurje has not been recorded, nor is it well known. Growing and using pumpkins in the local diet throughout the Prekmurje, Porabje, and Štajerska regions spread in the seventeenth century, together with the cultivation of maize. Since pumpkins grow as an intermediate fruit between maize and potatoes, agricultural statistics did not mention the pumpkin in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Blaznik 1970: 270). The cultivation of pumpkins and the use of pumpkin seed oil are not even mentioned in ethnographic writings about Prekmurje from the nineteenth century, including the works of Jožef Košič and Anton Trstenjak (Trstenjak 2006; Košič 1992).

According to sources, the extraction of pumpkin seed oil was initially a task associated with farming, but it was not a significant part of the local economy. We can say that in the past three centuries, the production of pumpkin seed oil was therefore mostly a domestic agricultural activity that gradually developed into a craft, with the specialized production of oil in Prekmurje becoming prevalent in the early twentieth century (Bogataj 1989: 85; Novak 1947: 94; Kozar-Mukič 1996: 99). The economic importance of pumpkin seed oil production increased after the Second World War, resulting in the proportional increase of arable land in Prekmurje dedicated to the production of pumpkin seeds for oil.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.primorske.si/plus/sobota/buce-so-nekaj-posebnega>

Many of the pumpkin oil mills in Prekmurje still in operation were established before the Second World War. In addition to their regular activities, many local millers also started to produce pumpkin seed oil, including the Hari oil mill in Križevci and the Pojbič oil mill in Gornji Petrovci. Such oil mills have been organized as family businesses, and the third or fourth generations of family members now continue this work. Today's descendants of the founders of the oil mills found a good source of income for themselves and their family members in the production of pumpkin seed oil in the challenging economic conditions typical of Goričko.

In the past, farmers needed a great deal of time to prepare pumpkin seeds, and this preparation process was an important community activity during the winter (Novak 1947: 94). In the early 1980s, oil producers started to use a special, locally grown variety of pumpkins, the so-called *buča slovenska golica* (*cucurbita pepo* var. *Styriaca*), which has swiftly replaced the older varieties of pumpkins (Rejc 1988: 119).

In the early 1980s, two pumpkin hybrids were developed in Austria that are very popular among farmers in the Goričko region today. These are the Wies 371 pumpkin and the Gleisdorf pumpkin, both of which give a good harvest even during summer droughts. Both varieties of pumpkin were registered in Slovenia in 1986 and approved for use (Rejc 1988: 120). These hybrid pumpkins allow better machine harvesting and the easier separation of pumpkin seeds from pumpkin flesh, thus resulting in high-quality pumpkin seed oil.<sup>4</sup>

The *slovenska golica* pumpkin is not a very popular variety of pumpkin in Goričko anymore. During my research, I found that about 80% of farmers currently use new pumpkin hybrids that yield a bigger and more reliable crop. Changed conditions in agriculture, the abandonment of the manual processing of fields, the management of new crops, and changes in local diets have resulted in a modified mode of pumpkin seed cultivation for pumpkin oil production. These factors have also resulted in a significant increase in agricultural areas on which farmers now grow pumpkins for pumpkin seed oil.

### THREE OIL MILLS IN GORIČKO - THREE STORIES, THREE QUESTS

Oil mills and pumpkin seed oil greet visitors to Goričko Nature Park almost immediately upon entry. At the far southeast of the park stands an oil mill in Bogojina, promoting its products with the help of a distinct sign in the center of the village, which is located on the main path leading to a famous church designed by architect Jože Plečnik. The owner of the oil mill promotes his homemade pumpkin seed oil with a visible, multi-lingual sign. The oil mill was founded recently, and its operation is primarily focused on selling pumpkin seed oil to tourists. At the other end of Goričko Nature Park, in the far southwest, another

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.bf.uni-lj.si/fileadmin/users/1/agronomija/Katedra/BUCE\\_predavanje\\_DOM\\_2013.pdf](http://www.bf.uni-lj.si/fileadmin/users/1/agronomija/Katedra/BUCE_predavanje_DOM_2013.pdf)



Signpost for Štesl oil mill in Gerlinci, 2019. Photo: Maja Godina Golija.



