

Quality Seal for Artisanal Chorizo in Valle de Toluca: Keys to Obtaining a Collective Brand

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To identify the socioeconomic and cultural conditions necessary for obtaining a quality seal for artisanal chorizo in Valle de Toluca, Mexico.

Methodological Design: A qualitative approach was made from the perspective of Localized Agrifood Systems, for the analysis of an artisanal food. The participative approach, observation, and semi-structured interviews were useful tools to carry out the research.

Results: Valle de Toluca has a traditional food that identifies it, as is the case of chorizo in its red and green versions, around which there is the possibility of implementing a quality seal for its differentiation and protection.

Limitations: The study was limited to the work carried out with the chorizo producers belonging to Valle de Toluca; in this sense it is necessary to assess the implementation of a differentiating seal for a traditional food which faces disloyal competition, both from the producers' trade union and from the food industry, consisting in the elaboration of generic products that have the same name, although their quality is not the same.

Conclusions: It is necessary to develop a participative and territorial perspective.

Keywords: quality seals, artisanal sausage, protection, collective action.

INTRODUCCIÓN

Local foods, of artisanal manufacture, are in a constant struggle to stay current: disloyal competition inside the home turf itself, industrialized analog products and, sometimes, the lack of a generational replacement are only some of the factors that threaten the continuity of these products.

The agrifood industry has been directed toward immediacy in the selection and purchase of products, which corresponds to the needs of the accelerated rhythm of contemporary life. However, some consumers attempt to acquire products with characteristics associated to the geographical place of origin, the traditional guarantee in the



elaboration process, the environmental care of those products that generate a fair economic retribution for small-scale producers, among others (Oyarzún, 2005).

The paradigmatic example of the European Union accounts for the existence of specific policies for the protection of food products, which are fruit of tradition and production in a specific region, which can be certified through seals such as Certificate of Origin, Protected Geographical Indication and Traditional Speciality Guaranteed, to cite the most frequent. This translates into a legal protection framework strongly directed at the consumer, ensuring good production and elaboration practices, as well as giving the producer a commercialization tool, which gives its product a competitive advantage (Oyarzún *et al.*, 2002; Oyarzún, 2005).

National Food Control Systems are an essential condition for the protection of consumers, and they are also fundamental to ensure the quality of food products; however, it should be taken into account that the quality of a food is the result of a process that implicates the entire productive and commercial chain (Oyarzún *et al.*, 2002).

In Latin America the demand for products with differentiated quality is still incipient, although the knowledge and the interest of an urban consumer for these quality characteristics of the foods have increased. In turn, this represents a small market niche, which leads to the conformation of organizations directed at the protection of their product, through a quality seal, which is also a commercialization tool (Oyarzún, 2005; Velarde, 2012).

The study carried out in Mexico by the Mexican Institute of Industrial Property (*Instituto Mexicano de la Propiedad Industrial*, IMPI), focused on the protection of traditional products, is still deficient because often the normativity represents an insurmountable access barrier for small-scale producers who wish to carry out a certification process for regional products that are part of their tradition (Linck *et al.*, 2006).

According to the IMPI (2020), there are two protection figures for products originally from a particular region: they are Collective Brands (CB) and Certificates of Origin (CO), and each has its particularities.

According to the IMPI (2020), a brand is understood as a set of visible signs that distinguish the products or services from others of the same kind or class in the market. The fulfillment of the following conditions must be considered to be judged as CB: i) only the associations or partnerships of legally constituted producers, manufacturers or providers of services can request it, ii) applying for the collective brand registry serves to distinguish the products or services of their members in the market, from the products or services of third parties, iii) it cannot be object of a transmission of rights or license of use, since its use is reserved to the members of the association or partnerships, iv) the use will be subject to the rules that the association or partnerships determine.

On the other hand, CO is understood as the name of a geographical region of the country that serves to designate a product originally from it; achieving this legal protection must be carried out officially, that is, the IMPI must issue a petition to achieve this goal.

Although both figures represent a legal protection for specific products which belong to a unique geography, the substantial difference lies in that the CB belongs to a partnership or association of producers, while the CO belongs to the State, so the benefits are distributed differently (Linck *et al.*, 2006).

Performing projects focused on revitalizing the patrimony requires integrating a multidisciplinary team, which can help a group of producers in different ways, in order to achieve an adequate productive, organizational, legal and commercial process.

In this sense, the objective of this document was to identify the socioeconomic and cultural conditions necessary for obtaining a quality seal for artisanal chorizo in Valle de Toluca. This document presents the study performed with chorizo producers to achieve the socioeconomic valuation of chorizo through a CB, from the collective construction of Rules of Use, required to integrate the documentation of a registry application of the brand at the IMPI.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Between the year 2010 and 2012, a group of students and researchers ascribed to the Master's Program in Rural Agroindustry, Territorial Development and Agrifood Tourism of the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de

México, began a project to achieve the certification by IMPI for chorizo from Valle de Toluca (VT) (Ovando, 2016). Through a research-action methodology directed by the approach of Localized Agri-Food Systems (LAFS), it was sought to promote collective action through two interconnected paths: i) structural collective action, related with the creation of a group of producers; and ii) functional collective action, which aims at gaining access to a territorialized resource such as a Collective Brand (CB), in this case for artisanal chorizo (Boucher and Desjardins, 2005; 17).

