

La Rioja:

the leading mushroom and cauliflower region



At the national level, La Rioja is part of the Ebro Valley economy, and shares many of its social and economic features with its neighbours, Navarre and Aragon. Rioja is small in terms of area and population, but economically vigorous: its above-average income per capita is the fifth-highest of the Autonomous Communities (self-ruling regions) of Spain.

La Rioja has a unique environment of distinct microclimates, so the six districts into which it is divided are home to widely different kinds of farming. The Valley concentrates most of the arable land. In Rioja Alta, the predominant crops are cereals, beetroot, potato, vineyard and vegetables; Rioja Media grows fruit orchards and vineyard; while Rioja Baja produces fruit and vegetables, vineyard, olive grove and almond orchard. Rioja horticulture occupies a surface area of about 10,000 hectares. Output is around 250,000 tonnes a year. Wine makes the largest contribution by value, followed by vegetables and fruit.

Mushroom growing has become Rioja's second-largest farming activity after wine and is a major hub of the regional economy.





Santo Domingo
de la Calzada

LOGROÑO

Nájera

Albelda
de Iregua

Calahorra

Arnedo

Autol

Alfaro

Cervera del
Río Alhama

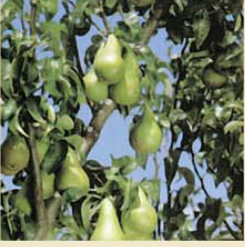
Rioja Alta has the largest area of potato crops (86% of the total cultivated area in Rioja) and accounts for 92% of the region's potato harvest. The regional department of agriculture and economic development has set up the Oficina de la Patata as a way to centralise the information and technical support needed by this sector of over 500 producers.

The weight of agriculture in the region's economy has grown in recent years owing to the size of the winemaking industry and Rioja's national leadership in the production of mushrooms and cauliflower.

The region's protected geographical indications include Pimiento Riojano (peppers) and Coliflor de Calahorra (cauliflower), while Pera de Rincón de Soto (pear) is a protected designation of origin.

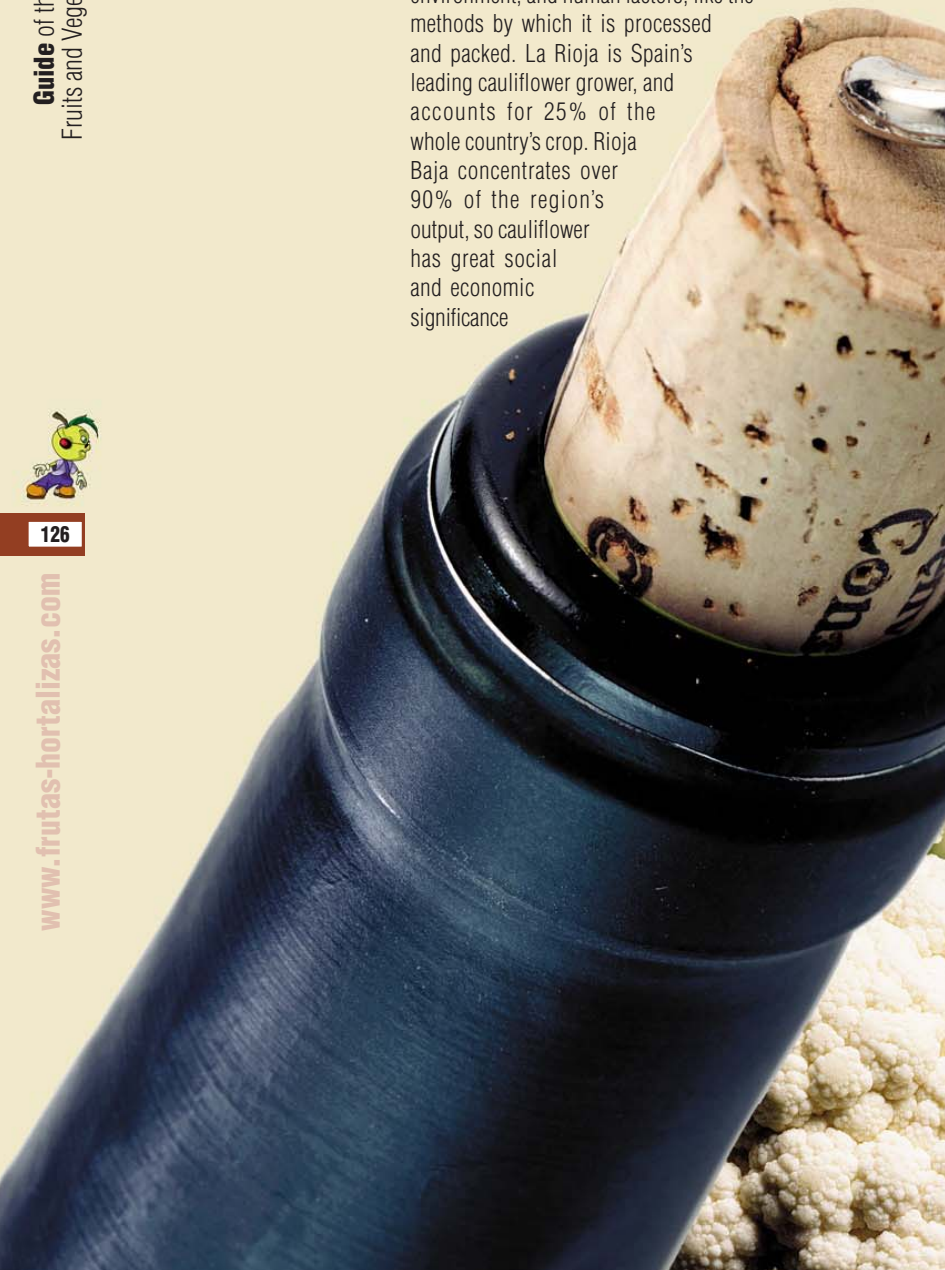
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Pimiento Riojano is a bright red pepper variety eaten both fresh and tinned. The PGI also covers entreverado ('marbled') peppers; like the red and green peppers under the mark, they are of superior quality and highly appreciated for their mild flavour and digestibility.

