Press dossier

EROSKI-ARTZAI GAZTA

Successful cooperation model for the development of the D.O. Idiazabal cheese

EROSKI and the Regulatory Board for the Designation of Origin Idiazabal (D.O. Idiazabal) have maintained since 2014 a cooperation agreement for the promotion and development of the cheese under this denomination, made from milk from Latxa and Carranzana sheep with quality certificate assurance. This is the **first agreement signed by the Regulatory Board for the D.O. Idiazabal with a distributor to assist in the development and sustainability of the sector** through the sale of this certified product.

The signing of this cooperation agreement marked the start of a **pioneering project in the sector that united for the first time all members of the value chain,** from the shepherds, grouped in the Artzai Gazta association, to EROSKI establishments where D.O. Idiazabal cheeses are marketed.

Currently, **EROSKI sells around 125,000 kilos of D.O. Idiazabal cheese, much of it processed by hand by 41 shepherds grouped in Artzai-Gazta.** Additionally, EROSKI works with 20 other cheese dairies that produce D.O. Idiazabal cheese in the Basque Country and Navarre. Last year, EROSKI increased its purchases of D.O. Idiazabal cheese by 12%.

"*The strong commitment undertaken by EROSKI for the development of D.O. Idiazabal and marketing support for cheese processed by hand by shepherds themselves is being highly appreciated by consumers. Sales grow at a rate of 12% per annum and EROSKI represents around 10% of the D.O. Idiazabal cheese production*", said Miguel Ángel Nafarrate, marketing manager for local products at EROSKI.

"*Collaboration is fruitful for both sides, since the promotion and sale of Idiazabal cheese in areas where EROSKI is established allows us to publicise both the characteristics of the products and sustainable operation systems, their relationship with the environment and influence on the territorial, landscape and ethnographic development", said* Jose María Ustarro, Chairman of the Regulatory Board for the D.O. Idiazabal.

The agreement also takes into account the marketing of **D.O. Idiazabal cheese under the EROSKI SeleQtia brand,** EROSKI's white label which includes a selection of high-end products made with the best ingredients using traditional methods. To implement this project, the marketing group Artzai Gazta which has worked for 35 years and is made up of more than 30 cheese-processing shepherds, has been working in this challenging open line for two years.

From the cheese dairy Quesería Ezkurra (Izurdiaga, Navarre) Jabier Ezkurra welcomes the outcome of this agreement, which has provided them security after the crisis that particularly hit the sector in 2011. "*The EROSKI SeleQtia project ensures the sale of a part of our production. In my case, out of 5,000-6,000 kg of cheese that I produced during the last campaign, 2,000-3,000 kg went to production for EROSKI SeleQtia".* Paul Basterra, president of the Artzai-Gazta association ratifies this: "*There is a good symbiosis between EROSKI and Artzai Gazta, and we understand each other perfectly in the professionalisation of the logistics that EROSKI needs for marketing any food with all guarantees. It is just one more feature of the professionalism of Artzai-Gazta as a marketing group. EROSKI understands our needs as shepherds and we all benefit from the agreement, because it allows us to reach consumers and the way in which they buy today*".

EROSKI also values positively the opportunity of enjoying a direct relationship with cheese producers offered by the agreement. " *We work with very different cheese producers. Shepherds who are producers, either individually or together in groups such as Artzai-Gazta, represent 42% of the D.O. Idiazabal cheese we sell. Small cheese dairies that fall within the D.O. represent another 30% and larger cheese dairies producing more than 100,000 kg annually, account for the remaining 28%*",

says Miguel Ángel Nafarrate, marketing manager for Local Products at EROSKI. "*Working with such diverse sizes of producers allows us to offer our customers a broad variety of local product. It requires working with simplified and decentralised logistics and processes, but it is what makes customers of each EROSKI shop enjoy cheeses made by the shepherds in their area".*

"*The cooperation line" opened between EROSKI and Artzai-Gazta is of great relevance for the sustainability of our highly fragmented sector in production and based on a completely hand-processed elaboration. The support provided by EROSKI in promoting Artzai-Gazta guarantees access to today's consumers seeking the authenticity and value of traditional foods. At the same time, new expectations open to revalue the shepherd profession, which implies a way of understanding life, food and rural development",* stated Paul Basterra, President of Artzai Gazta.

