FAO-EBRD “Support to Sustainable Value Chains through the Development of Geographical Indications in the Dairy Sector”

Assessment Report of Tenili cheese production system

August-September 2017

GEORGIA

Project implemented in collaboration with
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Background

The FAO-EBRD Project “Support to Sustainable Value Chains through the Development of Geographical Indications (GIs) in the Dairy Sector”, implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), the National Intellectual Property Centre of Georgia (Sakpatenti), aims at strengthening the institutional framework for GIs, in particular through the definition and development of a GI certification system.

The project also aims at improving food quality and safety and facilitating access to markets for agri-food products in the dairy sector through capacity building training and development of a production and marketing plan for Tenili cheese to access relevant markets while preserving traditional features of the product.

Introduction

The aim of the report is to assess the potential of engaging the Tenili cheese production system’s actors from the rural territory of the Akhaltsike province, Samtskhe-Javakheti region, in the cooperation activities aiming at improving food quality and facilitating access to markets.

The findings of the report are based on the observations and interviews made during a project field mission in Georgia, 24-25 August 2017 and during the Slow Food Cheese! event in Bra, 15-18 September 2017 (please consult Annex 1 for the List of participants, Annex 2 for the Persons interviewed and Annex 3 for the Program).

Map of the Akhaltsike province, Georgia, with indicated locations of Tenili producers visited during the mission
Description of the Tenili cheese and its production process

Tenili is a Georgian traditional cheese made from the fat sheep or cow milk in form of the wattle thin threads. It was registered as a Geographical Indication in Georgia in 2012 and inscribed in the registry of Georgia’s Intangible Cultural Heritage on 25 November 2013 by the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia¹.

Tenili cheese is normally produced in Meskheti, the historical area of Georgia, which situates partly in Turkey and partly in Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia, which the Akhaltsike province belongs to. It is traditionally produced by families only once a year in September, as by this time the milk usually is higher in fat content and the outside temperature goes down allowing for its storage without any cooling equipment, in the amount of around 20kg/family and stored in clay pots / jars (top-down) in the cool in-house room for further use, mainly on festive occasions, during the year.

The following is the description of the Tenili cheese production observed during the Mission in Andriatsminda, Georgia, at the premises of the Inasaridze family. For the description of Tenili cheese production according to the existing registered GI protocol please refer to Annex 4.

¹ https://heritagesites.ge/uploads/files/599d49e41f7c0.pdf
After milking by hand, the milk is skimmed. At the dairy facility a piece of pig stomach is added to the milk to activate coagulation. Then ready, the curd mass is cut into pieces and left for 15 minutes, then cut again, mixed and left in a plastic form with holes for drainage.

Once ready, it is cut in slices, which then are put into hot water on fire. Cheese ripening is made by placing a piece of cheese in hot water. If the cheese stretches, it is ready for kneading. Otherwise, the timing of each process is regulated by the smell and taste perceived by women cheese-makers.

With the help of a wooden spoon and hands, cheese-makers ensure that the slices remain separate in the water. Once heated enough to become “stretchy”, the slices in the heating water are gently formed into one mass with the wooden spoon.
The cheese mass is taken from the water and massaged gently in the arms to form a flexible ring. The stretched strands are dipped into boiling water several times during the stretching process to keep them pliable and quickly and continuously stretched into thinner and thinner strands. Once the cheese has been stretched into very fine strands it is immersed and left in cold, salted water. The strands are then squeezed hard with hands to removed excess liquid and hung to dry on a pole. At the same time, the cream is continuously boiled on low heat.

Once dry, the cheese is mixed with cream (the cheese dryness and the proportion of cream and cheese in Tenili are main aspects that differ the final product quality among the visited producers)
and pressed by hand into large glass jars, which then are stored upside down on a layer of ash in a cool place.

