



Matiz Navarro Piquillo Peppers

*Producer: Conservas Pedro Luis
Region: Navarra, Spain
Employees: 10 permanent, 30 seasonal*

Authenticity

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

Navarra is known throughout Spain for its vegetables and legumes. Spain has a long tradition of jarred vegetables, with the majority of them coming from Navarra, especially artichokes, white asparagus, and the famous piquillo pepper. Although the pepper genus is originally from South America and first introduced to Spain, and subsequently the rest of Europe, by Columbus in 1493, the Lodosa pepper is a unique botanical variety that only grows in Lodosa and the surrounding villages. 1987, this variety was awarded Denomination of Origin status as "Pimiento de Piquillo de Lodosa."

For centuries, the piquillo pepper has been an integral ingredient on the family farms of the local inhabitants. Yet it wasn't until the 1960's when tourism came to Navarra that it caught on with the outside world. In response, local farmers began cultivating larger quantities of piquillos, which were then jarred by small artisan producers for tourists to take back to their homelands. Since then, piquillo peppers have grown in prestige and have become known worldwide by foodies and chefs. They are a sweet in flavor with a slight bite, and their shape, fat and round at the top with a point at the base (piquillo means little beak) is perfect for any number of stuffings, such as piquillos stuffed with cod, a regional favorite.

Board Feedback & Questions:

The practice of jarring and preserving dates back centuries. Storing vegetables for months when less produce is available makes for tastier and healthier winter months.

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: Piquillo peppers 98.93% (either organic or Denomination of Origin), salt 0.9%, and citric acid 0.17%.

Pedro Luis does not cultivate any of the produce, but works exclusively with local farmers to process a wide variety of regional vegetables. They always work with the same farmers year after year to guarantee the quality of the product and the DO or Organic status. The farmers are: Antonio Aragón Ramirez, Talavera Moreno,

José Ángel Sancho Martínez, Ganadera Hermanos Marquinez, Jesús Ángel Martínez Etayo, Jesús Valerio Elvira, Jesús Caro Ordoñez, Manuel Ignacio Echarri, José Miguel Gurpegui Amatriain.

Navarra is well known for producing high quality vegetables and legumes. Because of the volume of produce in this region, there is a market price set for most items. Pedro Luis always purchases from their producers at above market rates, which is already quite high in the region due to the fact the product is either organic or denomination of origin. By offering a price higher than what the market sets, Pedro Luis is able to ensure quality and to ensure that their preferred farmers remain loyal.

Board Feedback & Questions:

It is really great to know the growers by name!

Very strong - long term relationships, premium prices for quality.

Local Ownership

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

Conservas Pedro Luis S.L. is a Limited Association, which is similar to an LLC in the U.S. The company is owned by Pedro Luis Antón Campo who lives in Lodosa and dedicates himself fully to the company.

Board Feedback & Questions:

More information on the background of the owners is requested.

Company Response: Conservas Pedro Luis is a family owned company, which was founded by Pedro Luis Antón Gurrea y Corona Campo Armendáriz. They focused on, and became well-known for, traditional products with Denomination of Origin status, such as artichoke, asparagus and piquillo peppers. The company expanded to organic products to encourage these practices in their region.

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.

The mission of Conservas Pedro Luis is to promote and preserve the traditional crops and recipes of Navarra by supporting the small farmers that keep these traditions alive.

Employees: Because the company processes agricultural products, they rely heavily on seasonal employees. Yet with the variety of produce and the various harvesting seasons, the seasonal employment lasts for a large portion of the year (from 6-10 months depending on the variations in harvests from year to year). Over 80% of their employees are native from the region. The remaining seasonal employees are immigrants with legal status that live in the community and have been working with the Company for many years. Many of them come from neighboring Portugal, and Algeria and Romania.

All employees are paid 57% higher than the minimum wage, which is a level that allows even the seasonal employees to enjoy a good standard of living and not seek secondary employment.

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. Employees are paid to attend courses to improve their work skills.

Community: The Company contributes both financially and with donated product to several community organizations including La Esperanza, Civil Defense of Tudela, Amor de Dios School, IBILL (Physically Handicapped People of Navarra), REMAR (Marginalized Rehabilitation and Reintegration), and the local Food Bank.

In addition to raw materials, the company makes an effort to support the local economy by purchasing its packaging, office materials, design and consulting services all through local businesses.

Board Feedback & Questions:

Pedro Luis goes above and beyond. The Board was impressed with the company's commitment to paying higher wages, providing additional insurance, paying for employees to get attend courses that will increase their skills, and the commitment to the community by donating to local charities.

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.

Cultivation: The organic piquillos have certification through the Navarran Government, which is a European certifying agency that reviews and recertifies on a yearly basis. There are no pesticides or chemical fertilizers used during the cultivations. Piquillos peppers are an annual plant that need to be replanted every March in a seedbed and transferred to the land in late May. The local farmers practice crop rotation, leaving the land fallow every three years, to restore the soil.

Production & Facility Management: Traditionally piquillo peppers are roasted over a wood fire and then hand peeled with no water used which would remove the flavor and juices. With a few technological improvements, this is still the process used for authentic piquillo peppers. They are roasted over an open flame and peeled and de-seeded by hand. They are hand-jarred in their own juices to retain the flavor, consistency, and natural sugars of the pepper. There are no chemicals used in the production process. The company tests all incoming raw materials for any chemical residues or imperfections that would interfere with the quality of the final product. All organic waste material is returned to the farmers to be used as natural fertilizers and for animal feed.

The largest input in the process is water, which is used for an initial cleaning of the freshly harvested peppers. But the company has installed a recirculation system to reduce the amount of gray water that is directed to the local sewage plant. Working hours in the facility are during daylight hours only to reduce electricity needs.

In March, the company participated in the “e+5 Certificate Business and Environment Program” organized by the Government, the Business Association, and the Environmental Resources Foundation of Navarra which rewards companies and communities for reducing energy usage and waste.

The D.O. piquillo peppers are certified by the Guarantee of Origin organization who makes weekly visits to the production facilities and take random samples to ensure that the raw materials come from the region and that the production process is done according to very strict criteria that retains the integrity of the product. In addition, the Company has the Organic, Sanitary, and Guarantee of Artisan Products certifications. They are reviewed on a regular basis by all of these oversight organizations to ensure compliance. The company also has HACCP certification.

Packaging: The products are packed in glass and they are in the process of sourcing recycled paper and cardboard for their packaging. The company works with Ecoembes SA and the SIG project which ensures that all excess and used packaging is collected and recycled.

Board Feedback & Questions:

The company’s commitment to sustainable facility management and organic ag practices is commendable. A request for more information on the environmental practices of D.O. product is requested.

Company Response: Pedro Luis processes two types of piquillos - D.O. (denomination of origin) and organic. Both peppers are cultivated using the same methods, although with the D.O. peppers the farmers have conventional treatments available to them when necessary (in years that pest management is particularly difficult). For this reason, there are often years that the availability of organic product is very low and we find shortages in the market.

The D.O. certification is a very detailed and strict control, overseen by a regional certifying body. It ensures that the product is grown and processed locally according to established traditional methods and that the final product meets certain parameters, such as color, size, consistency, seed count, etc.

Overall Board Assessment

Wonderful product, commendable adherence to tradition - this company is doing a far better job than average on all fronts.