Roasting pumpkin seeds at the Pojbič oil mill in Gornji Petrovci, 2019. Photo: Maja Godina Golija.

relatively new pumpkin seed oil mill was established: the Štesl oil mill in Gerlinci. This oil mill, which is located near Goričko Nature Park headquarters in Grad, cooperates well with the nature park in its business activities; its rich array of pumpkin seed products and the tour of the oil mill are some of the tourist attractions offered by Goričko Nature Park.

In addition to these two oil mills, other oil mills operate in the Goričko Nature Park area, and most of them produce pumpkin seed oil for local needs. These oil mills mostly produce oil from pumpkin seeds that are occasionally supplied to them in small quantities by local farmers. Therefore, the production of pumpkin seed oil in these oil mills is not intended for sale on a large-scale market, but for visitors to Goričko Nature Park or the tourists visiting this part of Prekmurje. I will take a closer look at the operation of three oil mills in Goričko Nature Park, each with its history, origin story, issues, and quest to find better ways to sell pumpkin seed oil, which would ensure an easier livelihood for their owners.

The first and also largest oil mill of the three is the Pojbič Koloman oil mill in Gornji Petrovci, which provides the milling of cereals in addition to the production of pumpkin seed oil. Milling different types of cereals and the production of pumpkin seed oil is a combination of activities established six decades ago by the ancestors of Miran Pojbič, the current owner of both mills. In an interview, Miran explained that he took over this well-established activity from his father five years ago, using new expertise and making some technical improvements, as he is a food engineer by trade. The new Pojbič oil mill was built ten years ago, before he took over, with the help of European funds and is installed separately from the existing mill, in a different building. He explained that pumpkin seed oil production was previously tied to the winter because farmers first had to dry and peel the seeds. This was a time-consuming task that was performed in groups during winter evenings. Just 2 to 3kg of dried and peeled seeds were then brought to the oil mill at a time, from which they produced smaller quantities of pumpkin oil for local inhabitants. I witnessed such a lively scene at the Pojbič oil mill on a warm spring day when local inhabitants waited for their pumpkin seeds to be milled. Today, they mostly use various hybrids of *Cucurbita pepo*, the seeds of which no longer have to be peeled; therefore, the production of oil from these seeds is easier, quicker, and not bound to any season. Customers who bring their pumpkin seeds to the oil mill make their appointments by the hour and mostly stay in the oil mill during the production of the pumpkin seed oil. Oil production is thus also an opportunity for socializing, with local inhabitants conversing about news and events in the village and wider area while the seeds are being roasted and pressed.

Most of the oil produced at the Pojbič oil mill is intended for nearby farmers, who cultivate pumpkins or pumpkin seeds for their own use. Some larger farmers also sell and offer the pumpkin seed oil as gifts to their relatives and acquaintances as a characteristic, highly valued product from the Goričko region. The Pojbič oil mill, as a renowned oil mill from Prekmurje, participates in another successful business story from Prekmurje – namely, the sale of *Lušt* tomatoes in Mercator markets and stores. In addition to *Lušt* tomatoes, the stores offer pumpkin seed oil from Prekmurje, i.e., the oil produced by the Pojbič oil mill.



Although the new owner of the oil mill is well-acquainted with the nutritional benefits of pressing oil from pumpkin seeds roasted at a lower temperature, which preserves more medicinal substances and minerals, he produces oil according to the older, traditional method, where the pumpkin seeds are roasted at 110 degrees Celsius. He does so to accommodate customers' requests, as they want the more distinctive flavor and darker color that the high roasting temperature provides. As a result, the basic recipe and procedure for producing pumpkin seed oil at the Pojbič oil mill have not changed in several decades. The geographical protection of Styrian-Prekmurje oil in the European Union stipulates a lower temperature for roasting pumpkin seeds. However, he decided to abide by the traditional method and the taste of the customers, who prefer oil made from pumpkin seeds roasted at higher temperatures instead of attaining geographical protection in the EU for the oil.

