

European Sheep Milk Cheeses Make a Breakthrough in the US, according to InLac

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European sheep's cheeses are increasingly accepted in the most demanding international markets, such as the USA, where the famous Manchego cheeses or "Murcia al vino", among others, are already present.

The European Union (EU) is an undisputed world leader in this sector, with a production of around 219,000 tons per year. As for the livestock population, Spain contributes 24% of the total sheep census in the EU, ranking as the first country in importance by number of animals according to the EU census, with around 14,452,586 heads and a production of around 522 million liters of sheep's milk.

With a very characteristic, slightly sweet flavor, this milk is mainly used for strong and pleasant cheeses, although yoghurts can also be made with it. These enjoy greater creaminess and intensity, as they contain more fat. In addition, sheep's milk is easier to digest than cow's milk and has a higher amount of calcium, which gives it values and attributes that are highly appreciated by consumers around the world, as the Spanish Interprofessional Dairy Organization (InLac) explains.

In terms of organoleptic properties, these cheeses show more variety, providing a wide range of olfactory sensations. Among the sheep milk cheeses protected by the EU, we find the D.O.P. Idiazábal, I.G.P. Queso Castellano, D.O.P. Queso Zamorano or D.O.P. Queso Manchego.

It should be remembered that the products that are covered by a Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) are those whose quality or characteristics are due, fundamentally, to the geographical environment, with its natural and human factors, and whose production, transformation and processing are always carried out in that geographical area from which they take their name. Meanwhile, products with a Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) have some certain quality or reputation, or other characteristic that can be attributed to a geographical origin, and whose production, transformation or processing is carried out in the geographical area from which it also takes its name.

The Manchego D.O.P. it is one of the most popular European cheeses in the US, as pointed out by InLac. For a cheese to be called manchego, it must be made with Manchego sheep's milk and mature for at least 30 days. This cheese is distinguished by a layer of casein in the shape of a circular crown on the opposite side of the label, its pressed paste, its natural color and an exquisite and intense flavor.

For its part, D.O.P. Idiazábal cheese (in the region of the Basque Country and Navarre) is made with raw sheep's milk of the native breeds Latxa and Carranzana, that graze in these rainy, green and leafy valleys with abundant pastures. It's a mature pressed cheese that weighs from 1 to 3 kilos, and can be found smoked or unsmoked.

Queso Castellano (PGI) has an widely-appreciated intense flavor, with butter and caramel notes giving it a distinct personality, very different from the rest of the cheeses of the Iberian Peninsula. And Queso Zamorano (PDO) is another essential dairy from Europe, which is produced from sheep of the native Churra and Castilian breeds, which graze in a territory with a vegetation typical of a continental Mediterranean climate.

However, the highest sales figures to the US market are focused on pure sheep milk cheeses and blends, which also have the maximum guarantees offered by the European production systems.

Among the reasons that explain this richness and variety of cheeses in Europe are the terrain and the diversity of climates, factors that have determined the settlement and development of numerous native breeds. "Respect for the environment, traceability, food safety, animal welfare and a very varied and versatile offer are differential aspects of the cheeses made in the EU", the president of InLac, Daniel Ferreiro, stressed.

Precisely to improve the knowledge of European cheeses in the USA, InLac is currently developing outreach activities within the framework of the campaign "[Discover the European Cheestories with cheeses from Spain](#)", with EU support, which includes promotional events and attendance to trade shows. And, to take advantage of the business opportunities in this market, a revolutionary [new online platform](#) has also been created, which will connect European and Spanish companies with large importers and distributors.
