

# Lavender and lavandin in France

Stanley E. Allured, Publisher, Perfumer & Flavorist

An interesting and educational display on the history, agriculture, and processing of lavender and lavandin in France was open to the public in a special room of the Abbey of Senanque near Avignon, France, during the summer of 1976.

This extensive and interesting display was planned and organized by Madame C. Meunier of the lavender and lavandin processing cooperative, Sicalav, headquartered in Montguers. Many of the historic photos were from the private collection of Mr. Gattefosse.

The display included several old field stills that were used from 25 years to more than 75 years ago in lavender country. At that time, most of the flower material collected grew wild and was only a part-time job for the farmer's family. The still was quite inefficient and required a considerable amount of fuel to distill off the lavender oil.

As time went on, general wage rates and income levels went up faster than the price of lavender making the collection of wild lavender uneconomic. The development of plantations started in the 1930s and continued until now practically all laven-

der is plantation grown and mechanically harvested. The production of lavender and lavandin increased from about 50 tons per year to the present total, over 1,000 tons, mainly due to this mechanization.

The new modern stills are centrally located and each takes a charge of about one ton of flowers. These stills are so efficient that they operate on the dried exhausted plant material so that no additional fuel is required. One ton of plant material will produce from 25 to 40 kilos of lavandin oil or 5 to 10 kilos of lavender oil. Lavandin yields a much higher tonnage per acre, so the large difference in price between these oils is clearly based on their difference in production costs.

The production of lavender has held quite steady for more than 40 years at a production level of about 100 tons per year, while lavandin has increased over tenfold from less than 100 tons to more than 1,000 tons.

Sicalav dries the clean lavender flower and sells 50 tons a year for use in sachets.

A number of additional materials now being developed by Sicalav also were on display. These included fennel, clary sage and tree moss. The cooperative is working with the farmers to extend the range of essential oil and spice materials grown in this region of France.

The Abbey of Senanque (left) was built in the Thirteenth Century. Above, a mechanical harvester is cutting and gathering a field of lavandin for delivery to the processing stills.