

## *Sunca Gourmeticus Academicum Senior (Romania)*

### Product developed in EIT Food RIS Consumer Engagement Labs project

Older adults need to consume protein-rich foods as the basis of their diets. This becomes important with the progress of aging, when older adults lose weight and muscle mass, suffer from illnesses and increased stress levels. The protein intake is further impaired by the loss of appetite, dental problems, as well as challenges related to biting, chewing and swallowing foods. In addition, the reduced purchasing power discourages many older adults from searching for high-quality, healthy and tasty sources of proteins. The Romanian ham, developed specifically for older adults, addresses these challenges.

To find out what kind of food products answer the needs of older adults, the EIT Food project team invited older adults in Romania to participate in co-creation workshops. The participants developed an idea of an innovative ham-based product targeted at the older adults.

#### Innovative food product

The Romanian ham-based cold-cut is innovative and at the same time, faithful to the local meat processing traditions. The consumption of pork meat per capita in Romania is below the EU average, because Romanian consumers value high quality products, purchased in lower quantities than in many other countries. The local cuisine is linked to the availability of unique, domestic pig breeds such as *Mangalita*, *Bazna*, *Albul de Banat* or *Albul de Rușețu*, which offer exquisite pork meat that is healthier and more nutritious than the products coming from the intensive pig farming. The innovativeness of the product results from the unique combination of chunks of meat and the surrounding, spicy jam, based on natural ingredients.

#### Good for health

*Sunca Gourmeticus Academicum Senior* is healthy and particularly suitable for older adults, as it is produced from the premium pork with very low contents of salt, fat or carbohydrates. The product contains as much as 83% of meat, and has particularly little fat or sugar when compared with other hams and meat-based products available on the market. Despite its high protein contents, it also has far less calories than smoked hams. The product does not include any artificial colorants or starch, widely present in cold-cuts from other producers. It's based on healthy, local, high quality ingredients and natural aromas, becoming an important source of proteins for older adults.

#### Preferred by older adults / Designed by older adults for older adults

The product concept was designed by Romanian consumers, who emphasized numerous desirable aspects of cold-cuts. It is easy to bite and chew – chunks of high quality pork are surrounded by spicy jam, making it easier to consume – nicely moist and soft, and thus very different from dry and hard hams, usually avoided by older adults. It contains a unique combination of flavours and aromas, answering to the distinctive Romanian taste, different from spicy meat-based products from other European regions. The use of spices also benefits meat preservation and extends the shelf-life while allowing to reduce salt contents and refrain from using artificial preservatives. The product takes into account the chemosensory decline experienced by older adults, with naturally enhanced flavours that ensure adequate sensory experiences.

#### Different from existing products

Agronomia Agro Food Innovation SRL took into account specific requirements of older adults, related to the product packaging and pricing. The combination of high quality meat with spicy jam made the price acceptable even for less wealthy consumers. The product is offered in conveniently small portion sizes, which could be

consumed at one or two meals, making it particularly suitable for single person households. The packaging was downsized to avoid unnecessary wrappings, use only one type of plastic but also reduce the resulting plastic waste, making it easy to sort and recycle. The packaging was fully transparent and easy to open, allowing consumers to see through to verify product contents, while also preserving the sensory characteristics and freshness.

#### Additional information about the project:

*Sunca Gourmeticus Academicum Senior* is a product designed during the co-creation workshops, held as part of the EIT Food RIS Consumer Engagement Labs project. The project is coordinated by the University of Warsaw and financed by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), under the Horizon 2020/Horizon Europe, the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. The project's main aim is to address the needs of older consumers in the food and beverage market by applying novel methodology which engages consumers, stimulates their creativity, and fosters the acceptance of new products. The product concept was designed in 2020 in Romania during co-creation sessions which gathered older consumers, scientists from the Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca and the representatives of food producer Agronomia Agro Food Innovation SRL. Following the co-creation process, the innovative product was developed and introduced to the market in 2021.

Find out more about the project at: <http://timo.wz.uw.edu.pl/cel>