

So let the pigs shave themselves, local residents decided, turning their attention to gathering bushels of the once widely ignored weed, in hopes of creating a new local industry to add to an economy based on construction, fruit farming, olive oil and a touch of tourism.

So far they haven't had too much success.

"I should start putting some of this stuff on my own face," said Nino Simunic, 48, ignoring the bucolic vista of yachts and ferries crossing Zadar's channel.

Instead, he scanned the harsh ground from atop his tractor, putt-putting across a moonlike limestone hillside, for any signs of a curry plant, also known as "immortelle" for its ability to survive in dry terrain and to remain alive long after being plucked.

In 2015, Mr. Simunic, a veteran of Croatia's early-1990s war for independence, ended a tumultuous 15-year career in local politics and joined the ranks of residents seeking some sort of financial boost from the curry plant. A local monastery of Benedictine nuns became partners with him, providing the 12 acres of land he's farming in exchange for a cut of revenues, he said. If there are any.

It's Mr. Simunic's first harvest, and he's not saddled with any expectations.

"If it covers at least some of the fuel and lunch costs, I'm happy," he said.

The search for profit from the curry plant is driven by Croatia's continuing economic troubles. The global financial crisis was largely responsible for a six-year recession. And the country's 2013 move to join the European Union brought competitively priced goods from elsewhere in the bloc onto store shelves, adding to the woes of the struggling agricultural and manufacturing sectors.

a
i
n

s
t
o
r
y



These days, the nation of 4.2 million relies on a tourism boom, mainly on the Adriatic coast, with the summer season responsible for nearly a fifth of its economic output.

So farmers in inland regions and towns like Zadar are always on the lookout for a new avenue of cash.

That's where immortelle — with the Latin name *Helichrysum italicum* — fits in.

The weed's mass-market potential emerged at the turn of the century, when cosmetics companies like L'Occitane began patenting anti-aging formulas that included immortelle.

"The essential oils found within the flower help to improve the skin's ability to fight the effects of environmental aggressions, which are known to accelerate skin aging," said Lucy Primrose, the director of learning and organizational development for L'Occitane. The company's

line of immortelle-infused products has become “adored by our customers,” she said.

But the French cosmetics giant gets its immortelle from farms in Corsica. And so far Zadar’s farmers have had little luck creating a direct partnership with a cosmetics or essential oils company. Instead they sell their curry plant harvests in raw form to nearby distillers, who act as a bridge to manufacturers that have relationships with larger cosmetics firms.

Selling immortelle to distillers is somewhat profitable; the plant’s oil fetches up to 2,500 euros per kilogram, or about 1.15 liters.