From a participative approach, work meetings were carried out with the chorizo producers from Valle de Toluca, which are focused on the tasks to attain a distinctive seal for their artisanal manufacture (Ovando, 2016), and in this way, to achieve a process of differentiation and protection in face of industrial chorizos and those from other parts of the Mexican republic.

In this sense, through team work, municipalities were identified that maintain an active production of chorizo and the approximate total of people who are devoted to this artisanal activity in Valle de Toluca (Map 1). Later, the working lines were defined to begin with the collective action, which were centered on: i) the conformation of a group of producers, ii) the development of an improvement plan for hygienic management, iii) the creation of a strategy for brand promotion and design, and iv) the identification of the requirements for obtaining the quality seal (Ovando, 2013).

Obtaining information for the conformation of a file was carried out through plenary meetings with chorizo producers and through the application of 10 semi-structured interviews, from a total of 30 participants, to understand their testimony regarding the process of elaboration of the sausage (Aprile-Gnisset, 2012; Guber, 2015), and in this way to integrate documentation with the adequate characteristics to carry out the CB application at the IMPI.

RESULTS

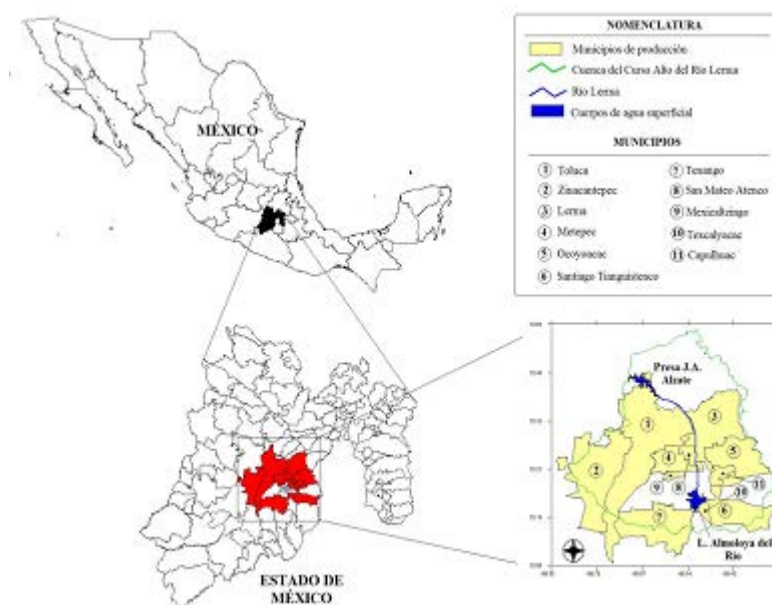
The production of artisanal chorizo in the study zone can be understood within the logic of a Localized Agri-Food System, because it has the following characteristics: i) it has a local concentration limited by a valley, where there

are specific resources and assets, ii) it is part of traditional know-how, and iii) it has a reputation of its own, where the characteristics of the territory gave origin to an emblematic sausage that is part of the cultural-gastronomic heritage of the zone (Boucher et al., 2011).

The study performed had the goal of making the territory more dynamic, through the revitalization of the cultural-gastronomic heritage, derived from obtaining a quality seal; unfortunately a monetary value cannot always be assigned to the benefits generated by these activities. Protecting traditional know-how, obtaining quality ingredients, improving the living conditions of producers, consolidating a CB, researching and educating about regional products, are clear benefits in the execution of the project, although they cannot be valued in exclusively economic terms (Linck, 2008).

The first studies stemmed from a small group of producers who showed interest and trust in the project, contributing the first steps to consolidate the actions proposed. Regarding the conformation of the CB application before the IMPI, the first approaches took place in the sense of understanding the ingredients, taking into account the differences between producers, and trying to obtain a range within which the traditional sausage would not lose this characteristic (Table 1).

However, when writing the rules, it is necessary to understand the custom of elaborating chorizo, or in



Map 1. Municipalities that produce artisanal chorizo in Valle de Toluca (Prepared by authors).

Table 1. Characterization of artisanal chorizo in Valle de Toluca.

