

Minutes of 9th meeting of the Informal Working Group on Halloumi/Hellim **11 June 2025**

The 9th meeting of the Informal Working Group on Halloumi/Hellim, i.e. the second meeting of its second assembly, was held on 11 June 2025 in the Home4Cooperation in Nicosia. The meeting was chaired in person by DG REGIO in the presence of 5 members of the Working Group and an observer from Sustainable Food Systems Ireland. Relevant Commission services participated on-line in the meeting, including co-chair DG AGRI. The new representative from DG SANTE introduced himself to the Working Group.

The Working Group adopted the Draft agenda shared in advance of the meeting.

Members shared information on recent developments relevant to the PDO scheme and the Working Group. The lack of progress with the delegation of powers to Bureau Veritas France for conducting relevant Union public health and animal health requirement inspections and controls in the Turkish Cypriot community was noted. The inspections and controls are needed to open the possibility for the full participation of Turkish Cypriot food business operators in the Halloumi/Hellim PDO scheme.

As concerns ways to increase the quantities of small ruminants' milk available for the PDO scheme, it was proposed to focus on basic solutions such as improving existing farming practices and increasing the price of sheep and goat milk.

The process of amending PDO specifications was discussed in detail. DG AGRI explained the legal basis and nature of temporary amendments, emphasising that such amendments are envisaged in the European legislation as a short-term remedy addressing urgent and particular needs which impact the ability of producers to apply the original recipe (for example in cases of natural disasters, market distortions and/or specific sanitary measures). The Commission needs to be informed of any temporary amendment which becomes applicable law in the rest of the territory of the EU upon publication in the EU Official Journal. It was noted that, contrary to the rules in place, the Commission has not been informed of any temporary amendment of the Halloumi/Hellim PDO specifications since July 2024. Working Group members were also reminded that any producer group composed of producers of the product designated by the PDO can propose to the Competent Authority an amendment to the PDO specifications.

Working group member Mr. Marios Konstantinou made a presentation on *Halloumi/Hellim PDO production capacities in the Greek Cypriot community* (see Annex 1). The ensuing discussion centred mostly on the possibility for joint bi-communal work to develop a common proposal for an amended PDO recipe, which would tackle the joint challenge of a lack of sufficient small ruminants' milk to produce at scale the original PDO recipe.

Working group member Ms. Nasia Alexandrou made a presentation on *laboratory tests of authenticity/composition of raw materials* (see Annex 2). The presentation opened up reflections on the possible applicability of the method throughout the island.

The meeting concluded at an optimistic note regarding the prospects of finding common ground among producers across Cyprus on a joint PDO recipe.

Ms. Pomoell-Segurola thanked members for their valuable contributions and cooperation.

The next meeting of the Working Group was tentatively announced for 26 September 2025 in the physical presence of colleagues from DG AGRI. The Chair expressed openness to host an earlier Working Group meeting if need requested by the members to discuss proposals for revised PDO specifications.

The minutes will be posted on the Commission's website.

Annex 1: List of members participating in the 8th meeting of the Informal Working Group on Halloumi/Hellim:

Working Group Members:

- Alexandrou, Nasia
- Andrea, Christo
- Ergüven, Mustafa
- Konstantinou, Marios
- Öztürk, Kemal

From the Commission:

- Pomoell-Segurola, Jutta, DG REGIO – Chair of meeting
- Cianfoni, Luca, DG AGRI – Co-chair (participating online)
- Karampella, Theodora, DG AGRI – (participating online)
- Bloemendal, Jan, DG SANTE (participating online)
- Castelló Corvillo, Javier, DG REGIO
- Buza-Vidas, Marina, DG REGIO

Observers:

