



La Rioja

Quality and flavour





The secret of the celebrated cuisine of La Rioja is the excellent ingredients grown on the fertile plains of the Ebro valley. This is a land where ideal natural conditions come together: watered by seven rivers and blessed with a mild climate, the area's long agricultural tradition has judiciously taken up modern cultivation techniques to offer a wide range of products whose hallmark is quality and flavour.

Besides its famous wine, which has made Rioja quality renowned throughout the world, the region stands out for its vegetables and fruit, which, after vineyard, are respectively the second- and third-largest agricultural product.

Coliflor de Calahorra cauliflower, with its outstanding firmness, colour and texture, and Pimiento Riojano red peppers, with their intense colour and flavour, have both earned protected geographical indications (PGIs), while asparagus – under the quality mark Espárrago de Navarra – is another example of fine Rioja vegetables, which account for 7,000 hectares of arable land and 200,000 tonnes of output.

Another fine Rioja product are its mushrooms – which bear the quality mark Marca de Garantía – the outcome of the longstanding tradition and potential of the region's crops. La Rioja is Spain's leading producer of mushrooms and operates a powerful distribution structure.

Rioja horticulture grows delicious fruit, occupying a surface area of about 15,000 hectares. One of the standouts is Pera de Rincón de Soto, a pear of generous flavour, sweetness and size, and available all year while maintaining the same high standard – this was the first Spanish pear to earn a protected designation of origin (PDO).

The fruit orchards of La Rioja are now seeing the rise of Ciruela de Nalda y Quel plums, grown in the Irelida and Cidacos valleys and much-prized both fresh in the summer and as prunes in the winter. These plums, one of Rioja's most typical, has just gained a Marca de Garantía quality mark, further engrossing the list of over twenty marks existing in the region, thus making Rioja a veritable garden and an irresistible invitation to table.

For further information:
www.lariojocalidad.org
www.larioja.org/agricultura





PDO Peras de Rincón de Soto

Protected Designation of Origin (PDO)



Pera de Rincón de Soto pears are green, large and intensely flavoured, with a special sweetness. In 2002 the virtues of this fruit earned it the first protected designation of origin granted for a pear in Spain.

The properties of this product are owed to the site of the pear orchards on the lower banks of the rivers Ebro, Cidacos and Alhama, which is ideal for growing pears of exceptional quality: the fields are flat, clear, well aired, deep, humid, permeable and clean. Dawn mist is commonplace, and there are steep differences between daylight and night temperatures.

This aids the growing of an aqueous pear that is firmer than others and more intensely flavoured, because its harder texture retains higher sugar concentrations. The mists of the banks of the Ebro also encourage oxidation on the skin of the pear, a much-prized effect known as “russetting”.

The PDO covers pears grown in Rincón de Soto, Aldeanueva de Ebor, Alfaro and Calahorra, where the pear-growing tradition is long. The first historic reference, in fact, dates back to 1747, in a document affirming that the pears of this vicinity were an “exquisite fruit” much enjoyed at the royal court of Philip V.

The PDO has flourished in the past few years, so that in 2008 the harvest exceeded eight million kilograms of the highest quality, two million more than the previous year.

Given these figures, the PDO plans to open up new markets in Spain and beyond. Pera de Rincón de Soto is available under its quality label at greengrocer’s and supermarkets all year, always at the same standard of fragrance and taste.







Coliflor de Calahorra cauliflower

Protected Geographical Indication (PGI)

The fertile lands watered by the rivers Ebro and Cidacos, the local climate – with mild winters, long summers and high humidity – and the skill and care of growers and distributors have made Coliflor de Calahorra cauliflower stand out among the fine vegetables produced in the area.

Since 2003, a PGI protects the cauliflower produced in Calahorra and, in addition, in Aguilar del Río Alhama, Alcanadre, Aldeanueva de Ebro, Alfaro, Arnedo, Autol, Cervera del Río Alhama, Pradejón, Quel y Rincón de Soto. Today, output exceeds 4,500 tonnes.

Coliflor de Calahorra cauliflower is distinctive for its green, well-formed, granule-free leaves, its diameter of over 11 cm, its firmness and its whiteness, owing to its slow growth determined by the area's climate.

The PGI is managed by an association of cauliflower producers that tests new varieties on a test field to examine how well they develop in local conditions. The tests are closely followed by growers and distributors, who thus gain new knowledge about harvest dates and product characteristics, uniformity and consistency.

The agricultural tradition underpinning this product combines deep-rooted know-how with new developments so as to achieve higher quality, with better-adapted varieties and increasingly environment-friendly plantations implementing integrated production and strict controls.

The cauliflower is sold both fresh and shrink-wrapped, and always under the PGI label. This mark guarantees quality and flavour, combined with the nutritional benefits of cauliflower, which helps prevent cardiovascular disease, as a rich source of vitamin A and of vitamin C, a powerful antioxidant.