*Tenili cheese in the glass jar stored top down*
**Overview of Tenili cheese producers**

Tenili has always been produced for household consumption only, with no estimates of the quantity of households engaged in producing it for own consumption in the villages of Dzveli, Nakalakevi, Tmogvi, Toloshi, Atsvita and Andratsminda. Sometimes these families sell the surplus of Tenili cheese made in the autumn for self-consumption on the local market before New Year’s celebration. Just recently, 2 producers (Association Mzianeti from 2010 with a pause during 2015-2017 and family Inasaridze from 2007) have started producing Tenili cheese all-year-round for selling purposes. Three Tenili producers in the Akhaltsike province of the Samtskhe-Javakheti region (1 cooperative and 1 family currently producing and selling Tenili a year around and 1 women willing to sell Tenili) were visited on 24-25 August 2017.

1. **Tenili Cheese Association “Mzianeti”, village Chobareti**

Emzar and Aluda Jvaradze and other 3 members are the founders of the Association “Mzianeti”, which now acts in the frame of the newly established cooperative plus 4 village women are involved in cheese-making process. Association owns the facility where women (workers of the Association) are making Tenili from the milk of cows owned by the Association.

**Production and marketing:**
The cooperative produces Tenili Cheese all year round: 2 tons/year (2016) equals to approximately 4,000 GEL (about 1,630 USD according to the GEL-USD exchange rate in June 2018).

They normally sell it:
1) in bulk (a jug of 8 kg costs 20 GEL/8 USD per kg) to 2-3 shops mainly in cities Tbilisi and Rustavi (supermarkets SMART, AGROHUB, CARREFOUR, where the price is 10-33 GEL / 4-13,5 USD per pot of 0,3kg of the cheese); and
2) packed in ceramic pots of 0,3kg / 8 GEL (1,5GEL is the cost of a pot).
Few are also sold locally in the shops and on fairs.
Emzar Jvaradze, a cooperative member interviewed during the visit, manifested the complete lack of problems with marketing of the Cooperative’s produce but rather would like to produce more to cover, at least partially, the high demand for Tenili cheese and interest manifested from the USA and Russia (estimated demand of 2 tons/month). Women interviewed have underlined increasing demand and trend in Georgia for less salty “fresh” Tenili.

The cooperative would increase the production to 10 tons/year increasing the number of cows in the herd, the key limiting factor impeding them from doing so is the need for enlargement of the existing processing facility or, rather, the reconstructing it to also conform with the food safety regulations of 2020, which anyway requires high financial contribution.

2. Single female producer, Nestan Maisuradze, village Muskhi

An individual who produces Tenili following a household technique and tradition to produce it only in September in the amount of 20 kg only for family members and small sales through special direct orders from Tbilisi. In her opinion, 2016 is the first year that Tenili became truly popular as more people were requesting to buy Tenili from her, even though it is quite more expensive comparing to other cheeses she sells on local market or directly.

Nestan has manifested the intention to start entrepreneurship and increase the number of cows. A limiting factor would lie in the need to construct the cheese-making facility in conformity with the food safety regulations which requires substantial (own money) investment. She is also willing to address the cooperative “Mzianeti” for an advice on the cheese processing when her new facility is in place.
3. Family production, Galina and Ruslani Inasaridze, village Andriatsminda

Galina Inasaridze (registered business operator), her son, Ruslani Inasaridze, one more family member and 2 hired local women (for milking and general assistance) are involved in the Tenili production all-year-round.

**Production and marketing:**
The farm produces approximately 20kg of Tenili/day, which is sold for 20 GEL/ 8 USD kg:
a) directly in small pots of different caliber (+2 GEL for a pot as a packaging) of 1kg, 0,5kg and 0,3 kg; and
b) in food containers to shops / cheese corners, restaurants / bread houses in Tbilisi.

![Ceramic pot used by Inasaridze family to sell Tenili](image)

Galina as well participates regularly in Cheese, Breed, Food Festivals, including those organized by the Georgian Guild of Cheese Producers (Ana Mikadze) and the Ministry of Agriculture (in Tbilisi) aimed at promoting Georgian cheeses and recovery of cheese types lost over centuries. The number of participating farmers, as well as the types of produced cheeses increases each year. Producers from all regions of Georgia are presented at the festivals; among them are the cooperatives, small, medium and large-scale farmers. Galina’s Tenili always gains high appreciation at the festivals. Actually, it was from the Cheese festival in 2007 where Galina presented Tenili that she started commercial production as she saw the interest and potential market for it.

