



Norway
Region of Finnmark, Isle of Sørøya

The producers

5 fishermen from the Isle of Sørøya and two companies that process cod into stockfish:

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Slow Food Presidia are local projects that work to improve the infrastructure of artisan food production. The goal of the Presidia is to guarantee a viable future for traditional foods by stabilizing production techniques, establishing stringent production standards and promoting local consumption.

The Presidia project is coordinated by the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity, which organizes and funds projects that defend our world's heritage of agricultural biodiversity and gastronomic traditions.

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Slow Food®

Stockfish from the Isle of Sørøya



photo: Carlo Fantti



Slow Food Foundation
for Biodiversity

Arctic Cod Fishermen

The Isle of Sørøya lies at the fringes of the Arctic Sea in Northern Norway in the middle of one of the world's richest fishing grounds. Each day at sunrise shoals of cod pour out in the fjord's waters. When winter is nearing an end and the days are getting longer, the cod return from Barents Sea to spawn and the fjords around Sørøya teem with fish. It is in this period, from January to April, that the best quality cod is caught and the best stockfish is made.

Each year in July, the 1,000 inhabitants of the isle – most of them fishermen or involved in fish processing – organize a fish festival in the village of Sørvær to celebrate the beginning of summer. There is a long tradition of producing stockfish on the island.

Sørøya has always enjoyed a good reputation for cod, which is caught here and made into *tørrfisk*, or stockfish, by local fishermen and artisans. As with elsewhere along the coast, traditional stockfish is produced from cod, but in Sørøya, with the richness of the waters, producers are also experimenting with halibut, wolf fish, saithe and haddock.



The Presidium

In 2005, Sørøya fishermen began delivering fresh cod to the two companies of the isle again. Since the fish is caught just two hours off the coast, it is not necessary to freeze it before delivering and processing it. The cod are gutted, decapitated and cleaned in seawater directly on the fishing boats. Once the fish have been delivered to the processing companies, each cod is paired with another specimen of the same size. The two fish are then tied together by their tails with cotton string and hung on *hjells*, the characteristic wooden racks where the stockfish are left to dry in the open during winter, when the climate is harsh and the air cold and dry. The drying process can last from two to three months, depending on wind, temperature and the size of the fish. It is critical that the stockfish be hung a certain distance apart from each other, allowing the air to circulate freely. The Presidium aims to promote this traditional product, made from cod from the Barents Sea that are caught with sustainable fishing techniques. This is one of the two sole areas of the world – along with Iceland – where cod shoals are in good health. Slow Food also hopes to expand the market for this stockfish beyond the region where it is produced.



Sørøya fishermen customarily catch cod from small boats no more than 50 kilometers off the coast. Most fishing vessels in Sørøya (about 50) have a maximum length of 15 meters and deliver the fish no more than two hours after they are caught – that is, when they are still extremely fresh. Cod used to make stockfish are fished mainly with a *juksa*, or a hook, and line. This is particularly beneficial to the quality of the cod, which do not suffer during the catch, and allows the artisan to attain a more prized product than that caught with nets. There are two companies that process cod on the isle of Sørøya. However, a series of financial problems – brought about by the difficulties in finding a market for the island's products – has seriously hurt the economy of the island and consequently threatens the survival of its inhabitants, whose sole means of earning a livelihood depend on the fishery.

During the year that the primary fishing company in Sørvær closed down, the locals there set up a work group called Tradisjonsfiskgruppa, which continued producing small quantities of stockfish, caviar and other products according to traditional recipes collected from interviews with the old fishermen of the isle.