The second oil mill in Goričko with a rich history is the Hari oil mill in Križevci, which is owned by Zdenko Hari. This oil mill operates in the center of this picturesque village, across from the church and rectory. Zdenko and his wife Nada Hari are the fourth generation of the Hari family to produce pumpkin seed oil in this oil mill, which operated even before World War II. Therefore, they remember the older times well, before the introduction of *Cucurbita pepo* in the second half of the 1970s, when pumpkin seed oil was still made out of the seeds that had to be dried and manually peeled. It was very time-consuming work then, but they obtained quality white seeds that produced a lighter and less dense pumpkin seed oil. As Nada said, such pumpkin seed oil was different: *very, very tasteful, unlike the hybrid*. She was probably referring to a modern pumpkin seed oil, which is made from pumpkin seed hybrids – namely from different varieties of *Cucurbita pepo*, most commonly the *gleisdorfer* pumpkin variety. These hybrids are less sensitive to the summer drought, more resistant to disease, and a more reliable crop than older varieties of pumpkin. Nevertheless, according to Nada, there are still some individuals who want pumpkin oil from pumpkin seeds of older varieties of pumpkins – that is, from seeds that need to be peeled. She believes that these older varieties of pumpkins will be increasingly sought after and valued due to their unique taste, as some individuals are already searching for their seeds for cultivation.

At the Hari oil mill, they still produce pumpkin seed oil according to the older, more traditional method; they light a fire under big iron pans, in which they slowly roast smaller quantities of seeds and mix the mass by hand. They use smaller presses into which they load the roasted pumpkin seeds. Oil cakes, which are the by-product of pressing, are then used as animal feed. They mostly produce pumpkin seed oil for local inhabitants, who make their appointments by the hour to bring their pumpkin seeds and wait for the oil to be produced. The inhabitants' pumpkin seed oil is also meant for sale for customers at the oil mill; their focus is on cultivating larger quantities of pumpkins for oil production. The Hari oil mill is also well-known beyond the border, and even farmers from Hungary and other parts of Prekmurje and Styria bring their pumpkin

seeds to them. They also produce pumpkin seed oil for some tourist farms and restaurants, including the renowned Puhan tourist farm near Moravske Toplice. The owners of the tourist farm supply their pumpkin seeds to the oil mill, where their pumpkin oil is produced and subsequently sold under the Puhan brand to their guests and tourists. The owners of the Hari oil mill believe that there are currently enough pumpkin seeds for the production of pumpkin seed oil in Goričko and that there is no need to import them, given that the cultivation of pumpkins, called *tikvi* by locals, is still widespread in the nature park area. People from Goričko, even those who are not farmers on a large scale, make sure that they cultivate enough pumpkins for homemade pumpkin seed oil, which is used in everyday meals and also offered as gifts to relatives and acquaintances that visit Prekmurje and Goričko Nature Park.

The third oil mill operating in the Goričko Nature Park area that I studied during the field research is the Štesl oil mill in Gerlinci. This oil mill was founded in 2010 and, therefore, has no rich history or family tradition; it is a new facility in an area that has long been without oil mills. Its owner – an agricultural technician – and his wife lost their jobs in an agricultural cooperative and when looking for new opportunities to ensure their livelihood and employment decided to build a mill after thorough consideration:

*I decided to found the oil mill after a market analysis. Farmers within a five-kilometer radius of our farm cultivate pumpkins on 1200 to 1500 hectares; therefore, they need an oil mill and we have a good foundation for the production of oil. We used to be the only oil mill in this area, though another oil mill operates nearby now.*

They were granted a EU subsidy to establish the oil mill; the Agricultural and Forestry Chamber helped them with the documentation for obtaining EU funds. Štesl turned an abandoned pigsty into the oil mill and furnished it with modern equipment for roasting and pressing pumpkin seeds. The owner of the oil mill proudly said that all the machines are a result of Slovenian expertise and made by Slovenian manufacturers according to his designs. They use natural gas as the energy source at the oil mill.