High in calcium, potassium and fibre, cauliflower helps regulate blood pressure, prevent colon cancer and eliminate certain carcinogens from the body.







Pimiento Riojano peppers

Protected Geographical Indication (PGI)

One of the most traditional vegetables of the Rioja market garden and its table is the red pepper. The native variety, Najerano, is grown in La Rioja almost exclusively.

Najerano, protected by a PGI since 2003, is grown all over Rioja but is especially emblematic in the area around Nájera, and is available both fresh and tinned.

The red peppers are grown on small plots using meticulously selected seeds and environment-sen-

sitive techniques. The area's mild climate during the development of the flower and the smooth gradations of temperature over the day favour the growth of the pepper plant and allow for larger fruits to form.

The pepper has a rough surface, a flesh thickness of 6 to 8 mm, and is 16 to 18 cm long. It has a distinctive red colour on ripening, and offers a sweet taste. "Marbled" peppers are especially typical in the area, and are highly thought of for their culinary and digestive properties.

The PGI-protected peppers, whether to be sold fresh or tinned, are selected at the time of harvest. Tinned peppers are first roasted by a hand-craft method using a direct-flame oven. Tinned distribution accounts for 70% of the total.

Pimiento Riojano was Spain's first quality mark to implement a food safety management system certified to ISO 22000:2005. Rigorous controls are in place from sowing to the sale of each individual pepper or tin.





Champiñón y Setas de La Rioja mushrooms

Guarantee Mark

La Rioja is Spain's leading mushroom producer and operates powerful structures of production and distribution. Rioja accounts for 55% of Spain's mushroom production and 3% of world output.

Rioja's mushroom production is second only to its vineyard output, and has the support of CTICH, a mushroom technology research institute created by the regional government which has become a point of reference and assistance for the entire industry.

Since 2006, Rioja mushrooms are protected by a Marca de Garantía, a quality mark that specifically covers the species Pleurotas, Lentinus, Legista, Pholiota and Falammulina of the Extra and Primera quality categories, sold whole, sliced or chopped, both fresh and tinned.

Tinned mushrooms are available in brine, cooked in their own juices, pickled and then packed in vegetable oil, and seasoned with spices.

The mushrooms satisfy strict conditions of cultivation and processing under the Marca de Garantía regulations, and reach the market under the label Champiñones y Setas de La Rioja, which informs consumers of their exceptional quality as against the produce of new countries which have entered the market.

Mushrooms have antioxidant properties owing to their selenium content. Selenium deficit is associated with heart disorders, osteoporosis and even some forms of cancer, such as breast cancer and prostate cancer.

For further information:
www.ctich.com





Ciruela de Nalda y Quel plums

Guarantee Mark

Plum is one Rioja's most typical fruits, particularly the Claudia Reina Verde variety, grown chiefly in the centre and east of the region. Its sweetness and suitability for drying to produce prunes has led to the recent creation of the collective brand Ciruela de Nalda y Quel.

The quality mark specifically covers the Claudia Reina Verde variety, both fresh and dried (plums and prunes), grown in 16 valleys of the rivers Iregua and Cidacos. Plums are picked by hand and dried by traditional methods; the prunes are stored to protect them from atmospheric conditions and humidity. All plums and prunes are distributed under the label Ciruela de Nalda y Quel.

The Rioja plum orchard covers 388 hectares, of which 110 are given over to the variety protected by the quality mark.

There are presently 112 registered producers entitled to use the Ciruela de Nalda y Quel label, and seven registered wholesalers.



Other quality marks for Rioja fruit and vegetables



Organic farming in La Rioja

Organic farming in La Rioja has undergone rapid expansion in the past few years, and now involves a range of foods, including fruit and vegetables such as artichoke, lettuce, tomato, pear and apple. Organic produce is sold bearing a back-label that assures compliance with organic farming rules, and is the only produce for which labelling is permitted to use the terms ecológico, biológico, bio and eco.



Integrated Production in La Rioja

Integrated Production is a farming standard whose techniques are environment-sensitive; it lies halfway between conventional agriculture and organic farming, and is spreading rapidly, in fruit farming especially - major crops being pear, followed by peach, apple, nectarine and cherry. These techniques are also used to grow potato, artichoke and cauliflower. Foods thus produced bear a label making reference to Producción Integrada (Integrated Production).



Collective mark Nuez de Pedroso

Nuez de Pedroso walnuts are of medium size, have a fine, smooth shell, and offer intense flavour. The collective mark Nuez de Pedroso covers Extra quality shelled walnuts of the species *Juglans Regia* grown in La Rioja and made available in containers. Under the strict controls commanded by the regulations of the quality mark, these walnuts are cultivated by traditional hand methods, and all growers and packagers are registered to assure a genuine product. Nuez de Pedroso walnuts are distributed in containers bearing the logo of the collective mark: a walnut under the legend Nuez de Pedroso.

