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AN EMPLOY OF SENSORY ANALYSIS IN PDO CONTROL: THE CASE OF IDIAZABAL CHEESE

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In food industry, sensory characteristics are principally defined from consumers' input and different products are made for different consumer' segments in function of their preferences. However, in the case of Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) foods consumers' opinions and their preferences should have a lower influence in sensory definition than in the conventional food ones. In consequence, sensory characteristics of PDO food products should be technically defined by researchers and product experts. Nevertheless, as for conventional market products, an important contribution of hedonic information from consumers could be to relate it to the establishment of acceptable quality limits for the sensory characteristics and to define strategies of communication.

European regulation establishes that sensory characteristics included in PDO certification must be guaranteed. Obviously, trained panels and specific sensory quality control methods are necessary. Unfortunately, there isn't a standardized approach or European guide for the development of sensory quality control methods for PDO products; so each PDO Regulatory Council decides the best way to fulfill to this legal exigency.

The approach of LASEHU considers 6 stages for the development of a sensory evaluation method of a specific food: sensory quality definition of the product, selection of parameters determining the sensory quality, definition of the top situation, quality

grading and scoring criteria for each parameter, score card, sensory reference development and sensory evaluation procedure.

This approach makes possible to evaluate the sensory quality of Idiazabal cheese in a rigorous and reliable way and it can be a very useful reference for other laboratories and also for accreditation bodies. The principal limitation of the approach is the time and cost for method development and training panel. Working with a group of people with great knowledge of the product, use of decision trees / tables and development of sensory references are very important aspects when developing methods to evaluate the sensory quality of specific products, especially when typicity or key descriptors are considered. Collection of attribute/defect citation frequency by the panel is an effective tool to determine the perception degree of an attribute in the product. This information complements the numerical scores and provides a detailed description of the product quality that, in addition to accept/reject decisions, enables to categorize the sensory quality of each sample and to distinguish those products with higher quality. The principal limitation of the citation frequency data is the difficulty to relate them statistically with other information, for example from consumers or instrumental analysis.