Recognition

AECOC, the main Spanish association of the Large Consumption sector, has awarded the AECOC Shopper Marketing - SME 2015 award to the joint work carried out by EROSKI and Artzai-Gazta to promote the hand-processed D.O. Idiazabal cheese following the agreement signed in 2014.

The award recognises the achievements of the cooperation between the two organisations as one of the best practices of collaboration between distribution and small producers to promote the diversity of the production sector of the food industry and more efficiently serve consumers.

In particular, the award recognises the strategic alliance between production and distribution that allows shepherds benefit from a direct distribution through the *co-branding* with EROSKI *SeleQtia* of this high quality cheese.

"*This award values the close collaboration between Artzai-Gazta and EROSKI to improve consumer access to local products and to enhance them as culinary treasures that enrich our cultural, gastronomic and environmental heritage*", says Paul Basterra, President of the Artzai-Gazta association.

The Town Hall of Ordizia, the Regulatory Board for the Idiazabal Designation of Origin, and the Brotherhood of Idiazabal Cheese of Ordizia also recognised EROSKI's work for the distribution and dissemination of Idiazabal cheese in the framework of the official presentation of the first Idiazabal cheese of the season at the Artzai Eguna held in Ordizia in 2015.

"*This recognition wants to value EROSKI's firm commitment with D.O. Idiazabal cheese and its materialisation into specific commitments. The cooperative has intensified its efforts to incorporate the products of shepherds to the EROSKI points of sale. Furthermore, it has also included in its own SeleQtia brand the hand-processed D.O. Idiazabal cheese Artzai-Gazta, as a sign of trust in the outstanding quality of our cheeses*", as highlighted on that occasion by José María Ustarroz, President of the Regulatory Board for the Idiazabal Designation of Origin.

EROSKI's work for the promotion of D.O. Idiazabal cheese was also recognised at the Uharte Arakil Artzai Eguna in 2015.

EROSKI, collaborator of the Euskadi Basque Country International Cheese Festival

In April, EROSKI and Artzai-Gazta signed an agreement whereby the cooperative became a strategic cooperator of the 28th edition of the *World Cheese Awards,* within the *Euskadi Basque Country International Cheese Festival,* held in San Sebastian between 16 and 18 November 2016, and the association of shepherds-processors of cheese from Latxa sheep was to be co-organiser in this edition in collaboration with the creators of the *Guild of the Fine Food* contest, leading English association of gourmet products and international benchmark.

Luisa Villegas, coordinator of Artzai-Gazta, Asun Bastida, marketing manager for Local Products at EROSKI, were responsible for signing the agreement. They both agreed that this appointment is a unique opportunity to promote artisan cheeses and the professional livestock sector and to showcase the effort made by a sector that is responsible and committed to high quality standards.

This is the most important international cheese event worldwide, and one of the most important gastronomic events of the year. Its main purpose is to promote and strengthen the productive callings related to the production of artisan cheese, revitalising the productive sector which is committed to rural development.

Its mission is to provide the professional, local and tourist foreign public, hand-processed cheeses together with cultural experiences of the highest quality (tastings, gastronomy, workshops, conferences and other activities) that foster coexistence and promote the work of traditional producers.

The festival brings together more than 3,000 cheeses from 40 countries of five continents and brings together 250 international tasters. Additionally, producers with Designation of Origin Cheeses from Spain and Europe, internationally recognised chefs, craftsmen, universities and companies in the cheese and gastronomic industry

participated. An influx of more than 20,000 attendees from five continents is expected.

EROSKI, member of the jury of the World Cheese Awards

Natalia Perea, marketing manager of the Cheese category at EROSKI, is part of the jury of the 2016 edition of *World Cheese Awards,* which are held in San Sebastian within the *Euskadi Basque Country International Cheese Festival*. Perea has been selected by the international organisation of the *Guild of the Fine Food* contest to compose the official jury for the selection of the best cheeses in the world.

The marketing manager for Cheese at EROSKI has a degree in Economics and Business Administration by the EHU-UPV and a postgraduate Master's degree by ESIC. Among other performances she has been an independent consultant for quality certifications and has held her current position in the cooperative for eight years. Moreover, she is part of the internal training programme "Escuela de Frescos".