This family has intentions to enlarge the production scale through building a new, larger processing unit and in doing so solicited the bank loan following the governmental funding scheme – 50/40/10, which allows for a 50% grant in case of 10% contribution of the applicant and a 40% bank loan, the latter was not approved though.
Evaluation of the potential cooperation

As shown on the map above, all three production units described are located in the close proximity to each other (average distance of less than 5 km) in the same geo-climatic conditions in the Akhaltsike province of the Samtskhe-Javakheti region. As seen from the descriptions, they also experience more or less the same challenges – need for an investment to either scale up the production (family Inasaridze) or correct nonconformities found during the Regional Food Safety Service’s inspection to conform to the 2020 food safety regulations “Technical Regulations - Food/Feed Hygiene General Rules and Food/Feed Hygiene Simplified Rule” approved by the Decree N 173 of the Government of Georgia (Association “Mzianeti”) or initiate commercial production in line with the above mentioned regulations’ requirements (individual producer Nestan).

At the same time, in neither of three cases direct marketing problems were underlined, which along with the estimations of the producers allows to assume that the interest and market demand for the product even only on national level substantially prevails the current offer. The latter though is currently limited due to many factors: economic (investments in the herd and a cheese-making facility in conformation with the food safety regulations), socio-cultural (Tenili cheese-making is a hard work requiring traditional knowledge and particular skills that one should acquire from someone knowledgeable and skillful).

Given all this, the assumption can be made that collaborative activities would be beneficial to all visited producers, the Association, the family, and the individual producer, especially in the intention of the latter to initiate commercial production. In reality though, the Association and the family producer work completely autonomously from one another and do not engage in any join activity at any stage while the individual producer has manifested a willingness and readiness to cooperate.

Several enquires were undertaken to understand the underlying situation and evaluate the potential for cooperation within the Tenili production system of the Akhaltsike province:

1) During the Mission:
The Association’s member, Emzar Jvaridze, who underlined the importance of his past participation in the Slow Food event, Terra Madre Salone del Gusto, in Turin for further development and commercialization of the Tenili cheese production, has manifested openness and readiness to share the experience and skills obtained with other interested Tenili producers in general.

Female Tenili producer-to-be, Nestan Maisuradze has responded with the will to engage and understanding of the potential benefits of her cooperation with the Association.
A member of the Inasaridze family, Ruslani Inasaridze, has not revealed the nature of the reason/s, although, made it clear that some disagreements impede any form of possible cooperation between the Inasaridze family and the Association.

2) At the **Cheese event in Bra**, Italy, Ruslani Inasaridze and Ana Mikadze (Georgian Guild of Cheese Producers) with other delegation members have participated in the meeting with the Presidia programme coordinator of the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity. The Slow Food Presidia project was thoroughly discussed and the issue of the potential cooperation among Tenili cheese producers has been addressed. Communicating their opinion, Ruslani has confirmed the impossibility of any cooperation between Inasaridze family and the Association, while Ana Mikadze who knows both, the Association and family, has revealed her support for the Inasaridze family in terms of the quality of product produced and in the preserving and following the tradition Tenili production against the product and effort of the Association and shared opinion of Ruslani that the cooperation between the Association and the Inasaridze family is not possible.

3) The opinion of the **Elkana association**, Slow Food’ long-term partner on the territory and in this project, on this issue has been also sought. It was mentioned by Elkana, that the Tenili producers had an opportunity to consider cooperation and joint action in order to participate in the ENPAD program scheme, providing up to €15-30,000 to newly established cooperatives, and yet did not consider it. As we have seen, the association “Mzianeti” has already established a 5-person cooperative in the village and according to them they do not plan to join efforts with the Tenili cheese producers outside of their village. This might confirm the actors’ current unwillingness and unreadiness to engage in larger cooperation, even with potential economic benefits. In overall, the Elkana opinion supports the assessment of the cooperation potential between the Association “Mzianeti” and the Inasaridze family as impossible in the current conditions.
Recommendations

Considering that further intervention to engage current Tenili cheese producers in Akhaltsike province in cooperative activities in the current circumstances is seen as unfruitful, while the market demand for Tenili cheese shows the evidence of its rising and the potential risk of the disappearance of complex artisan techniques of traditional Tenili cheese-making (due to the limited number and aging persons in possession of the skills and knowledge), the recommendation for further actions might be to engage more actors in the Tenili cheese production systems in the area.

