

discover...

The new challenges that farmers and breeders in the high hill regions of the Oltrepò now face are tied to ancient traditions. One of these took place every year in San Ponso Semola, a few kilometres from Varzi. **San Ponso Fair** was on the first Sunday in August and was dedicated to farm animals and local produce. When the harvest was over, this village in the heart of the Staffora Valley filled with farmers from the valleys in the surrounding four provinces where, although it was known by different names, this unmistakable, wheat-coloured bovine could be found. The fair brings breeders, farmers, tourists and faithful lovers of the Lombard Apennines to the charming village of San Ponso. They all come sure of one thing: that the present is born again each day; it is the result of constant caring for the environment, of attending to fields and animals, and of the cooperation among the many and various professions that make the Oltrepò a unique and precious place.

A Biodiverse Oltrepò.

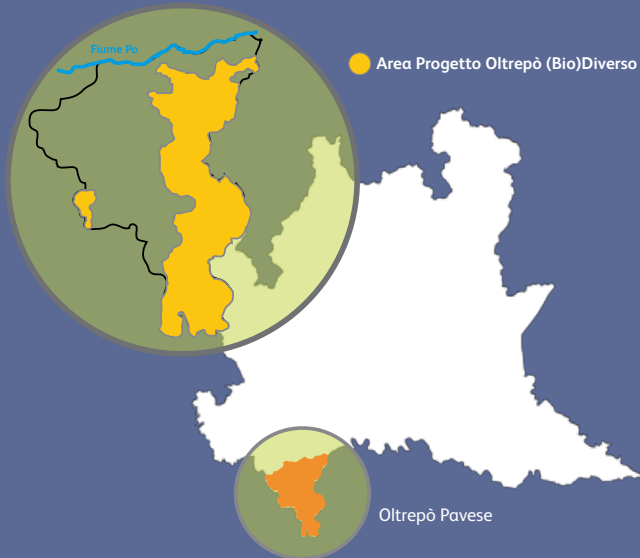


The Varzese Cow in the Province of Pavia

Az. Agr. Aietta di Fossati Daniele - Fraz. Casale Staffora, 29 - Santa Margherita di Staffora
Az. Agr. Barbieri di Krajpowicz Mariola - Fraz. San Ponso, 5 - Ponte Nizza
Az. Agr. Birilli Fabio - Fraz. S. Alberto di Butrio, 12 - Ponte Nizza
Az. Agr. Ca' dal Rus di Volpi Cecilia - Loc. Colombaia - Cecima
Az. Agr. Camerini Alessandro - Loc. Altre Case, 3 - Varzi
Az. Agr. Chierico Luigi Antonio - C.na Busto di Ferro, 3 - Valle Salimbene
Az. Agr. Crevani Davide - Via Gorretta - Golferezzo
Az. Agr. Della Noce Luca - Cascina Sforzesca - Monticelli Pavese
Az. Agr. Forlino Cesare - Loc. Albergognone, 1 - Borgo Priolo
Az. Agr. Kopeschi Luciana - Fraz. Moglio - Valverde
Az. Agr. La Fuga di Bertella Giancarlo - Cascina Cagnano, 1 - Varzi
Az. Agr. Montana Attilio - Via Gambolina, 94 - Vigevano
Az. Agr. Monticelli di Saflund Sophia - Loc. Monticelli - Val di Nizza
Az. Agr. Oranami di Tambornini Maurizio - Fraz. Pizzocorno, 64 - Ponte Nizza
Az. Agr. Podere Il Santo di Martinotti Sabina - Via J. F. Kennedy, 36 - Rivanazzano Terme
Az. Agr. Ranucci Wolderich Claudia - Fraz. Ca' Lombardini, 1 - Varzi
Az. Agr. Ruggieri Donato - Loc. Casarume, 1 - Godiasco Salice Terme
Az. Agr. Scaffali Roberto - Fraz. Lumello, 7 - Ponte Nizza
Az. Agr. Tavazzani Luigi - Loc. Ca dei Ratti, 117 - Pavia
Az. Agr. Verardo Lino - Fraz. San Ponso Semola - Ponte Nizza
Ca' de Figo S.a.s di Mandonico Matteo & C. Società Agr. - Loc. Cascina Figo - Varzi
Cooperativa Agr. Canedo - Fraz. Pozzallo - Romagnese
Piccola Società Cooperativa Agr. Cima Colletta - Loc. Lagone - Brallo di Pregola
Soc. Agr. Piccolo Fiore - Via Santa Marta di Sotto, 98 - Vigevano



to value, care for and discover
The Varzese



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There are places where the present is reborn day after day. This happens when work, the daily routine, brings together the authenticity of the past, and a readiness to face the challenges of a future rife with innovation that concerns us all. The Oltrepò is one of these places: valleys, old town centres, environmental and cultural resources, productivity and a flair for hospitality, food and wine, and traditions that have not been forgotten. It is here that a number of farmers have come together to protect the biodiversity of the Oltrepò by relaunching the "Vacca Varzese" (Varzi Cow), the popular "Montagnina" that has been a part of the country life of these valleys for centuries. The network consists of breeders, farmers, technicians, specialists from the worlds of tourism and commerce in this wedge of land, and also universities. They are in contact with Milan State University's Department of Veterinary Medicine and the Catholic University's Department of Sustainably Vegetable Production in Piacenza. The Adolescere Foundation's Open Innovation Centre in the Penicina is used for research and consulting regarding the reproduction of the Varzese breed and how the pastures are managed.

value...