- Parker, Michael, Sustainable Food Systems Ireland

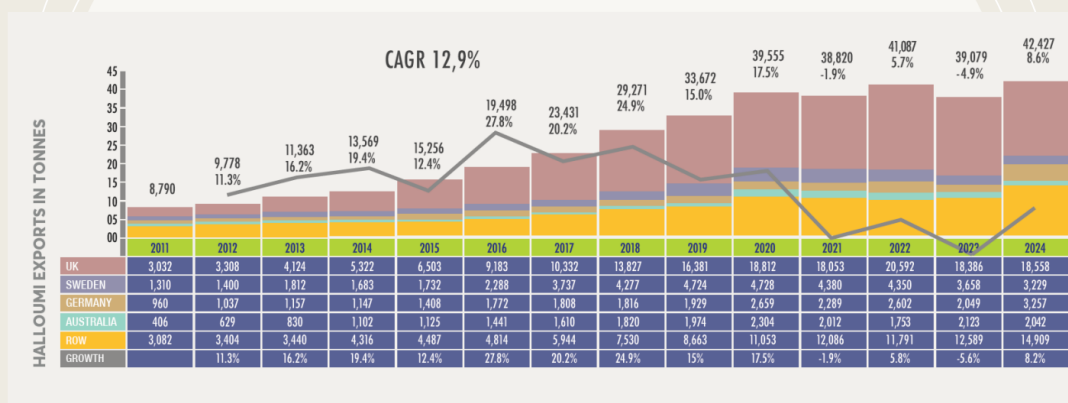
Halloumi PDO Status

11 JUNE 2025 – DG REGIO

Agenda

- 1. Halloumi historical Export Volume**
- 2. Learnings from the Halloumi PDO Implementation**
- 3. Halloumi PDO Challenges**

Halloumi Historical Export Volume



Learnings from the Halloumi PDO Implementation

1. Strong Protection within EU from imitations. Still vulnerable to fake Halloumi produced in other countries with CY code
2. Good protection in 3rd countries with room for improvement
3. Consistent quality audits by Bureau Veritas & the ministries of Commerce and Agriculture promote fair competition in the cheese makers industry
4. The PDO implementation ignited upgraded support and focus from the Cyprus government (New monthly milk production reporting, monthly milk usage by dairies, Halloumi committee chaired by the Chamber of Commerce)
5. Minimum benefit derived from consumers and customers

Halloumi PDO Challenges

1. Transitional period ends in July 2029, so we need to finalize specs on time...
2. Current weather conditions are very challenging for the Cyprus farming and Agriculture (heat, water scarcity)...
3. How do we expand PDO in more countries outside EU
4. How do we leverage existing trademarks
5. Exports pricing on standard Halloumi is very low for a high quality PDO product
6. Inflation coupled with pressure on the disposable income of consumers following the numerous crises of the last few years (COVID, Ukraine war, Israel war, USA tariffs)
7. Intense competition from grilled cheeses produced in EU
8. The loss of key SKUs following the PDO implementation (Light, flavors, etc).
9. How do we upgrade our participation at international fairs

Thanks for your Attention

Annex III: Presentation by Nasia Alexandrou



Method for identifying Cypriot milk in Halloumi Cheese

Agenda

- Presentation of the results of the Cypriot Mil Identification Program
- Highlighting its advantages and applications
- Information on next steps

Purpose and Justification

► The Importance of Milk Identification

Emphasizing the need for authenticity and quality in Cypriot milk

► Background on Halloumi Adulteration

Historical context and foundations of the program

► Adulteration trends

Grill cheese presence.

The Importance of the PDO

- Customers/Consumer concerns about food product safety and transparency have been ongoing for years.
- Customers/Consumers are happy to pay a fair price for a crafted premium product.
- The added value of such products also increases the risk of their adulteration.
- Halloumi, as a PDO product, is subject to annual certification based on mass balance checks of milk and cheese quantities. It is certified for manufacture, packaging, and selling under a single certificate covering all stages.
- Currently seasonal recipe changes are managed by the responsible ministry, taking into account the availability in sheep and goat milk availability in Cyprus.

Objectives of the Project

CONTEXT: Reports of origin fraud are persistent and high profile.

Consumer concerns about food product safety and transparency have been ongoing for years.

THEREFORE: Collaboration agreed between POC, Nordex Food Group (Futura) and Food Forensics to develop a bespoke origin validation test for Halloumi Cheese.

- ▶ To Identify and provide a scientific test to confirm milk origin is Cypriot.
- ▶ To protect Cypriot Farmers, identifying the provenance of milk provided by Cypriot farms.
- ▶ To provide an accredited test method by the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) against ISO 17025. UKAS assures this test method gives reliable and consistent results.
- ▶ Therefore, creating a tool for Government Compliance, to support **integrity** throughout Supply Chain – to provide added value for **consumer confidence**, build **brand trust** and business reputation.