It may be made through creating favorable conditions, including provision of training, for the increased number of families in the territory that produce Tenili only for self-consumption would consider taking on an entrepreneurship way and produce it all-year-round for sale. Increased number of small-scale producers might result in adjustment of the dynamics of the situation and entailed advancements of the possibility of cooperation.

It is equally important to create economic incentives for those families to engage into entrepreneurial activity of Tenili production. Which raises the role of the regional authorities of the Samtskhe-Javakheti, from the general divisions of social-economic development as well as tourism, and the local authorities from the Akhaltsike province who may require additional effort made to increase their sensitivity to and interest in the potential of developing Tenili production system as a gastronomic brand and tourism destination for the economic development of the province and the region. The starting point for their activation may be involvement of several key decision-makers into Cheese or Terra Madre Salone del Gusto events in Italy.

Development of agricultural/gastronomic tourism activities and products, that welcome visitors to discover Meskhetia through food, in general, and Tenili cheese, in particular, might become another promising factor to facilitate cooperation and increase the interest in entering the Tenili cheese production system by new actors. Once developed, the cheese-makers community incorporated in regional tourism system services (visits to cheese-maker farms, tastings, gastronomic events, etc.) will receive not only additional income possibilities, but additional promotion and marketing channels for Tenili cheese while conserving the cultural heritage and regional identity.

In this regard, it is important to mention that, for instance, the Association “Mzianeti” owns several traditional Meskhetian houses, all situated next to the cheese-making facility. One of which they already turned into the sort of museum/visiting center of Meskhetian lifestyle and another is still in poor conditions awaiting reconstruction. This creates immediate possibilities to exploit for the development of local touristic offers bound within rich socio-cultural and gastronomic traditions of Meskhetia.
### Annex 1. List of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Name, Surname</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Pascal Bernardoni</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>Georgia, Italy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Elene Giorgadze</td>
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<td>Georgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Georgia</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mariam Gordadze</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
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<td>Georgia</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Tamar Noniashvii</td>
<td>Association ELKANA; Consultant</td>
<td>598370751; <a href="mailto:bioextension@elkana.org.ge">bioextension@elkana.org.ge</a></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Zviadi Abuseridze</td>
<td>National Food Agency, Food Safety Department; Deputy Head of Samtskhe-Javakheti Regional Division</td>
<td>591914810; <a href="mailto:zviadiabuseridze@gmail.com">zviadiabuseridze@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>Georgia</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Mariam Jorjadze</td>
<td>Association ELKANA</td>
<td>577497401; <a href="mailto:director@elkana.org.ge">director@elkana.org.ge</a></td>
<td>Georgia</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Kateryna Poberezhna</td>
<td>FAO Georgia</td>
<td>599 11 10 73 <a href="mailto:Kateryna.Poberezhna@fao.org">Kateryna.Poberezhna@fao.org</a></td>
<td>Italy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Arianna Carita</td>
<td>FAO HQ</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Arianna.Carita@fao.org">Arianna.Carita@fao.org</a></td>
<td>Italy</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Raffaella Ponzio</td>
<td>Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity, Presidia programme coordinator</td>
<td><a href="mailto:r.ponzio@slowfood.it">r.ponzio@slowfood.it</a></td>
<td>Italy</td>
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### Annex 2. List of persons interviewed

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<thead>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Emzar Jvaridze / Aluda Jvaridze</td>
<td>Association “Mzianeti” / Cooperative</td>
<td>599628089 / 597747097</td>
<td>Akhaltsikhe, Chobareti, Georgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nestan Maisuradze</td>
<td>Female Farmer</td>
<td>598554281</td>
<td>Akhaltsikhe, Muskhi, Georgia</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Galina / Ruslan Inasaridze</td>
<td>Individual Entrepreneur</td>
<td>558977282 / 595381884</td>
<td>Akhaltsikhe, Andriatsminda, Georgia and Bra, Italy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Anna Mikadze</td>
<td>Head of Cheese Guild</td>
<td>596452323; <a href="mailto:gate_an@yahoo.com">gate_an@yahoo.com</a></td>
<td>Bra, Italy</td>
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Annex 3. Program of the visits and meetings in Georgia and Italy

