

# Transylvanian Cheese Reinvented with EU Money

*Beyond the tales of vampires and strange creatures of the night, Transylvania is increasingly known worldwide for its gastronomy.*

SÂG, SĂLAJ COUNTY, ROMANIA, May 26, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Transylvania is known worldwide thanks to Irish writer Bram Stoker's novel Dracula. But beyond the tales of vampires and strange creatures of the night, Transylvania is increasingly known worldwide for its gastronomy. The Financial Times, in a report a few years ago, compared Transylvania to Tuscany, and Professor Paul Bloomfield of Oxford Brookes University said Transylvania has the same potential for food tourism as Tuscany or Antalya.

Transylvanian gastronomy is a blend of Romanian, Hungarian and German traditions with Armenian and Balkan influences. Old recipes preserved in Transylvanian villages are being discovered by young enthusiasts studying at the [University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine in Cluj](#), who have set themselves the task of preserving the gastronomic heritage of this European region.

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*Cristi Blaga, executive director of LAG Poarta Transilvaniei*

But it's not only the students of the Cluj university who are involved in revitalizing gastronomic traditions, but also its teachers. A very special project has been funded by the European Union through a very dynamic association bringing together local entrepreneurs, civil society and public administration in the Western Carpathian region.

It is the Local Action Group (LAG) "Poarta Transilvaniei", which implemented a project entitled "Development of new products in the territory of the LAG Poarta



Sâg ripened cheese

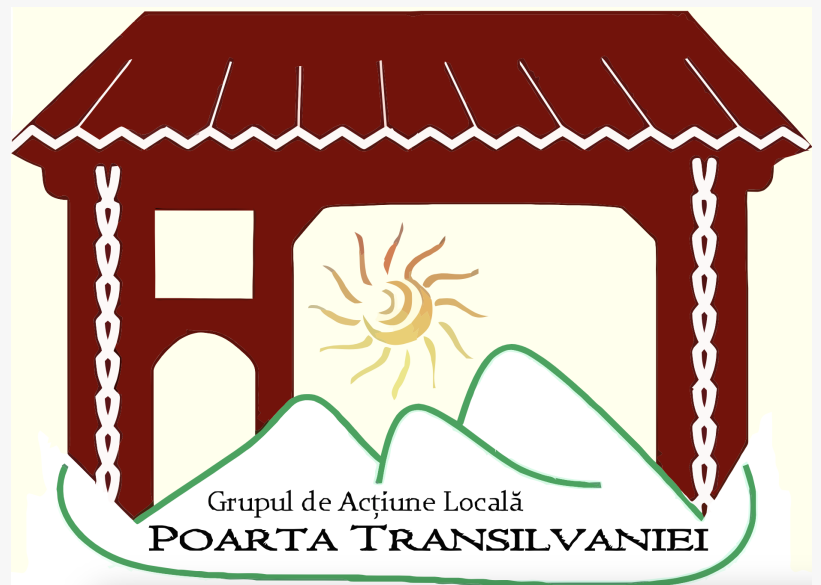
Transilvaniei". This project involved nine partners: the University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine, the Association of Cattle Breeders from the village of [Sâg](#), and seven farmers.

The project started in 2018, at the initiative of the executive director of LAG Poarta Transilvaniei, Cristi Blaga. "We noticed that local farmers had a big problem. Because they lacked the capacity to process and store milk, they were prisoners of the prices offered by intermediaries. These prices were very low and didn't allow farmers to make the profits they needed to reinvest and grow their businesses. So we started from idea that there is strength in unity and proposed that farmers join forces to start a new project," says Cristi Blaga.

At first, his proposal aroused enthusiasm in the Transylvanian village of Sâg in Sălaj county. "The farmers seemed seduced by the idea of selling their milk at higher prices and also becoming shareholders in a cheese factory. But when they found out that they had to contribute financially to the project, their enthusiasm faded. Only seven farmers eventually stayed in the project," says their leader, Dorel Breje.



The cheese produced in the project



LAG Poarta Transilvaniei

The total value of the project was €594,738 and the European funds amounted to €463,625. The difference had to be provided by farmers struggling on the verge of poverty. But they had faith in their plan and their dream gradually became a reality.

To succeed, they enlisted the help of specialists from the University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine in Cluj, which is the top-ranked Romanian university in its field. The team led by Professor Călin Vac was a veteran of European projects. He set up the first European project

writing office in a Romanian university before Romania joined the European Union in 2007. Professor Călin Vac started to study which is the best milk that can be used to produce mature cheeses. He identified the breeds of cows suitable for this part of Europe, as well as the amounts of buffalo, goat and sheep milk that can be added to cow's milk to create a distinctive taste for the mature Sâg cheeses. He also identified plants that grow in the spontaneous flora of the meadows in this part of Transylvania to flavor the cheeses.

Professor Călin Vac then studied the Romanian and European markets in order to position future mature cheeses from a marketing point of view. He found that the average Romanian consumer buys four times less cheese than a European consumer. On average, a Romanian consumer buys five kilograms of cheese, while a European consumer buys on average 20 kilograms of cheese. It also found that two thirds of Romanian consumers prefer traditional cheeses and prefer organic, certified organic products. However, when it comes to buying, half of Romanians choose products based on price as the main criterion, while the other half of buyers consider quality as the main criterion.

From this stage, the initiative was taken over by Professor Avram Fițiu, who has a great deal of experience in collecting and using traditional recipes to create food products that are successful on the Romanian market. He discovered that one of the most valuable plants found in wild flora is thyme. The use of this plant is attested in history. Thyme was used by soldiers of the legions of the Roman Empire established in Dacia, today's Romania, to ensure their adaptation to the local food. Thyme has a positive influence on the human body in that it stimulates the secretions of the liver and has a positive effect on the intestines. In addition, thyme has a distinctive taste. As a result, this herb has been included in one of the recipes used for the production of Sâg cheeses. These cheeses are semi-hard and semi-fat cheeses with a taste that is highly appreciated by consumers.

Now the project in Sâg has become a success. The seven farmers who founded the factory are happy to have succeeded in creating high value-added products. "In the beginning, we sold a kilogram of cheese for 20 lei (€4). Now, we sell it for 120 lei (€24), which is a tremendous progress. The challenge now is to expand the factory. We are trying to find serious farmers in the region who will supply us with the milk we need, in the quantity and quality we want, in order to increase the quantity of cheeses," says farmer Dorel Breje.

The success of the Sâg project has also inspired other farmers. Already, other milk producer associations want to copy the project model.

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