Support actions to the Euskadi Basque Country International Cheese Festival

"*From EROSKI we wanted to support the holding of the World Cheese Festival in San Sebastian, making it present in local chops with different interventions and initiatives in collaboration with local cheese producers and the Artzai-Gazta association*", stated Miguel Ángel Nafarrate, responsible for marketing local products at EROSKI.

In June, on the occasion thereof, EROSKI held a training day at the Garbera hypermarket in San Sebastian in collaboration with Artzai-Gazta aimed at workers of the cooperative within its training programme "Escuela de Frescos" which was attended by the master refining cheesemaker, Jose Luis Martin, an expert with over 25 years of experience providing training and working in refining cheeses in close collaboration with cheese dairies.

Furthermore, in September EROSKI organised a visit to the country house "Caserío" of Erraizabal where circa 40 Partner Customers of the cooperative, regular customers of the Garbera hypermarket in San Sebastian participated. The visit allowed the cooperative Partner Customers to learn about the manufacturing process of Idiazabal cheese and the way our shepherds work. Subsequently, they saw first hand the Latxa sheep with which this family of shepherds produces Idiazabal cheese the traditional way.

In the months of October and November, the cooperative has also held cheese tastings in their Arco Amara and Atotxa supermarkets in San Sebastian where numerous Partner Customers participated.

More than 1,400 different cheeses at EROSKI

EROSKI's commitment with the cheese sector translates into the marketing of **1,415 different cheeses** in its commercial network, produced by **216 suppliers,** and **purchases of circa 40 million euros in 2015.** In Spain there are twenty-six protected Designations of Origin (PDO) and one Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) of cheese, and EROSKI works with all of them.

"*During the last financial year EROSKI has added 232 new cheeses and has sealed trade agreements with 11 new producers, deepening its expertise in fresh and local food. Consumers show a growing interest in local products, due to their high quality and due to an increased sensitivity towards what is local. EROSKI aims at reconciling this renewed consumer interest today with the further professionalisation and development of many small local producers*", states Miguel Ángel Nafarrate, marketing manager of local products at EROSKI.

About the D.O. Idiazabal

The Designation of Origin was created in October 1987 to defend the market, reserved for the set of genuine Idiazabal cheese processors, and to guarantee its quality and origin -Basque Country and Navarre- to consumers.

The Designation controls the origin of the milk (which must be sheep milk, raw and exclusively from Latxa and Carranzana breeds) and the quality of the cheese, both from a physical-chemical, and from a taste perspective, for which there is a Tasting Committee that brings together a group of accredited tasters whose experience allows them to control the typical characteristics of this valued cheese.

The Regulatory Board ensures that all requirements are met, certifying the product through the red strip and stamp on its label.

About Artzai-Gazta

Currently 116 shepherds are grouped into Artzai-Gazta from the four provinces that make up the D.O. Idiazabal protected area, that is, Álava, Guipuzcoa, Navarre and Biscay. In the 2014 campaign, cheeses produced by its members accounted for more than 52% of the total certified D.O. Idiazabal cheese, making this D.O. the only one in Europe whose own craft production exceeds that produced in cheese factories.

Artzai-Gazta has received numerous awards for the quality of their cheeses, highlighting the gold and silver medal received by the Mausitxa and La Leze cheese factories in the last contest of artisan cheeses of the Madrid Gourmet fair, along with the awards won in the prestigious World Cheese Awards.

The association seeks to achieve excellence in the production of shepherd cheese and to showcase their identity as a raw milk cheese from local Latxa sheep coming directly from the shepherd's herd, and produced using an age-old traditional production method.

About EROSKI

EROSKI is the first distribution group of a cooperative nature in Spain and benchmark operator in the regions of Galicia, the Basque Country, Navarre, Catalonia and the Balearic Islands. It has a sales network of 1,877 shops, including supermarkets and hypermarkets cash & carry, in addition to petrol stations, opticians, travel agencies, perfume shops and sports equipment shops. It has more than 7 million Partner Customers and 33,870 partners, cooperative members and workers.

For more information:

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