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Matiz Valenciano Horchata

Producer: Mon Orxata (consists of Terra I Xufa and Suc de Lluna)

Region: Valencia, Spain

Employees: 11 year round, 70 seasonal

Authenticity

The product or recipe is native to the producer's region and has historically been part of the regional food culture.

It is believed that the origin of the tiger nut, a cultivated tuber, comes from the Chuf region of Sudan. Tiger nuts, known as xufa (chufa), have been unearthed in Egyptian tombs, and ancient Egyptian texts refer to a white milky drink found along the banks of the Nile. A XII century Arab agricultural book refers to techniques for cultivating tiger nuts. It was the Arabs who first brought the xufa plant to Spain in the 700's AD, and following the Christian Reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula, there are many references to this sweet milk-like drink.

For centuries, the Valencian region has been the home to horchata. Xufa needs sandy soils and warm temperatures fairly consistently, making the lands of Valencia a perfect host. The recipe for horchata, which was used for medicinal purposes by Valencian forefathers, has been handed down through the generations. Today, during the summer months, there is not a bar or café in Valencia that does not serve up this sweet refreshing drink.

Board Feedback & Questions:

Excellent.

This product represents a fascinating part of the history of the Iberian Peninsula and reflects the complexity of what it means for a food or plant to be native to a place. The tiger nut (originally from the region of Sudan, 700 AD), and the resulting beverage has become integral to the land and people of Spain. Perhaps time is a good measure of authenticity. More than 2000 years is enough time for something to become authentic to a place and people.

Local Sourcing

A majority of all ingredients are purchased within the region in which the company is located (region is defined as bioregion or country depending on the size and geographic make up of the area), AND is either grown directly by the producing company or is purchased direct from the farmer or a farmer organization at fair prices.

Ingredients: Organic Tiger Nuts (Xufa)(66%) and Organic Sugar (34%)

Mon Orxata cultivates 20% of the tiger nuts using organic methods. The remaining raw material is purchased direct from eight organic farmers in the region (Francesc Beltrán, Silvestre Carceller, Cristina Ballesteros, Vicent Marco, Vicent I Maria Marti Bellver, Joan de Ceba, Rafael Vargás). Most of these farmers began cultivating organic

xufa in 2003 in response to the establishment of Mon Orxata, and several of them who were already cultivating xufa, have switched to organic farming because of the project. The company purchases the xufa at twice the going market rate, with the price being agreed upon between the company and the farmer prior to the season. Because this is a denomination of origin product, the company is assured of a certain level of demand and is able to guarantee their purchases before the season, giving the farmers secure sales of their produce.

The organic sugar is purchased from a company in Barcelona (Mapryser SL) who imports it from Brazil. There is no organic cane sugar cultivated in all of Europe and importation is the only option. Substitutes such as sugar beet, which is available in Europe, does not offer the same quality as the sugar from Brazil

Board Feedback & Questions:

Very Strong. In particular, we are pleased with the demand for organic cultivation of the tiger nut that they have created.

More info requested on Mapreyser SL for info on Sugar

It was not clear if the price is standard for all the farmers or if each one negotiates separately with the company.

Local Ownership

The producing company is privately or worker-owned with a majority of the owners actively participating in the company.

Mon Orxata is in fact split into two companies Terra i Xufa S.L. and Suc del Lluna S.L., both of which are Spanish Limited Associations, similar to an LLC in the U.S. There are seven partners, two of whom began as employees, but were vested in the company due to their hard work and dedication. All of the owners are from the local agricultural community and each actively participates in one or the other company.

Terra i Xufa, run by the partner Enric Navarro, cultivates the land and produces the horchata while Suc de Lluna is the retail end of the business, managing horchata carts making fresh horchata throughout the metropolitan area. Both companies are known locally as Mon Orxata, the brand under which their horchata is sold in Spain.

Board Feedback & Questions:

Excellent.

Particularly like that two workers became owners through sweat-equity and that other workers appear to have ownership stakes (is that the case or does this just refer to the original five plus the two additional ones - ie., do all workers have opportunity to gain equity?).

Social Responsibility

The company's social and financial practices and policies are designed to ensure maximum benefit to the company's employees and to the local community and economy.

Mon Orxata was founded in 2003 by a group of young Valencian people with the objective of restoring the tradition of fresh natural horchata in Valencia, and preserving precious farmland. By proving the economic viability of the cultivation of

organic xufa, their goal is to lure farmers back to the land and ward off the increasing sprawl and land speculation by developers. The company acts as a hub to organize the farmers, protecting their rights and setting fair and sustainable prices to ensure that farm lands are profitable and not sold off to developers.

