

FROM A QUEST FOR WELL-BEING TO AN ENTREPRENEURIAL PASSION: MY SAFFRON LEARNING JOURNEY



Keltouma Adouane pursued business law at the University of Béjaïa in 1996. Enthusiastic and interested in fashion, she then studied fashion design and pattern making at the Béjaïa Training Institute in 1999. Thereafter she participated in a vocational training programme (PEP) in the clothing field. Her eagerness to continue learning led her to courses in stained glass painting, colour research, and didactics and pedagogical approaches. In 2015 Keltouma completed the PSEP1 (Specialised Training Programme for Access to the Grade of Professor Specialised in Professional Education, First Grade). Since 2018 she has been passionately pursuing a project growing saffron in her hometown of Béjaïa. In 2020 she broadened her horizons by training in artisanal cheese making, artisanal soap making, artisanal jam making, mushroom cultivation, and beekeeping. In 2023 she was elected Vice-President of the Rural Women's Association of Béjaïa (AFUD).

My name is ADOUANE Keltouma and I was born in 1975 in Béjaïa¹, a region of richly contrasting landscapes between sea and mountains. I grew up between the town of Béjaïa and Sidi Aïche. From an early age these places awakened in me a deep connection with nature.

My career began in the legal field with studies in business law, but my passion for something more creative soon steered me in a different direction. In 1999, I did a training course in fashion design, laying the foundations for my commitment to craftsmanship. In 2003, I became a fashion design trainer in the vocational training sector. In 2015, I became a trainer of trainers, a role that enabled me to reach more young people and women seeking autonomy.

My journey with saffron began in 2018 when my health was particularly fragile. In search of natural solutions to improve my condition, I discovered the medicinal benefits of saffron, a precious spice known as 'red gold'². Convinced of the benefits of saffron, I started consuming it in infusions. Within two years, my health had significantly improved, which led me to take a closer look at the saffron plant³ and consider cultivating it.



Saffron stigmas.

To learn more, I travelled to southeastern Algeria, where I met ELHADJ Louibi, an experienced saffron grower. Although I faced scepticism from those around me, such as some doubting the feasibility of growing saffron near the sea, I had a deep conviction that this fragile yet powerful flowering plant could transform many lives. I followed ELHADJ Louibi's advice and planted my bulbs in September 2018 (I had an initial investment of five kilograms of bulbs). A month later, a beautiful purple carpet emerged from the soil - a sight that remains etched in my memory. This was the beginning of an adventure that would change my life - the start of a passion that would gradually evolve into an entrepreneurial project.



My journey with saffron cultivation: Hands in the soil.

In 2019, I joined the Rural Women's Association of Béjaïa (AFUD)⁴. I participated in training sessions on the artisanal production of local goods (and became Vice-President in 2023). I took advantage of the COVID-19 lockdown period to dedicate more time to saffron cultivation, and I explored new applications for the plant. This was a turning point in my project - I developed saffron-infused cheeses, artisanal soaps, and cosmetic products made from the spice.



My saffron products.

Additionally, I used saffron straw to cultivate oyster mushrooms⁵, an initiative that enriched my project and diversified my source of income. My commitment then took on a collective dimension as I shared my knowledge and skills in saffron cultivation with other rural women, helping them generate income for their families and strengthen their economic independence.

I received Algeria's first saffron farm card⁶. This official recognition gave new momentum to my project. Thanks to the training provided by DVV International in the form of communication, semiotics, didactics, project management, engineering, and 'la boîte à outils' (the toolbox/tool kit), I was able to further structure my initiative.

In 2024, I was invited to lead a workshop on saffron at an international symposium in Tunisia, where I shared my knowledge of

its uses in cosmetics, nutrition, and health. A few months later, another international symposium organised in collaboration with the International Labour Organization, gave me the opportunity to speak on the economic and therapeutic potential of saffron, particularly in the fields of well-being, cosmetics, and sport. These events marked an important step in the recognition of my work and that of the region's rural women.

In June 2024, a major breakthrough came with the publication of a dissertation by HAMLET Billel and IDIR Rachid under the supervision of Professor KATI Djamel Eddine (Department of Food Sciences, University of Abderrahmane Mira of Béjaïa). The study focused on 12 saffron samples grown by rural women in Béjaïa and the factors influencing the quality of saffron. In March 2025, Professor ABDEL FETAH Dalila (Department of Process Engineering, Abderrahmane Mira University) completed a doctoral thesis⁷ examining the characteristics of saffron from the Béjaïa region. For this study, I contributed 20 saffron samples cultivated by rural women from our area. This scientific research is vital for validating our work and giving recognition to the quality of Béjaïa saffron.

Today, I continue on this collective adventure by working closely with rural women to develop natural saffron-based cosmetics such as moisturisers and enriched soaps, which are particularly beneficial for the skin. One of my proudest achievements is the development of a therapeutic saffron cheese, currently in the research and development phase, which could become a signature product for our region. My objective is clear: to create a factory or plant for the production of artisanal saffron cheeses, supported by the women of the region using ancestral knowledge and innovation - maintaining the artisanal aspect with a touch of modernity, in order to develop a sustainable local industry. My dream is to market these products on a national scale.

My concluding thoughts

Through my personal experience in saffron cultivation, I discovered how learning can not only change a life, but also offer sustainable economic opportunities to an entire community.

Acquiring skills is not just about individual improvement - through the training sessions I attended and the opportunity to share my knowledge, I have helped other rural women diversify their activities, establish sustainable sources of income in order to improve their households, and contribute to strengthen local economies. My experience demonstrates that practical learning, combined with a commitment to sharing knowledge, can help foster independence among participants and build local economies.



Rural women's exhibition.

Endnotes

1 Béjaïa is located in northeastern Algeria on the Mediterranean coast and is the capital of the Béjaïa Province. It is known for its natural wealth, strategic port, and historical and cultural significance. The region is also an agricultural hub, particularly for saffron cultivation and olive oil production.

2 Saffron is often called this for a few reasons, including its characteristic colour, wide-ranging health benefits, and high market value (each fragile thread must be carefully handpicked, with thousands of blossoms needed to produce a small amount).

3 Saffron comes from a flowering plant called *Crocus sativus*. It is a beautiful, aromatic, purple flower with bright red threads (stigmas) which when dried make up the spice.

4 The Rural Women's Association in Algeria (AFUD) assists rural women by providing practical training and local economic development projects.

5 A type of mushroom cultivated on natural substrates such as saffron straw, used in alternative agricultural projects.

6 An agricultural card (for farmers) and craft card (for artisans) - the card is an official document issued by the relevant authorities, confirming a person's professional status as an artisan or farmer. The card is

crucial as it enables the authorities to keep track of and support artisanal and agricultural activities, while also granting artisans and farmers specific benefits and rights associated with their profession.

7 <https://ft.univ-setif.dz/fr/departements/departement-de genie-des-procedes>

