ALAS

All About Salt

In the same ALAS leaflet series:

- Traditional saltworks in southern Europe: historical development and operation
- The salter's profession: weather and sweat
- *Traditionally produced salt: a high quality product*
- Traditional production of salt: an age-old cultural heritage
- Discovering traditional saltworks: a short guide for tourists and amateurs
- Traditional production of salt and its culture: your region benefits from it

The ALAS Project is an initiative that aims the safeguard of traditional salinas. It is carried out within the framework of an ECOS-Overture Programme. More information on this project can be obtained at www.alas.gr and www.aegean.gr/alas/general.htm

With the financial support
of the European Commission

Text - Theodora Petanidou / Hjalmar Dahm / Renato Neves • **Photos** - Hjalmar Dahm • **Design** - João Ricardo • **Layout** - Filipe Dias • **Coordination** - Sónia Pinto / Figueira da Foz City Council •

Traditionally produced salt: a high quality product

Cover photo: A pile of *fleur de sel*, salinas of Guérande

Traditionally produced salt: a high quality product

Although they share the same fundamentals and pathways of making, i.e. through evaporation of sea-water in successive basins, traditionally and industrially produced salts differ remarkably. The difference not only concerns their chemical composition, but also their organoleptic characteristics. Further, it is related with the culture standing behind the product, together with the people and the site of production.

As to the chemical composition, the difference between traditionally and industrially produced salts concerns the presence of elements other than sodium chloride, which is explained because of the harvesting techniques. First of all, due to the harvest frequency, industrially produced salt is purer in sodium chloride, whereas artisanal salt contains more "chemical impurities" otherwise known as *trace elements*. Artisanal process encompasses a carefully handmade scraping using wooden tools, with everyday to weekly harvests along the salt making season. The industrial harvesting is carried out once per year by means of mechanical scraping or cutting the layer of salt deposited at the bottom of the crystalliser. Considering that mechanical harvesting drags a large amount of soil impurities, industrial salt must be washed, thus eliminating most of the less representative mineral elements and increasing the concentration of sodium chloride often to about 99% dry weight. Another point of difference concerns the chemical additives used in many salts produced this way in order to prevent water absorption.

Salt harvest in an artisanal salina, Piran, Slovenia

Salt harvest in an industrial salina, Kalloni, Lesvos

Contrary to what is produced at the industrial level, traditionally produced salt does not need washing when correctly produced, keeping its original properties for very long storing periods. Its content in sodium chloride is lower compared to industrial salt, because of the *trace elements* combined with the dominant salt, as illustrated in the table herewith. It must be pointed out that modern dietetics considers the ingestion of some of these trace elements essential. Their exclusion from diet is a step towards its impoverishment, which is globally considered as harmful to public health. Western societies must give special attention to this issue in the context of the substantial changes in the concept of nutrition habits taken place the last years.

Compounds – Elements	Traditionally produced sea salt (salinas of Guérande, Atlantic France)	
	% on fresh weight	% dry weight
NaCl	84.71	96.61
$CaSO_4$	0.29	0.33
MgCl	1.20	1.37
$MgSO_4$	1.08	1.23
total H_2O	12.32	
insolubles	0.24	0.27
other elements (K, Fe, Mn, Zn, Pb, Cd etc.)	0.17	0.19
total	100.00	100.00

Analysis made by "Laboratoire Central de Chimie Analytique de l'Institut Scientifique et Technique de Pêches Maritimes"; Source: Groupement des Producteurs de Sel de Guérande.

On the other hand, because salt is extensively used in seasoning and preservation of ready-made food, the intake of sodium chloride must be done according to recommended contents, which is 5-6 daily grams per person. As its presence is excessive in prepared food, the domestic use of common salt should seek for commercial brands offering lower NaCl contents. In this respect, artisanal salt or salt produced in a traditional way in solar salinas is doubtlessly advantageous.

Another point to be elucidated concerns the organoleptic characteristics of the traditionally produced salt. Due to the regular harvesting by scraping the bottom of the crystallisers, traditionally produced salt contains fine grains needing almost no grinding, opposing to the coarse salt crystallised in the industrial salinas. Further to the aesthetic aspect, the fact that fine grain salt is used without any process, almost directly from the salina, helps it keeping all its bouquet of scents related to the site and the type of production.

Finally, many chefs and *gourmets* consider traditionally produced salt a higher quality culinary product, above all the so-called sparkling white flower salt (*fleur de sel*) obtained by crystallisation in a thin film at the surface of the crystallisers. According to such experts, the use of traditionally produced salt and flower salt contributes a good deal to the taste quality of food prepared with it.

Recipe with traditionally produced semi-coarse salt:

Sardines as in Kalloni

Ingredients:

½ kg small sardines

- 1 cup of coarse salt, preferably humid (e.g.unrefined traditional salt)
- olive oil, lemon and parsley

Cooking:

- Put the fish in layers with salt in between. Leave in a cool place for 6-8 hours.
- Wipe off the remaining salt; eliminate skin, heads, and intestines.
- Drop olive oil and freshly cut lemon juice over the fishes; decorate with chopped parsley and enjoy as a starter.

Kali orexi! (Bon appétit)

Very traditional for the area of Kalloni, Lesvos island, Greece

Salt harvested manually on the island of Kythira, Greece