	Ingredients	Preparation	Variations
Red chorizo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pork Meat • Spices (pepper, cumin, cloves, nutmeg) • Dried chilies • Ginger • Garlic • Onion • Coriander seeds • Vinegar • Lard • Pork tripe 	Grind chilies, garlic, onion and reserve. Dissolve the spices and salt in the vinegar, add to the chili mixture, place the meat and let it pork tripe. Place in the gut, tie every 10 cm and hang	Currently there are almond chorizo, with raisins, special (they contain other spices). The greatest variation of this chorizo is the one that occurred in the 70s, due to a rise in the prices of chili peppers, this is how the green chorizo was born
Green chorizo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pork Meat • Spices (pepper, cloves, cumin, cinnamon, oregano) • Coriander seed • Ginger • Chile cuaresmeño • Coriander • Tomato • Lettuce • Chile poblano • Parsley • Garlic • Onion • Vinegar • Lard • Pork Tripe 	Devein and grind the chilies, garlic, onion, coriander, tomato, lettuce, poblano pepper and parsley, reserve. Dissolve the spices and salt in the vinegar, add to the previous mixture. Incorporate the meat in the liquid and let it rest for 3 days. Place in the pork tripe, tie every 10 cm and hang	This chorizo has few variations (only in the ingredients) and this depends on the region where it is made, avocado, pumpkin seed, spinach, chili peppers like chile de arbol are added to it as well as some nuts such as almonds, peanuts, raisins, pine nut, walnut.

other words, trying to convert the tradition into a rule, granting chorizo a unique legal character with which the Producers' Association can be endorsed and differentiated, through particular ways in which they have produced their chorizo throughout time.

From meetings with the producers (Photo 1), a short definition of chorizo was also determined; this, with the aim of achieving a unification criterion in terms of the artisanal product that they elaborate. It was concluded that chorizo is a sausage made from pork meat, chili peppers and spices; elaborated manually; prepared, tied and dried with the traditional recipe; and which is part of the history and tradition of Valle de Toluca.

Since there was already a characterization of the sausage and a first definition of it, the remaining steps consisted in: defining the name for

the CB, establishing the rules of use, and presenting the application, not without first attaining the consolidation of the Association of Chorizo Producers in Valle de Toluca, since it is an essential requirement to achieve each of the steps. Therefore, the constitution of the name had to do with the region so the working team proposed the CB Chorizo del Valle de Toluca Región de Origen (Chorizo from Valle de Toluca Region of Origin), taking as a paradigm the case of the Queso Cotija Región de Origen, first food elaborated artisanally that was granted a CB by the IMPI in 2005 (Barragán, et al. 2018).

However, the proposed name –despite the background– was inviable because within the industrial property law endorsed by the IMPI, in 2012, certain words could not be used, such as Valle (valley), Toluca or chorizo, due to their generic character; this was before the law's actualization –carried out in 2018–



Photo 1. Meetings with producers (Photograph by Pedro Ovando, 2013)

where the name of a known geographical zone can be registered to identify the product as native, defining its quality and reputation (IMPI, 2020).

Despite the setback's efforts continued, so that in order to achieve integrating the documentation, they started by establishing the rules of use for artisanal elaboration of chorizo, which had as reference the rules of use proposed for the CB Queso Cotija Región de Origen (Álvarez et al., 2010).

In the rules for the elaboration of artisanal chorizo in the traditional manner, just as the producers described, a description was found of the geography referencing the limits of the Valle de Toluca where the authentic chorizo could be manufactured; the procedure for packing, tying and aerating is also detailed, complemented with the amount of the ingredients and the range of each product. An example of this is the proportion between meat and fat that could be used, which was established at between 15% and 20% fat, and 80% and 85% meat, to be able to be considered chorizo from Valle de Toluca.

Although the aim of the project was attaining the CB to support the tradition and quality of the chorizo, it was also sought to motivate the creation of the association of producers and to involve the public institutions and

the academy, so that the support network could provide continuity in the process and certain aspects could be favored. These aspects were: i) improving the economic welfare of producers, ii) strengthening producers' organizations, iii) promoting relationships between producers, public and private actors both in the territory and the country, and iv) possibilities of promoting other processes of artisanal manufacture within the region.

Likewise, some challenges about the implementation and the use of a quality seal were discerned: i) drive of promotion and commercialization, ii) conformation of a self-regulating organization of the CB, iii) projection of the promotion of a slaughterhouse where meat from the region could be obtained for the product's elaboration, iv) participation of intermediaries in the process, with the aim of reinforcing the circuit of traditional character.

In this sense, the promotion of the first Fair of Artisanal Chorizo from Valle de Toluca was achieved through participative work (Figure 1), where in addition to the participation of the producers with which work was being done, some others joined, accounting for the chorizo-making tradition found in the valley.

CONCLUSIONS

The study to be carried out with the producers of a traditional food, for it to acquire value, is enriching and ought to take place constantly and consistently. In the case of this proposal, obtaining a brand for artisanal chorizo in Valle de Toluca has still not been consolidated, an aspect that translates into a series of economic, management, educational and organizational challenges that must be navigated in face of the socioeconomic transformation of the territory where this emblematic food is produced. Without a doubt, what we present here is an antecedent that collective work has benefits that can be consolidated gradually. It is necessary to take into account that achieving a collective action that advances adequately is a long and sinuous path because, on the one hand, there is scarce participation of the producers' trade union, but also because there is a large chain of institutions to gain access to a quality seal that allows differentiating and protecting a traditional food such as chorizo in Valle de Toluca.

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Figure 1. Poster from the fair (Ovando, 2013: 91).

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