The Montagnina Territory Association

Local breeders play the leading role in the reestablishment of the Varzese, the only autochthonous bovine in Lombardy. Breeding the Varzese is back in vogue on a number of farms in the high hill regions of the Oltrepò, as well as in adjacent areas. A considerable number of breeders are now becoming involved. Some time ago, a significant group of these breeders founded the Associazione Terre della Montagnina, The Montagnina Territory Association. The Association is striving to improve the breed genetically and increase its numbers through collaboration, to guarantee the eco-compatibility of breeding methods, and to ensure that what the animals are fed is both traceable and genuine. The overall goal is to protect and promote the uniqueness and importance of local agricultural and food production by eventually creating a specific guarantee that defines and safeguards the products that are a part of the chain.



The Slow Food Foundation and the Varzese Breed



The foundation aims to relaunch breeding of the Varzese by communicating the value of its meat, which comes from very small farms. The objective is to bring together as many breeders as possible using common breeding regulations that guarantee the highest quality meat: open pastures for as long as possible, the use of cereals (barley, maize) and locally produced hay, without soya, GMO or even maize silage. The greatest difficulties they face are the lack of genetic lineage and excessive fragmentation among the farms themselves.



care for...

Origin and distribution

The Varzese is the only autochthonous breed in Lombardy. It originated in an area of the Apennines where four regions meet: Lombardy Emilia, Liguria and Piedmont. In these different regions, the cow is called by a number of names; Varzese or Montana, Ottonese, Cabellotta and Tortonese. The breed is current most widespread in the provinces of Pavia, Milan, Alessandria, Genova and Piacenza. It probably arrived in Italy following the so-called Barbarian Invasions in the 6th century. At that time, the Longobards brought light-coloured livestock with them to the Po Valley. These were called "Fromentino", or "wheat-coloured".

The Varzese is on the list of officially registered rare autochthonous bovine breeds. The register was created to protect bovines bred in Italy that risk extinction and also to protect their genomes. Their skin is the colour of ripe wheat and the animals are small in size.

The Varzi cow is known for its longevity. 15 to 20-year old cows and oxen were a common sight in our fields. It is hard-working, rustic and peaceful, undemanding and adaptable. Compared to other breeds, it produces less meat and milk, but the quality is excellent.

*An animal is waiting
for you there.
The place is both yours
and hers.
Only together can you bring
it to life.*

*So I thought about all
the places I know, where I live.
From the plains of Milan to the highest hills. From Penice to Giarolo
and as far as Capanne di Marcarolo. Millenniums of history in Bobbio
and Gualdo di Catelnuovo..
That wheat-coloured cow, the "Montagnina" blends in with hills
and history. It's always been there: marking the passing of time
in the countryside.
If any of this has a soul, it's her. The Varzese, Ottonese, or just
"Montagnina". Wherever you are you feel at home, because you bring
together the land and real life and eliminate boundaries..*



(Maurizio Marone, veterinary surgeon)



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THE VILLAGE OF SAN PONZO

These pictures were taken in the picturesque village of San Ponzo (Ponte Nizza) during the traditional fair that takes place on the first Sunday in August.

This particularly charming village is of mediaeval origin and consists of well-conserved porticos and buildings made of local stone. The parish church, dedicated to the patron saint Saint Ponzo, stands at the entrance to the village. Although it dates back to the XI century, all that remains of the original, Romanic building are traces of the walls and the lower part of the bell tower. Since 1903, the altar in the chapel on the right has been home to the relics of San Ponzo. These were brought to the Staffora Valley from Rome in the III century AD to evangelize the local population. The so-called S. Ponzo Grotte are well worth a visit. According to legend, this cave is where the saint withdrew to pray in solitude. It can be reached from the church square by following the signposts: cross the village, then take an unsurfaced path until you reach a fork in the road. Go straight on, cross the stream (Torrente Semola) and go into the woods. The cave is 4mt high and 7mt long. For a long time, the faithful gathered the water that dripped from its ceiling because they believed it had miraculous properties.

01_02_03_09_Pictures of the San Ponzo Fair

04_05_08_The village of San Ponzo (photo M. Garavana)

06_07_Sant'Alberto di Butrio Hermitage (photo M. Garavana)

10_The Varzese at Lino Verardo's farm in San Ponzo



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Things to see
Near San Ponzo and not to be missed, is the Hermitage of Sant'Alberto di Butrio. It is set at 687 metres above sea level in the hamlet of the same name, which forms part of the Ponte Nizza district. The hermitage is in a breath-taking position surrounded by hills covered with woods and green pastures. The abbey was founded by Saint Alberto himself, who was perhaps a member of the feudal Malaspina family. In 1030, he went to live in solitude in the nearby Borrione valley, where there is still a small chapel dedicated to him. Today the abbey consists of a large central structure than incorporates the churches of St Antonio, Santa Maria, and St Alberto, as well as the bell tower made from an imposing rampart that was once part of the ancient town walls. In addition to the relics of the saint, the abbey houses numerous valuable frescos. These are cared for, as is the entire structure, by a small community of monks, the Congregazione religiosa Figli della Divina Provvidenza Opera di San Luigi Orione.



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