

Open Food Facts API Documentation

FINAL PRODUCT REPORT

GOOGLE SEASON OF DOCS 2019-2020

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Summary

The outcome of several months of fruitful collaboration with my mentors and the Open Food Facts community (from now on to be mentioned as OFF) is a brand new API documentation set that allows developers to better understand the project and build applications that can retrieve information from the Open Food Facts database and enhance its contents.

About

About the Technical Writer



Marina Hernández is a technical writer passionate about languages and technology who has been working in the IT industry since 2014. For more information about her professional background, you can visit her LinkedIn profile: <https://at.linkedin.com/in/marinahernandezgarcia> and personal website: www.marina-hernandez.com

About the Open Source Organization



Open Food Facts is a food products database made by everyone, for everyone. You can use it to make better food choices, and as it is open data, anyone can reuse it for any purpose. For more information about Open Food Facts visit: <https://world.openfoodfacts.org/discover>

About the Project Proposal Submitted to GSoD



Season of Docs

The application programming interface is one of the most important components of the Open Food Facts project, as it allows users to interact with its database. The previous version of the API documentation lacked important information and a proper structure, and contained deprecated features. The technical writer submitted a proposal to create a new state-of-the-art version of the documentation that can quickly bring developers up to speed and enhance adoption.

Motivation

I applied to Season of Docs because I fell in love with the Open Food Facts initiative. In fact, this was the only project I created a proposal for.

I take great care of my health and the foods I eat and I'm always checking the nutrition facts of the products I buy at the grocery store. That's why I could easily align my personal values with the vision and mission of the project. This has enhanced even more my commitment to creating good documentation that can help developers make nutrition facts available to more people and, by extension, help everyone make better food choices.



Links to the Final Product

- **Online version of the documentation (Postman collection):** <https://documenter.getpostman.com/view/8470508/SVtN3Wzy?version=latest>
The latest version of the API documentation has been made available for public viewing by anyone with this link.
- **Exported source code of the API documentation in JSON + final product report + translation guidelines:** <https://github.com/openfoodfacts/api-documentation>

Impact on the Open Food Facts Project

The creation of a new, enhanced and validated version of the API documentation will promote the development of new applications based on the Open Food Facts database and improve the quality and quantity of data. This, in turn, will increase the number of conscious customers checking the nutrition values of food products via apps and support Open Food Facts' vision of making nutritional information available to everyone.

Furthermore, during the development phase, several bugs were identified and converted to bug-fix and new feature requests, which will improve the quality of the whole project in the short term.

Goals and Expectations

At the beginning of the project, my mentors and I set the goals and expectations for the project, which are the following:

- Create a user-friendly and updated version of the API docs.
- Retrieve as much knowledge as possible from the OFF Slack channels and structure it in a meaningful way.
- Once the documentation basics are in place, work on look-and-feel and interaction enhancements.

We also agreed that some occasional collaboration in other areas such as marketing and pilot projects could be also expected.

Project Planning

Communication and Preparation of Meetings

Every two weeks my mentors and I had a two-hour call to review the changes I made to the documentation since our previous call and plan the next steps. I also had the opportunity to ask questions and clarify issues. My mentors have been very helpful and responsive, and have provided me with all the information I needed to document the API.

I have always prepared an agenda with the topics to be discussed on the call and also created minutes to keep track of the discussions and decisions made.



Previous Versions of the Documentation

A former basic version of the API documentation is available in the Open Food Facts wiki at

<https://en.wiki.openfoodfacts.org/APIfoodfacts.org/APIfoodfacts.org/APIfoodfacts.org/API>.

This version was created in a collaborative way and contains scattered and deprecated information. My mentors and I went through it, cherry-picked sections that should be added, with some adaptations, to the new version of the API docs, and also discarded content that is no longer valid. This documentation reference will be deprecated soon and replaced by the version created within the Season of Docs framework.

Documentation Tools

In terms of documentation tools, my mentors let me decide which technology to use. I wanted to create professional documentation that could be also used “as code”. After reading about different possibilities, and despite having previous experience with Swagger, I decided to use Postman for documenting the API for various reasons:

- Postman is a free tool
- It allows you to publish an online version of the API docs. The published documentation shows information on the endpoints (including requests and responses, the parameters used to make the call and example code) which can be very useful for users to replicate similar requests.
- The learning curve is not steep.
- The documentation is written in Markdown, a format compatible with many development tools.
- The project (Postman collection) can be exported as a JSON file, which again, gives plenty of possibilities for reuse.
- Once published, the latest version of the documentation is always shown. It is not necessary to trigger a new publishing workflow for making the changes visible.
- Users can send test calls to the server online.

Deliverables

My mentors and I agreed that, for the sake of visibility, I'd create the new version of the documentation directly in Postman. The goal was to provide other OFF contributors with an online version of the documentation as soon as possible and encourage them to provide feedback. At the end of the project, I'd export the source code of the Postman collection to a JSON file, which would be pushed to a dedicated repository in GitHub, together with the final product report.