Oil is made from pumpkin seeds cultivated by nearby farmers, most commonly from hybrid pumpkins, e.g., the *gleisdorfer pumpkin*, while seeds of the Slovenian *Cucurbita pepo* represent only 20% of the seeds used for the production of pumpkin seed oil. Despite their modern oil mill, they roast pumpkin seeds at relatively high temperatures, from 90 to 110 degrees Celsius, which is prohibited for oils with Protected Geographical Indication in the EU. The roasted mass is then pressed in the hydraulic press, where approximately 2 kg of mass is distributed between the iron plates in each compression layer. The mass is pressed only once, while the oil cakes, a by-product of the pressing, are used as animal feed or fishing bait. The Štesl oil mill produces high-quality pumpkin seed oil and refrains from producing salad oils. They also produce walnut oil, which has received several prizes, and its importance in the culinary industry and medicine is



Nada Hari prepares roasted seeds for pressing at the Hari oil mill in Križevci, 2019. Photo: Maja Godina Golija.



Sale of products at the Štesl oil mill in Gerlinci, 2019. Photo: Maja Godina Golija.

ever-growing. They produce oil throughout the year, and the married couple does most of the work on their own. During the periods of seasonal work on the farm, which now focuses on fruit farming in addition to producing oil, they receive help from their adult children and their partners.

Each of these three oil mills has its own story, past, and experience with Goričko Nature Park. Two of them successfully continue the tradition of multiple generations of pumpkin seed oil-makers, while one is relatively new, and its owner is still on a quest to find successful methods for ensuring a livelihood in Goričko. Interestingly, the operation of all three oil mills is connected to the 2008-2010 economic crisis in Slovenia, which severely affected Prekmurje, resulting in high unemployment rates in Prekmurje and Goričko. The loss of jobs, economic difficulties, uncertain situations in industrial plants in Prekmurje (e.g., the Mura textile factory), and the problems of agricultural cooperatives and other agricultural-food establishments resulting in layoffs caused Goričko residents to return to traditional agricultural sectors. These include fruit growing, pig and cattle breeding, the cultivation of vegetables, and the production of pumpkin seed oil. In the last decade, the importance of planting oil pumpkins, their cultivation for animal feed and pumpkin seeds for producing oil has grown significantly in this area. After the cultivation of sugar beet was abandoned, the number of agricultural areas with planted pumpkins increased and, therefore, there is no need to import pumpkin seeds in Goričko, as is the case in some Styrian oil mills.

The production of pumpkin seed oil in combination with farming ensures all three families from Goričko a relatively high standard of living and a good way to earn a livelihood. During the fieldwork, I found that these oil mills with a rich family history have only slightly updated the methods for pumpkin seed oil production. The current owners of the oil mills also did not make any larger investments to upgrade oil mills but only took them over from their parents and continue to produce pumpkin seed oil according to decades-old, traditional methods. On the other hand, the newest oil mill is testing some new approaches to selling their products to visitors of Goričko Nature Park. Furthermore, the owner has developed some new, additional products made out of pumpkin seeds, including pumpkin seed baking flour, roasted and salted pumpkin seeds, and pumpkin liqueur.



Pumpkin liqueur from Štesl oil mill, 2019.  
Photo: Maja Godina Golija.

The owner of this oil mill recounted: *In our shop, we want to have a bigger assortment of products from pumpkin seeds to sell to tourists and visitors of Goričko Nature Park.*

Interestingly, all three oil mill owners assess that the development of tourism in Goričko and the establishment of Goričko Nature Park has not had a positive impact on the development of traditional agricultural sectors in the area, including the production of pumpkin oil. One oil mill owner was even highly critical towards Goričko Nature Park, which:

*through its measures and required permits only limits the development of agriculture in Goričko. The nature park did not bring anything good; farmers inside the nature park received financial aid only in the first year; they have not received anything for several years now.*

Despite this, they cooperate with Goričko Nature Park. In Grad, the headquarters of Goričko Nature Park, they sell products from their oil mills in the park's gift shop. They also gladly receive visitors from Goričko Nature Park and give them a tour around the oil mill, demonstrating the entire pumpkin seed oil production process and offering their products for purchase.

