



Interview



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France is the European leader in oyster production. After having reproduced on the coasts of Charente, Vendée or in the Arcachon basin, they are raised on the entire coast.

Nestled between sea and pond, in wild nature, is the oyster farm of Leucate (a French town located in the southeast of the Aude department in the Occitanie region). The Leucate oyster is growing rapidly because the Leucate pond is very rich in plankton.

Jérôme Ferrari, director of the oyster farm «Chez ALLARY», told us that in the oyster village, only about twenty small oyster farms have been producing oysters for several decades, attracting many tourists. He shared his knowledge of oyster farming with us and explained why oysters are so popular in France and worldwide.

–How long have you been involved in the oyster business?

–«Chez ALLARY» is a familiar company; Allary is my grandfather's name. The company has been around for over 50 years. I started working when I was 17 and have been running the business for 5 years.

For 20 years we have been working as a degustation center. We were the first local producer to open a degustation center here. Leucate is known as a small place where people come to taste oysters on site. In total, we are about twenty oyster farmers in the village. All of them are family businesses having between 5 and 10 employees.

–What is the production volume?

–I make 80 tons of oysters a year. The volume of oysters produced there does not allow us to export them. So, it is sold on the local market. 90% of sales are made on-site: for sale to individuals or tasting in our degustation center.

–Please explain to us what oyster farming exactly means.

–Here oysters do not reproduce. We buy baby oysters, glue them to a rope, and leave them for 14 to 16 months. To take them, we pass them through a machine to detach them from the rope and wash them. With the help of a knife, we remove all unnecessary and put them back in salt water.... And in 15 days, they will be ready.

The season lasts all year round, but there are times when we work harder. It is during Christmas and summertime.

–According to a legend, the months that do not contain the letter «r» (June, July, etc.) are not good for oyster production. Is it true?

–It was valid before. It was the



Jérôme Ferrari

Director of the oyster farm «Chez ALLARY»

«Leucate is where people come to taste oysters on-site»

problem of being able to transport oysters. There were no refrigerated trucks, and there were no large cold rooms. Now everything is different. Today we make oysters here; tomorrow, they are in Paris.

The only condition for keeping oysters: the water ever must be cool.

–What are the benefits of oysters?

–The oyster contains many nutrients essential to the functioning of our body. Among others, phosphorus (tissue growth and regeneration), iron (cell development), zinc

(immune defences, production of genetic material, participation in the production of testosterone), copper (tissue structure, defense against free radicals), selenium (antioxidant) or the essential vitamin B12 (production and maintenance of nerve cells).

There is protein, and it is not a fatty product. It has a very good taste, and it is natural.

–Oysters can only be eaten raw, or are there options (oyster juice, for example)?

–No, oyster juice doesn't exist. Here

in France, we only eat them raw. On the other hand, in the United States, you can find shelled oysters.

–Can we say that oyster tasting has become a form of tourism, like wine tourism?

–Yes, we are visited by many tourists. July-August is the high holiday season, in September it is mainly older people who come to us, as it is not so hot anymore. We are not a big factory. People know that our products are of good quality. We are treated well, we try to do our best, and that's it...

–Is there always the same demand, or is the demand constantly increasing?

–Our business is profitable; otherwise, we wouldn't be here. We cannot increase our production because we have limited resources. What we do is our efforts to ensure that the product is of good quality. Good quality products are always more expensive. Therefore, we always participate in competitions organized by French agricultural saloon. Several times we managed to win a quality gold medal. This is what allows us to increase our



income.

-How many times have you won?
-We won 6 times: 4 gold medals and 2 silver medals.

-Is it hard to win? Do we have many competitors?

-Yes, we have a lot of competitors; the oyster business is very popular in France. But winning the competition is very important; it increases the selling price by 10 to 20%.

-And what are the conditions for obtaining a gold medal in France?

-They look at the interior, the oyster's taste and the mother-of-pearl. An oyster has to be the



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normal size, what we call number 3 (their size ranges from 0 to 5, with zero being the size for the largest oysters).

-Speaking of price, how much is the

tasting menu?

-A dozen oysters cost 14 euros.

In total, our boat can carry 10 boxes of 100 kg each (just one way). After cleaning, we get about 600 kg of oysters, which is equivalent to

4,000 euros...

-What are your development projects?

-Our goal is to increase product quality. We try to have the product

of the range and the gold medals many more times. Sometimes the quality is not as good as we had previously, so we try to find a way to have consistency throughout the year. ≡

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