Community Bonding Phase

Although I was familiar with the Open Food Facts initiative, I had to delve into the ins and outs of the project to be able to document the API. During the community bonding phase, I introduced myself to my mentors and the community, set up everything I needed to become an active member of the project (create a new OFF account, clone the GitHub repository, join the Slack channel, etc...) and my mentors and I defined the communication channels to be used (bi-weekly calls and Slack).



I wanted to support this initiative as much as I could from the very beginning. To this end, I took advantage of the fact that I would be reading lots of data about the project and the API during these first weeks to, in parallel:

- Review and enhance the English version of the website and the wiki
- Check/complete the translation strings into Spanish.

Doc Development Phase

After getting familiar with the project and gaining more knowledge about the API, my mentors and I defined a project roadmap to create the new version of the documentation.

Steps in the Development Phase

I started the development of the API docs by creating 3 different end-to-end scenarios or walk-throughs that show users how to perform the most common use cases (READ, SEARCH, WRITE requests).

Documenting the scenarios helped me a lot to get acquainted with the API and its intricacies. I could also find some bugs that were converted to feature and bug-fix requests and added to the project backlog. This has been a constant during the doc development, and I was glad that I could also contribute this way to the project.

After creating the scenarios, I started working on the main sections of the documentation, which we identified as follows:

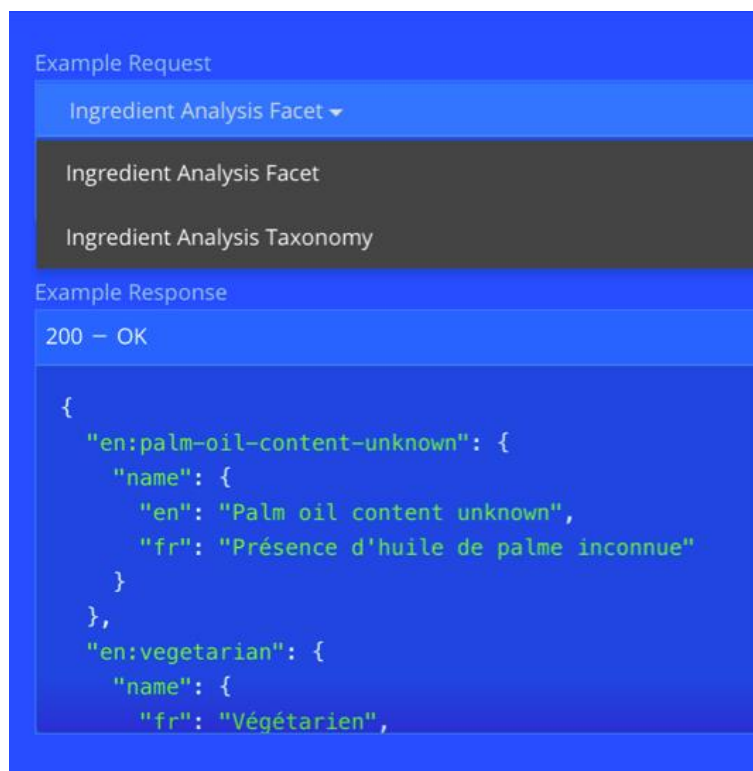
- General information (audience, version number, endpoint, authentication, security...)
- READ requests
- Parameters
- Taxonomies
- SEARCH requests
- WRITE requests
- FAQ
- Best Practices

To improve the user adoption of the API, I've added a lot of examples to the documentation. Postman also supports the use of request and response fields, which allows users to review the request information and the parameters used at a glance.

Example:

The dropdown shows two examples added for ingredient analysis. The example response can be expanded by clicking on it.





The documentation has been updated on an almost daily basis with the information provided by my mentors and by members of the community, who either contacted me directly (I left my contact details in the two dedicated slack channels #api and #api-documentation and also in the online version of the docs) or posted and answered questions on Slack:

Hi! I'm Marina, an OFF contributor and technical writer who is creating a new version of the Open Food Facts API documentation. Before you start reading I'd like to clarify that this document is in progress and subject to changes (actually, it's my working repository). I update the content regularly and enhance/rearrange the folders and requests if needed. If you find any errors or have any suggestions on how to improve the documentation, feel free to join the #api-documentation channel on Slack or ping me :) (#Marina Hernandez) Thanks in advance!


The API-related Q&As posted on Slack have been added to the FAQ section of the documentation. Thus, this knowledge (sometimes very useful, especially for new users) did not get lost in the Slack channels and was made available to all members in a structured way.

After some months, I also started working on the look and feel of the project. I used markdown styles to better organize the information structure and add images, and applied the same logo, styles, and colors displayed on the OFF website. The goal was to maintain consistency among the information resources of the project and make the docs more user-friendly. See an example below.

Open Food Facts official website:

← → ↻ world.openfoodfacts.org

Open Food Facts Country Search for a product Discover Contribute

 OPEN FOOD FACTS the free food products database

Open Food Facts gathers information and data on food products from around the world.