In addition, Suc de Lluna has built a fleet of 30 horchata carts and 2 horchata cafés stationed throughout metropolitan Valencia during horchata season and run by mature local woman, known as Horchateras, who previously had few job opportunities available to them.

Employees: The core business of these two sister companies is run by 11 full time employees, several of them having participatory ownership. Because horchata is a seasonal product, the company employs over 70 employees only part of the year. About 70% of the workers are from the local community, with immigrants making up the remaining workforce (mainly from Algeria and South America). The company works with an immigration law firm to process the working papers for their immigrant workforce and to help integrate them into the community.

All employees are paid above the established minimum wage, with the percentage depending on the position. For example, the Horchateras are paid 25% above the national wage. All employees are offered flexible hours, which is of significant importance for the female employees who are often juggling the responsibilities between work and family. In addition to the Spanish social security system, the company holds a private insurance to cover on the job accidents, offer annual medical exams, and provide safety-training courses.

Community: Both sister companies participate in several local organizations. They are founding members of *Llavors d'ací*, an association to preserve the agricultural diversity of Valencia, of which the xufa is of extreme importance. The association offers seed exchange events such as the Valencian Alternative Fair. The Company participates in the Summer Garden University organized by *Per l'Horta*, which works in defense of Valencian farmland. They collaborate with *Slow Food Valencia* in educational courses and activities such as Earth Market. With all of these groups, Mon Orxata contributes product, offers courses, and helps with the organization of events. Mon Orxata is also a member of *Denominacion de Origen "Chufa de Valencia"* which protects local cultivation of xufa from "dumping" methods by companies who produce xufa in countries that avoid the social and environmental costs of farming and sell into the market at very low prices. Mon Orxata also participates in local cultural events, such as *Horchata Day*.

In addition to the raw ingredients, the company sources the majority of its other materials locally, including design and packaging services.

Board Feedback & Questions:

Excellent - especially in developing program to keep Farmers on the land. We applaud their efforts to ward off sprawl of local land by developers.

Do the horchateras have any incentive based on sales or if it's just a flat wage?

The effort to employ mature local women as Horchateras is admirable. Moreover, it shows a sensitivity to local challenges and politics. It is well known within certain communities of Spain that older Spanish women have challenges finding employment

than their younger colleagues. The employment and assistance with immigration papers for workers from north Africa and South America is also commendable, and again reflects the unique fabric of the politics of Spanish labor.

More info requested about their efforts to help immigrant workers integrate into the community.

Environmental Stewardship

The company's environmental practices and policies are designed to minimize environmental impact through the elimination of chemicals and waste, and the reduction of resource use.

The company's mission explicitly charges them to protect their local land and resources from the cultivation and preservation of the land to the production process.

Cultivation: All ingredients are certified organic. The tiger nuts are certified by the Agricultural Ecologic Committee of Valencia, a European certifying body, and in 2009 they will also be certified by the USDA. The sugar is certified by both USDA and the Catalanian Department for Ecologic Agriculture. Every xufa farmer they purchase from also has the organic certification, and the company oversees all aspects of the cultivation and certification process.

The cultivation of xufa naturally restores riverbank vegetation offering refuge and by-ways for local fauna. The remaining waste fiber from horchata production is used as a fertilizer for the horchata fields as well as for animal feed.

Production & Facility Management: There are no chemicals or preservatives used during the production process which consists mainly of cleaning and then grinding the tiger nuts to get a thick paste which is combined with water and organic sugar. The largest input of resources in the production process is energy, used to pasteurize the horchata concentrate and pack it in a sterile environment. The company works to minimize all resource use by limiting the amount of production time to short but intense periods. For example in 2007 they were in production four times, each a 2-day period.

Packaging: The horchata concentrate is an efficient way to sell the product as a 17 fl oz bottle produces 3 liters of horchata. It is packed in glass and then in cardboard boxes made from recycled material. During the season, much of Mon Orxata's production is of fresh horchata for the carts that ply the streets of Valencian, This product goes out in bulk and uses no packaging.

Board Feedback & Questions:

Excellent. The commitment to organic farming is outstanding. The use of waste fiber as fertilizer is also deserving of acknowledgment.

How is product served from carts - what kind of packaging or glasses?

Overall Board Assessment

Good Candidate - plus a very tasty product!

Excellent. It's apparent that Mon Orxata is dedicated to the production of a high quality product that is important to the local community and produced with little negative impact on the environment.