## PUMPKIN OIL IN THE DIET OF THE POPULATION IN GORIČKO – OLD AND NEW USES

Pumpkin oil and its present-day use in the Goričko diet gives the impression of its past importance in local food culture. However, sources that testify to its frequent use for preparing dishes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries do not confirm this (Košič 1992; Trstenjak 2006). It is more likely that its production expanded only after the First World War, when some mills in Prekmurje were grinding pumpkin seeds and producing pumpkin oil in addition to cereals.

The description of agriculture and food culture in Prekmurje and Goričko from the nineteenth century does not mention the pumpkin as an important agricultural product, the production of pumpkin oil, or its use in nutrition. In the 1880s, Anton Trstenjak, who traveled the territory of Goričko several times, wrote in his detailed description of agriculture in Prekmurje:

Prekmurje Slovenians are farmers and hard workers ... They sow barley, rye, wheat, potatoes, oats, lentils, beans, maize, buckwheat, flax, cannabis, turnips, cabbage, and millet. Happiness is for the hilly places; that is where the vines grow. When the wine is born, the house has at least enough to pay taxes and buy food. Otherwise, it is difficult to survive the winter. They sell linseed, wine, fruit and

plum brandy. They carry their produce to Styria, where everyday salesmen are located. They buy a particularly large amount of livestock. (Trstenjak 2006: 31)

The quoted facts about agriculture and agricultural products confirm our assumption that pumpkins in Prekmurje in the nineteenth century were not a very important agricultural product. They were mainly grown in maize. They were grown in smaller quantities than today, and pumpkin seed oil was not a product to trade but grown for use at home. All this leaves the researcher with a lack of archival or other sources to contend with an analytical challenge: how to combine modern testimonies and beliefs about the great role of pumpkin oil in the Goričko traditional local diet with historical facts?

Certain museum objects and older ethnographic descriptions may be helpful in this regard. These include smaller wooden presses for home-made pumpkin oil production, which indicate that they have been making pumpkin oil in the past centuries, especially in smaller quantities for farmers' own use. Pumpkin seed oil was used to season everyday meals more rarely, as more often, farmers would use pork fat, bacon, and greaves, or, like elsewhere in Eastern Slovenia, sour cream. Pumpkin oil was still a valuable item in the nineteenth century but was not available in large quantities for everyday meals. Vilko Novak describes simple, home-made pumpkin seed oil for farmers' use: first, the hulled and dried pumpkin seeds were roasted and ground, poured into water, and boiled. When the oil then floated to the top and cooled, the oil was taken out and stored in pots. In some places, they also made home-made pumpkin oil by heating a mixture of roasted pumpkin seeds and water and allowing the water to evaporate, leaving the oil at the bottom (Novak 1947: 93).

In this simple way, farmers could only obtain small quantities of pumpkin oil. In addition to pumpkin seed oil, the production and use of other types of oils were expanded to include linseed, poppy, and rapeseed oils. As mentioned in earlier written sources, they also used the more readily available pork fat for seasoning cold foods. The rare use of pumpkin oil, as is customary today, is also evidenced by the statement of a source from Gerlinci who, when asked how pumpkin oil was used in Goričko in the past, stated:

*Sometimes pumpkin oil was difficult to access; but today, you know something is missing on the salad if it is not there.*

The greater production and use of pumpkin oil in the Goričko local diet began after the First World War, with some larger mills in the area producing pumpkin oil, including the Pojbič mills in Gornji Petrovci and Hari mill in Križevci. The use of hydraulic presses imported from Austria that allowed for the faster and easier production of pumpkin oil also increased its accessibility and role in the nutrition of the local population. At that time, pumpkin oil was used mainly for dressing green salads and cold dishes, including green beans and beans, pickles, cabbage, potatoes, black radish (Novak 1947: 94; Kozar-Mukič

2014: 124). It has also been popular as a supplement to enhance certain dishes, e.g., baked eggs or buckwheat *šterc*, a dish that has been very popular throughout Styria (Gamerith 1988: 179) and also in north-eastern Slovenia. Gibanica and a similar cake, *oljavnice*, were also baked from stretch dough and pumpkin seed oil.

