



Production Area

Austria

UNESCO World Heritage Site Wachau, Lower Austria



Slow Food®

# Wachauer Safran



Bernhard Kaar

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The **Slow Food international** organization involving more than 100,000 people from 150 countries on five continents-promotes taste education, fights for the preservation of agricultural biodiversity, organizes events and publishes books and magazines.

Slow Food **Presidia** are local projects that work to protect small-scale producers and to safeguard quality artisan products. Their objective is to guarantee a viable future for local communities by organizing producers, searching out new economic outlets and raising the profiles of tastes and regions.

The **Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity** supports over 300 Presidia in the world.

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Slow Food Foundation  
for Biodiversity

# Revival of Crocus Austriacus

The cultivation of saffron in Lower Austria (defined in botanical and pharmaceutical literature as *Crocus Austriacus*) is documented from the end of the 12th century until the 19th century. It appears that it arrived in 1187 with the Crusader Walther von Merkenstein who brought the seedlings from the Orient to Austria. The local abbey published a manual on the cultivation of saffron crocuses in 1797.

Thanks to its quality and purity, the saffron from Lower Austria was considered to be one of the best available in Europe. Its main market was the seed market in Krems, the largest city in the region, which was visited by merchants from all over Europe. In the mid 18th century, approximately 800 kilograms of saffron was being produced. The names of villages in the region, Saffen and Safrat, are testimony to this local tradition. Saffron cultivation ceased to be important in the region due to the combination of cheap imports and high taxes for farmers. Saffron production is now experiencing a renewal in the



# The Presidium

This is a particularly complex Presidium, as while the production of saffron in Lower Austria is historically very important, it was completely abandoned several decades ago. Therefore, much work is being done to reclaim the tradition using written and oral testimonials (such as interviewing the elderly), and to identify appropriate regional farming techniques in order to reestablish Wachauer Safran production in the region.

The Presidium is coordinated by Bernhard Kaar, an ecologist who founded the association "Crocus Austriacus" for the protection of saffron in 2007. The aim of the Wachauer Safran Presidium is to re-build the culture of traditional saffron production in the region, and for the product to regain the importance and quality it was once renowned for across Europe. Today, the Presidium involves two producers and the immediate goals are to involve more producers and to gradually increase the total cultivation area to five hectares. The organically certified saffron and products are mainly sold in the local region in order to encourage a reconnection with this traditional product and develop awareness of its history.



Wachau region, an area that is characterized by wine terraces and apricot orchards and has been UNESCO World Heritage listed since 2000. Many of the centuries-old terraces are no longer productive, and many have been covered over with scrub. Agricultural specialties such as saffron could provide a chance to bring the terraces back into use.

Local production of saffron started again in 2007, and was re-introduced as an organically certified crop. The bulbs are planted in sandy-loamy soil in August and bloom from October onwards. The Presidium producers have developed a new harvesting technique, based on traditional methods, in which only the stigmas are harvested from the flower in the morning. This harvesting method is one of the reasons why the quality of the Wachauer Safran is so high. Saffron was and is still an ingredient in many traditional cakes (such as Gugelhupf, an Austrian Bunt cake) as well as in soups or horseradish sauce. Today it is also used in creations such as saffron-red wine chocolate, jam, vinegar, beverages and flavored honey.