Sign in
Sign-in to add or edit products.

Username or e-mail address:

Password:


☒ Remember me

Not registered yet? [Create your account.](#)

Add a product

☐ I have already donated or I'm not interested. Hide the banner.

An independent and citizen led project for food transparency?

 We need your support! **Please Donate**

Open Food Facts - World

Discover
Open Food Facts is a food products database made by everyone, for everyone.
You can use it to make better food choices, and as it is open data, anyone can re-use it for any purpose.
→ [Learn more about Open Food Facts](#)

Contribute
Open Food Facts is a non-profit project developed by thousands of volunteers from around the world. You can start contributing by [adding a product from your kitchen with our app for iPhone or Android](#), and we have lots of exciting projects you can contribute to in many different ways.
→ [Learn more about how you can join us](#)

Recently updated products:
→ [products from the mobile app that need to be completed](#)

1,158,554 products

Open Food Facts API Documentation:

OPEN FOOD FACTS API DOCUMENTATION

Introduction

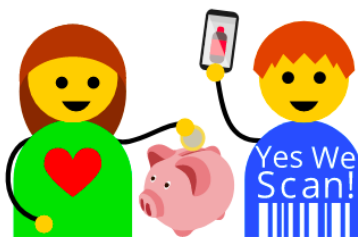
- Read Requests
 - GET** Reading the nutrition facts of a product
- Parameters
- Taxonomies
- Search Requests
- Write Requests
- FAQ
- Best Practices
- RobotOff Project

GET Reading the nutrition facts of a product

GET requests allow you to make two types of calls: READ and SEARCH. This scenario describes how to make GET READ calls to retrieve the nutritional data of products with a barcode.

GET Read Scenario

Meet Dave. Dave is an active Open Food Facts contributor and a developer who wants to build HealthyFoodChoices, an Android app aimed at conscious consumers that buy healthy products.

 Yes We Scan!

HealthyFoodChoices will provide information on healthy foods available in the place where their users live. The users can narrow down the results by applying different filters and save their search criteria so that the app shows them the products that match their preferences next time they use

State of the Project and Work Remaining

The new version of the Open Food Facts API documentation is complete.

Late in the project, I have documented the basics of a new pilot project called Robotoff and added it to the Postman collection. This project aims to complete missing information on nutrition facts uploaded to the OFF server by using algorithms and artificial intelligence.



As the project is currently being developed, the documentation must be enhanced in the future with request examples and other relevant information.

Additional Tasks

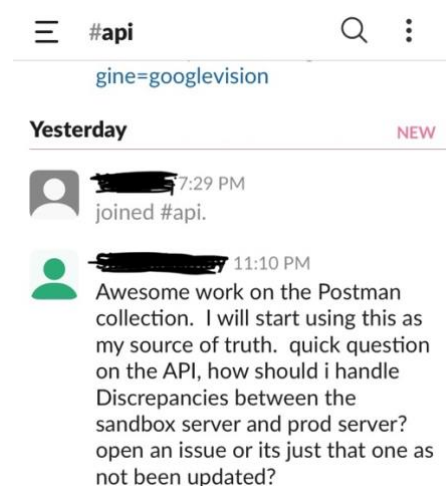
Besides documenting the Open Food Facts API, I was happy to contribute to the project by:

- Proofreading the English version of the website (www.openfoodfacts.org) and the wiki (https://en.wiki.openfoodfacts.org/Main_Page)
- Defining translation guidelines (available in the GitHub repository and in the wiki)
- Working on translations into Spanish (Strings, Marketing campaigns)

Feedback

The OFF users have been actively using the new version of the documentation from the beginning of the project and have provided useful feedback and remarks to improve the documentation. The feedback received so far has been very positive.

Example:



Learnings

I'm very glad that I've had the opportunity to take part in the GSoD project. Participating in this program has helped me to:

- Enhance my skills as a technical writer.
- Learn new documentation tools and languages (Postman, Markdown, GitHub)
- Get involved with an amazing community that aims to improve the way we eat, support food producers and protect our environment.

Future Steps and Collaboration

To ensure that other contributors can work on the project in the future, I made my mentors administrators of the Postman collection and also exported the project to



JSON and pushed it to a dedicated repository in the GitHub OFF project. (See Links to the Final Product).

I'll keep collaborating with Open Food Facts in the future by:

- Maintaining the current version of the API docs and enhancing the documentation about the Robotoff pilot project.
- Setting up a plan to improve the user documentation of the project (how to identify documentation needs, create and assign documentation tasks).
- Defining a new format for the Postman documentation or creating a more user-friendly URL.

Acknowledgments

I'd like to thank the Google Season of Docs organizers, the Open Food Facts community and especially my mentors Vince Bataille, Pierre Slamich and Stephane Gigandet for their support and valuable input and feedback throughout this project. It's been a pleasure working with you and I'm looking forward to our future collaboration!