After World War II, pumpkin seed production in the Prekmurje fields increased, and pumpkin seed oil became a common ingredient in the daily diet. In addition to its use in the dressing of salads, cucumbers, legumes, onions, and cabbage, it also expanded to the roasting of meat in pumpkin seed oil and the seasoning of cooked beef with pumpkin oil, which are ways of using pumpkin seed oil from Austrian bourgeois cuisine. Over the past three decades, some new dishes have also emerged, including trout baked in pumpkin oil, or buckwheat cake with pumpkin seed oil cream.<sup>5</sup>

The development of tourism in Prekmurje – especially in Moravske Toplice – and the emergence of Goričko Nature Park further increased interest in pumpkin seed oil and promoted modern ways of using pumpkin seed oil in cuisine. The source said:

*Recreational cyclists who visit this part of Goričko Nature Park often stop at our oil mill. They look at the process of making the pumpkin seed oil that we still sell in bottles. Unfortunately, this is not good packaging for cyclists to safely store and transport on a bicycle, so only a few people choose to buy our product; but they like to visit the mill. We sell more oil to locals and visitors who come to Goričko by car.*

Nowadays, in Goričko cuisine, pumpkin oil is not only a tasty seasoning for salad, vegetables, and root vegetables, but it has become an essential base for dishes that were not known or even prepared with pumpkin oil in the past: pastries, ice creams, creams, soups, sauces, and drinks. They offer these dishes to visitors of Goričko at local pubs, tourist farms, and hotel restaurants.

In addition to pumpkin seed oil, pumpkin seeds – especially roasted ones – are also important as a stand-alone snack or as a side dish. Some Goričko producers have started making whole flour from ground pumpkin seeds. The flour is marketed primarily for people who have celiac disease, which also reflects a good understanding of the needs of the modern customer as well as an adjustment to a market that requires a greater supply of so-called healthy foods and high-value protein foods. Pumpkin seed oil and pumpkin seeds have also become a component of chocolates, pralines, biscuits, and liqueurs, which are often offered to tourists, beautifully wrapped, as an original souvenir from Prekmurje.

In the souvenir shop at the headquarters of Goričko Nature Park in Grad, they offer a diverse selection of pumpkin seed oil products and pumpkin seeds. The source employed by the shop mentioned that *Goričko food is one of the most popular souvenirs that visitors to the nature park buy. Only Prekmurje pottery is more popular.*

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.goprekmurje.si/slo/kulinarika/recepti/?page=6>

Some mill owners also sell pumpkin seed oil, food with pumpkin seed oil and pumpkin seeds at thermal spas, in rented outlets in Moravske Toplice and on tourist farms, including the famous Puhan tourist farm in Bogojina. They also sell these products at Prekmurje events around Slovenia, for example, at the annual event *Diši po Prekmurju* at Pogačar Square in Ljubljana.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The production of pumpkin seed oil in Goričko oil mills and the frequent use of pumpkin seed oil in the local diet is a relatively new phenomenon, which has spread in this territory only after the First World War. Nevertheless, the people from Goričko today perceive pumpkin seed oil and pumpkin seed products as part of their rich and centuries-old heritage, which they present to visitors of Goričko Nature Park at the headquarters of the park, in oil mills, at tourist shops and at local exhibitions in Goričko, including, for instance, the museum in Domanjševci (Lendvai Kepe 2012: 155).

Increasing interest in pumpkin seed oil is today closely related to the tourist industry and the establishment of Goričko Nature Park. Interest in pumpkin seed oil has grown among producers, who have expanded the areas of land planted with pumpkins and increased the production of oil; this also holds for visitors of Goričko Nature Park, who like to buy pumpkin seed oil and pumpkin seeds as souvenirs.

Pumpkin seed oil is one of the cultural elements by which Goričko Nature Park, as well as other peripheral landscapes, strive to achieve at least a symbolic equality, importance, and centrality (Kozorog 2013). As a high quality, healthy, and well-regarded local agricultural product, pumpkin seed oil is a food that plays a significant role in local communities (Godina Golija 2014). In addition to a symbolic role, pumpkin seed oil also possesses a significant economic function as an essential part of the development of agriculture in Goričko Nature Park.