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<tr>
<td>24.08.17</td>
<td>13:30-16:00</td>
<td>Visiting Tenili Cheese Association “Mzianeti” in Chobareti</td>
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<td>16:30-19:00</td>
<td>Visiting a small producer of Tenili Cheese in village Muskhi</td>
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<td>25.08.17</td>
<td>08:30-12:30</td>
<td>Visiting Tenili cheese producer in Andriatsminda</td>
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<td>16.09.17</td>
<td>16:00-18:00</td>
<td>Meeting during the Cheese event in Bra</td>
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Annex 4. Registration file for the GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATION: TENILI

GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATION: TENILI

NUMBER OF REGISTRATION: 5

DATE OF REGISTRATION: 2012.01.24

PRODUCT NAME FOR WHICH THE REGISTRATION OF THE GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATION IS REQUESTED:

Class 29 – Cheeses

NAME AND ADDRESS OF THE APPLICANT:

Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia., 6, Marshal Gelovani ave., 0159, Tbilisi (GE)

DESCRIPTION OF THE FINISHED PRODUCT AND RAW MATERIAL:

The cheese TENILI is produced from the very fat milk of sheep and cow.

THE FORM: It has a shape of wattle thin threads with mass of 100-150 g.

ORGANOLEPTIC CHARACTERISTICS:

The smell is pleasant, specific. The taste is pure, a little spicy and acidy.

CONTENTS:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MILK ORIGIN</th>
<th>SPECIFIC WEIGHT</th>
<th>CONTENT OF LOW FAT DRY SUBSTANCE (%) no less than</th>
<th>FAT (%) no less than</th>
<th>ACID (°T) no more than</th>
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<tr>
<td>cow</td>
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<td>sheep</td>
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CHEESE TENILI MUST MEET THE FOLLOWING REQUIREMENTS:

Humidity – no more than 60 %

Fat in the dry substance – no less than 45 %

Salt – 2-4%

GEOGRAPHICAL AREA OF PRODUCTION:

Obtaining and processing of the milk for the cheese TENILI production takes place in Samtskhe-Javakheti region and in
municipality of Kvemo Kartli region.

PRODUCTION METHODS:

The milk fermentation time is 30-40 min. The “Delamo” (product received from milk by enzyme) is cut and split into small pieces and heated to 37°C. Then, granules are collected, the cheese is placed in the forms and it kept getting ready. Whole cheese mass is not boiled together, but 200 g of molten mass is taken, then it is cut and must be completely stretched. After this, it is pressed by fingers and the circular shape mass is obtained by stretching. Then, it is folded up, stretched again and everything is repeated till getting the thin thread mass. After this, the mass is bound, rolled and left. The same happens with the second, third and next pieces. The cheese is salted in the “Tsatkhi” (brine) during 2-3 hours. Then, the cheese is taken out and placed on the shelf for becoming free from extra wetness.

The pieces are rinsed in the cheese fat decoction (consisting of 13-26%) and then placed in the ceramic pot. When the pot becomes full of cheese, it is pressed by hands (from which the term “Tenili” comes). The clean canvas is placed on the pot and kept thereon during 2-3 days in the cool place, after which the pot is turned, the extra liquid is removed and after 1-3 days it is pressed again. The wood ash is scattered down and the pots are placed thereon. The temperature in the storage must be 10-11°C.

SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR THE END PRODUCT LABELING:

The name TENILI on the cheese packaging, as well as on its accompanying documents and advertising materials in foreign languages is placed in the following way:

By Latin font: TENILI

By Russian font: ТЕНИЛИ

PRODUCTION CONTROLLING AUTHORITY: Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia.

Source: National intellectual Property Center of Georgia http://www.sakpatenti.org.ge