NH
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Rationale

- ▶ Existing database of milk sample profiles from various European locations (via laboratory).
- ▶ Objective: to develop a laboratory test that discourages and prevents unfairly low offers of authentic dairy products in the global market.
- ▶ By investing in building trust across all parts of the supply chain, we increase recognition of the label's value
- ▶ The test is used in collaboration with our suppliers and is available to major retailers, food producers, catering companies, and relevant regulatory authorities.

Locations for collection of milk

- Within projects, wider data was collected from European countries to widen the laboratory's database and provide data



Database of samples with known Country of Origin

- Aware of this scientific approach, POC approached Food Forensics with an opportunity to help support and include in the database Cypriot milk samples. Try to define what is Cypriot milk and compare to non Cypriot one.
- Grilling cheeses, (which replicate the Halloumi eating occasion) from EU imports can unknowingly infiltrate external Markets.



The Approach

1. Determine

Determine the questions to be answered e.g.

Is this made from Cypriot milk?

2. Collect

Collect data from known locations.
Establish a database (fingerprint)

- POC Collections/ Food Forensics collections
- Representation of commercial production
- Covering target and possible adulteration locations

3. Confirm

Food Forensics test the database against samples from other countries.

- Can we discriminate?
- Validate method

4. Test

Industry test for consistency with samples of known origin

Principle of the Method The Science

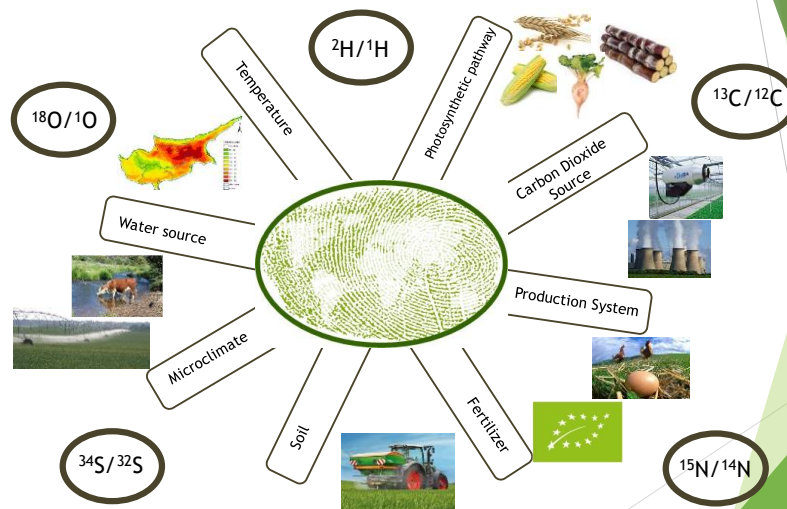
Think of SIRA as a **fingerprint**



But instead of telling you **WHO**
it tells you **WHERE** and **HOW**
(Origin & Production Method)

Stable isotopes do not decay (not radioactive)
Natural abundance of the 5 different isotopes in our environment

The Environmental Fingerprint



The Approach

Collect data from known origins/production system

- ▶ Establish a database (fingerprint)
- ▶ Methods of securing authentic samples
 - ▶ Representation of commercial production

Test the database against samples from other origins/production methods

- ▶ Can we discriminate?
- ▶ Which is the best method?
 - ▶ Can be combined with other test methods if required.
(fatty acid composition or trace elements)
- ▶ Establish method
- ▶ Validate method
- ▶ Retest annually

Results for the Halloumi Project

We have successfully implemented a scientific test to confirm milk origin is Cypriot.

This is an accredited test method accredited by UKAS against ISO 17025. The United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) gives reliable and consistent results.

- ▶ We can identify Milk and Halloumi Cheese from Cyprus.
- ▶ We can identify Milk from non-Cypriot origins.
- ▶ We can identify Milk from Milk powder.

Halloumi Program – Today

- ▶ Method presented at press conference.
- ▶ Ongoing quarterly sampling to cover all seasons.
- ▶ Participation of dairy producers and certification of involvement.
- ▶ Method is used by major retailers

Future Planning & Next Steps..

Our Goal

- Overtime we will have a representative of every farm in Cyprus.

Our ASK to you

- For Farms not currently participating to volunteer and become part of the Database.

Thank you

