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BACALA' ALLA VICENTINA STAR OF THE NATIONAL FOOD HERITAGE

The international network EuroFIR (funded by the European Commission), after a thorough study, has appointed the dish as one of the five traditional foods representative of the Bel Paese

The *Bacalà alla Vicentina*, the most important dish of the Venetian cuisine and the most famous of all of specialties of the Berica region, has been officially selected as one of the five most representative traditional foods of Italy.

This important recognition, which in effect puts the *Bacalà alla Vicentina* in the elite national offerings of food and wine, comes from the project EuroFIR (European Food Information Resource Network) financed by the European Commission.

During the press conference of the Veneto Regional Council, held yesterday (Sept. 21) at Palazzo Balbi, Luca Zaia, the Regional Head of State, accompanied by Luciano Righi, president of the *Confraternity of the Bacalà alla Vicentina* (an organisation engaged for years in the protection and enrichment of the dish) wanted to emphasise this significant milestone, noting that this dish, due to its long tradition, is representative of all the Veneto.

The prestigious **international network for information on foods EuroFIR (which includes 27 EU countries and 49 research centres)** has been responsible for the identification of traditional foods of excellence in the European Union, including specifically the *Bacalà alla Vicentina*. This was an in-depth work which involved specialists and researchers of nutrition from all over Europe.

In Italy, the study involved the National Research Institute for Food and Nutrition in Rome; the Division of Molecular and Nutritional Epidemiology Institute for the Study and Prevention of Cancer, Florence; the Division of Epidemiology and Biostatistics at the European Institute of Oncology in Milan; the Chair of Hygiene and Epidemiology, University of Udine.

Accompanying *Bacalà alla Vicentina* in the EuroFIR project, are four other domestic products of long tradition: ***the Brasato of Barolo (Piedmont), the Cannoli di Ricotta (Sicily), the Castagnaccio (Tuscany) and the Pizza Margherita (Campania).***

These Italian specialties, along with others selected from throughout Europe, can now be thoroughly recognised by all who are interested and passionate in traditional food and its research. It has been extensively distributed throughout the gastronomic world due to the work of this European project. In this sense, the first step was to circulate the data sheets prepared for the study via the website dedicated to the project www.eurofir.net. Here you can download the document (in Italian and English) which summarises the history, the traditional recipe, preparation and finally the nutritional values.

The *Bacalà alla Vicentina* has managed to overcome competition from other famous national gastronomic specialities mainly thanks to the important work of historical restoration and enhancement in this sector since 1987, performed by the *Venerable Brotherhood of the Bacalà alla Vicentina* and which were responsible for providing researchers specifically to study the historical records of the dish (whose origins date back to the 1400s), as well as all other information on recipes, methods of preparation and diffusion in the area, all of which were extremely useful in the development of the project.

However, the *Bacalà alla Vicentina* was not only studied "on paper". The researchers in charge of EuroFIR, with camera in hand, also filmed all stages of the setting up of the dish (which had a preparation time of about 3 days) and then sent samples of the dish to accredited laboratories, which then proceeded to establish the nutritional characterisation which were then obtained essentially through chemical analysis the nutritional values of this food speciality.

This European recognition not only serves to further enhance the reputation of a dish that only two decades ago was in danger of being forgotten but has instead been able to win back consumers and fans. One thing above all: now, thanks to the spread of the *Bacalà alla Vicentina*, it is estimated that 20% of the 3000 tons of *stoccafisso* (i.e. cod, the dried ingredient in the recipe) which a leader in this production such as Norway exports to Italy, ends up in Veneto. And within the consumption of these 600 tons arriving in the region, Vicenza is one of the "heavyweights" in economic terms, since the 'Berico' dish requires the use of the best quality dried cod, which is, of course, also the absolutely most expensive product.

It is no accident that in the next few days, from 23 to 27 September 2010, the mayor of the Norwegian island of Rost (in the archipelago of Lofoten), accompanied by a delegation of authorities from the Scandinavian country, will be in **Sandrigò (VI)** to participate in the annual ***Festa del Bacalà*** organized by the *Pro Loco Sandrigò* and the *Confraternita' del Bacalà alla Vicentina*. This is an event which draws thousands of fans of the traditional Berico dish from all over the Veneto region and which is the most important event in the celebration of the popular dish (for more information see www.baccalaallavicentina.it). **During the festival it is estimated the more than 20 thousand portions of this highly acclaimed delicacy will be consumed.**

Ambassadors of the *Bacalà alla Vicentina* are also many restaurants that include this typical dish in their own menus. In this respect, the *Confraternita* promotes in collaboration with Vicenza Confcommercio, which represents the majority of Berico operators, a specific route for the recommended restaurants. These include some **forty restaurants scattered within the province of Vicenza and four outside the province** (Milan, Castelfranco Veneto, Mestre and Tombolo in the province of Padua). In these restaurants the preparation of the dish, all **specially tagged**, is done in strict compliance with the traditional recipe and so many random and surprise inspections are conducted by the fellowship in order to ensure the quality of the product that is offered to customers. So now, thanks to the EuroFIR project, Europe has also certified the value of the *Bacalà alla Vicentina* in the national traditional diet of our country, making the *Made in Vicenza* dish a somewhat ambassador in the entire world's rich and national gastronomic heritage.

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