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M^aPaz Villalba Talens

M^a Paz Villalba Talens, has a degree in Agricultural Engineering by the Polytechnic University of Valencia with the speciality of Food Industry. She has been working for about 12 years in aini as a Food researcher. The research areas are in the field of production and postharvest technology; fresh fruit&vegetables quality and safety and food law; postharvest and processing technologies; new products development to improve their nutritional value, as well as innovation in traditional products, in particular meat products. Experienced has been enhanced by the participation in several projects working closely with food producers, at national and international level.

TITLE: AN APPROACH TO INNOVATION IN TRADITIONAL CURED-MEAT PRODUCTS.

Villalba Talens M.P.¹, Vidal N²., Molina J.² , Carreres J.E.¹

¹ Department of New Product Development, ainia, centro tecnológico. Parque Tecnológico de Valencia. C/ Benjamín Franklin. Paterna. Valencia (Spain) Email: mpvillalba@ainia.es

² Department of Technology Transfer, ainia

Traditional food products (TFP) are an important part of European culture, identity and heritage. In order to maintain and expand the market share of TFP, further improvement in safety, health, or convenience is needed by means of different innovations¹.

In an increasingly globalising market, innovation is an important strategic tool for micro, small, and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) to achieve competitive advantage. Innovation can be defined as an ongoing process of learning, searching and exploring resulting in new products, new techniques, new forms of organization and new markets. Innovation is a continuous process characterised by three steps: efforts, activities and results².

The SMEs need to strengthen their innovation capacity and their contribution to the development of new products, as well as to promote their products to broaden market opportunities³.

Some authors propose the following structure as a strategy to innovate: market prospective (trends on new products launching), explore consumers' trends and finally analyse the results obtained in order to find the appropriate recommendations on product innovation⁴.

The identity of traditional products reflects the unique combination of local natural resources (climate, soils, local breeds and plant varieties, traditional equipment, etc.) and cultural ones (traditions, know-how and skills, some of which are transmitted through generations) in a given territory, linking the product, the people and the place³.

A particular case study that reflects the innovation in traditional food products is the cured-meat products developed in Requena, a city situated in the most occidental area of the Valencian region in Spain. The producers of "Embutido de Calidad de Requena" use recipes, methods and rituals handed down from "fathers to sons" to recreate the traditional flavours of the area³. They assume that innovation is part of the market requirements and there is a need in innovating without losing their identities.

References

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