With a decreasing population in Goričko and the consequential abandonment and overgrowing of agricultural land, the production of pumpkins for pumpkin seed oil has turned out to be a particularly suitable agricultural industry for the region, as it requires less labor and can be carried out with agricultural machinery. The production and sale of pumpkin seed oil in Goričko is thus a good example of a successful merging of public and private interests, the heritagization of food products, and the reinvention of food from the past (Grasseni 2011). These processes and the changed perception of pumpkin seed oil have been certainly greatly influenced by the establishment of Goričko Nature Park and tourism development in the area. Lastly, these new practices in the production and consumption of pumpkin seed oil facilitate a better quality of life for residents and help them to continue leading their lives in the protected area of Goričko Nature Park.



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## PROIZVODNJA IN UPORABA BUČNEGA OLJA NA GORIČKEM – TRADICIONALNE IN SODOBNE PRAKSE

*V slovenski prehrani je bučno olje razmeroma nova sestavina, njegova uporaba je bila več kot dve stoletji omejena le na del slovenskega ozemlja. Kljub temu, da gre le za dodatek k jedem in solatam, ki ga uporabljajo v manjših količinah, dobiva v zadnjih dveh desetletjih zlasti v Prekmurju večji pomen. Pri tem ne gre le za njegovo vedno večjo ekonomsko vlogo, ampak tudi za simbolni in socialni pomen. V članku skušamo odgovoriti, kako je ustanovitev Krajinskega parka Goričko leta 2003 vplivala na njegovo pridelavo, vse večjo uporabo in promocijo. Na Goričkem, kjer je potekala raziskava, prebivalci dojemajo bučno olje kot del bogate, večstoletne dediščine in kot enega najpomembnejših označevalcev regionalne pripadnosti.*

*Razvoj turizma v Prekmurju, zlasti v Moravskih Toplicah, in nastanek Krajinskega parka Goričko, sta še povečala zanimanje za bučno olje in pospešila sodobne načine uporabe bučnega olja v kulinariki. Danes se na Goričkem povečujejo njivske površine, zasajene z bučami golicami. Tod nastajajo tudi nove oljarne za izdelovanje bučnega olja, stare oljarne pa obnavljajo tudi s pomočjo evropskih sredstev, npr. oljarno Pojbič v Gornjih Petrovcih. Buče so postale najbolj*

*razširjena in najpomembnejša oljna rastlina v severovzhodni Sloveniji. Poleg tradicionalne uporabe bučnega olja za beljenje solat, kumar, stročnic, čebule in zelja sta se na Goričkem razširili tudi peka mesa in rib na bučnem olju ter beljenje sirov, mesnih jedi, namazov in sladoleda z bučnim oljem. Bučno olje in izdelki iz bučnega olja ter semen, npr. liker, čokolade, pralineji in piškoti, so postali tudi zelo priljubljen spominek iz Krajinskega parka Goričko, ki ga mnogi obiskovalci tega dela Slovenije odnesejo s seboj kot spomin na Goričko in Prekmurje ter na njune kulinarične in druge posebnosti.*

*Rezultati raziskave so pokazali, da sta pridelava in uporaba bučnega olja tisto področje kulture, s katerim skušajo akterji v Krajinskem parku Goričko, podobno kot v drugih obrobniških pokrajinah, opozoriti na svoje regionalne posebnosti in vsaj simbolno doseči enakopravnost in središčnost. Zato je goričko bučno olje dediščina, ki pomembno zaznamuje gospodarski razvoj in preživetvene strategije prebivalcev tega varovanega območja. Je tudi primer gospodarskih in simbolnih praks, kjer se uspešno srečata javni in zasebni interes, kar ljudem v tej gospodarsko zelo šibki regiji olajšuje preživetje. Danes torej prebivalci Goričkega vidijo v bučnem olju tisti element svoje kulture in dediščine, ki je bistven za razvoj in kolektivno identiteto skupnosti.*

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