Coliflor de Calahorra is firmer and larger than cauliflower grown elsewhere. Creamy-white in colour, it has a smooth rather than grainy texture, owing to natural factors, like the climate and soil of its growing environment, and human factors, like the methods by which it is processed and packed. La Rioja is Spain's leading cauliflower grower, and accounts for 25% of the whole country's crop. Rioja Baja concentrates over 90% of the region's output, so cauliflower has great social and economic significance.





in this area. Pera de Rincón de Soto pears, grown in the Rioja Baja district, are larger, longer, sweeter and greener in colour than pears grown elsewhere. The geographical area where the pears are grown comprises the municipalities of Aldeanueva de Ebro, Alfaro, Calahorra and Rincón de Soto. The local growing practices are specific to this district and bespeak a tradition going back centuries. The special features of the pear are therefore inextricably linked to the physical setting and the skill of the local fruit growers.

La Rioja is Spain's leading field mushroom region and accounts for 51% of the country's crop. Mushroom growing has become Rioja's second-largest farming activity after wine and is a major hub of the regional economy. Two out of every hundred kilograms of field mushrooms consumed worldwide are grown here. The field-mushroom producers' organisation (Asociación Profesional de Cultivadores de Champiñón) brings together growers from three Autonomous Communities - Rioja, Navarre and Aragon - and is headquartered at the Centro Tecnológico de Investigación del Champiñón research facility, which is equipped with the latest technology. The organisation works to improve growing techniques for field mushrooms and other edible fungi to continue offering exceptional quality.



Wine makes the largest contribution by value, followed by vegetables and fruit.

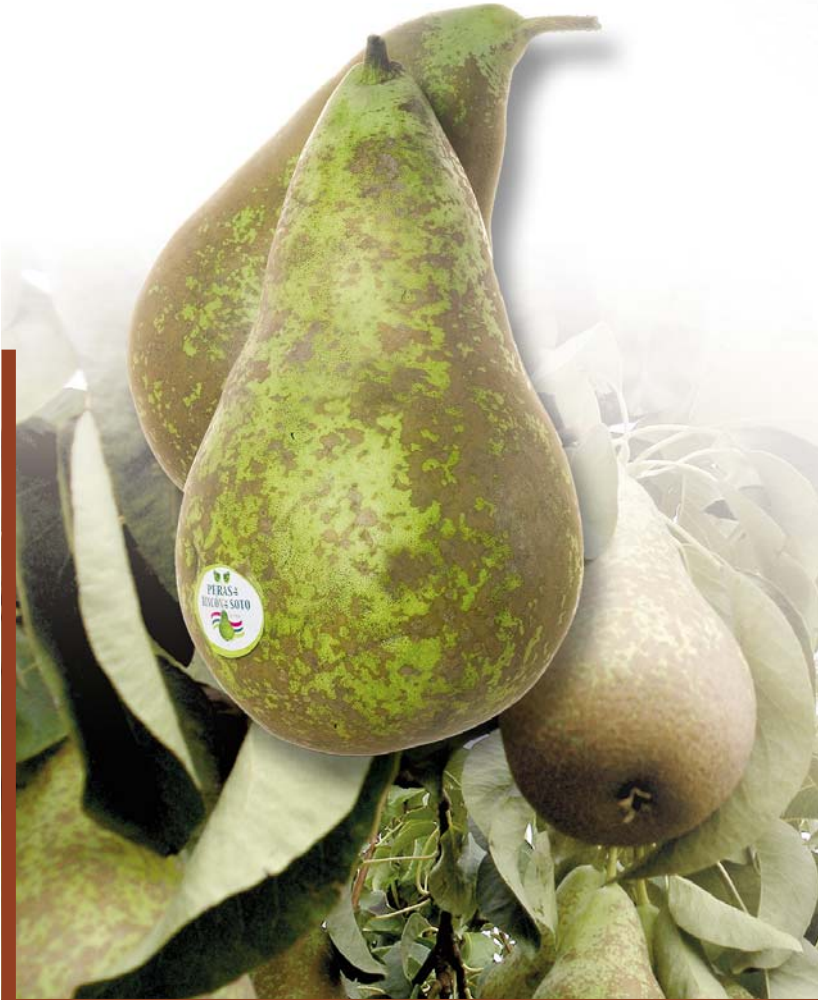


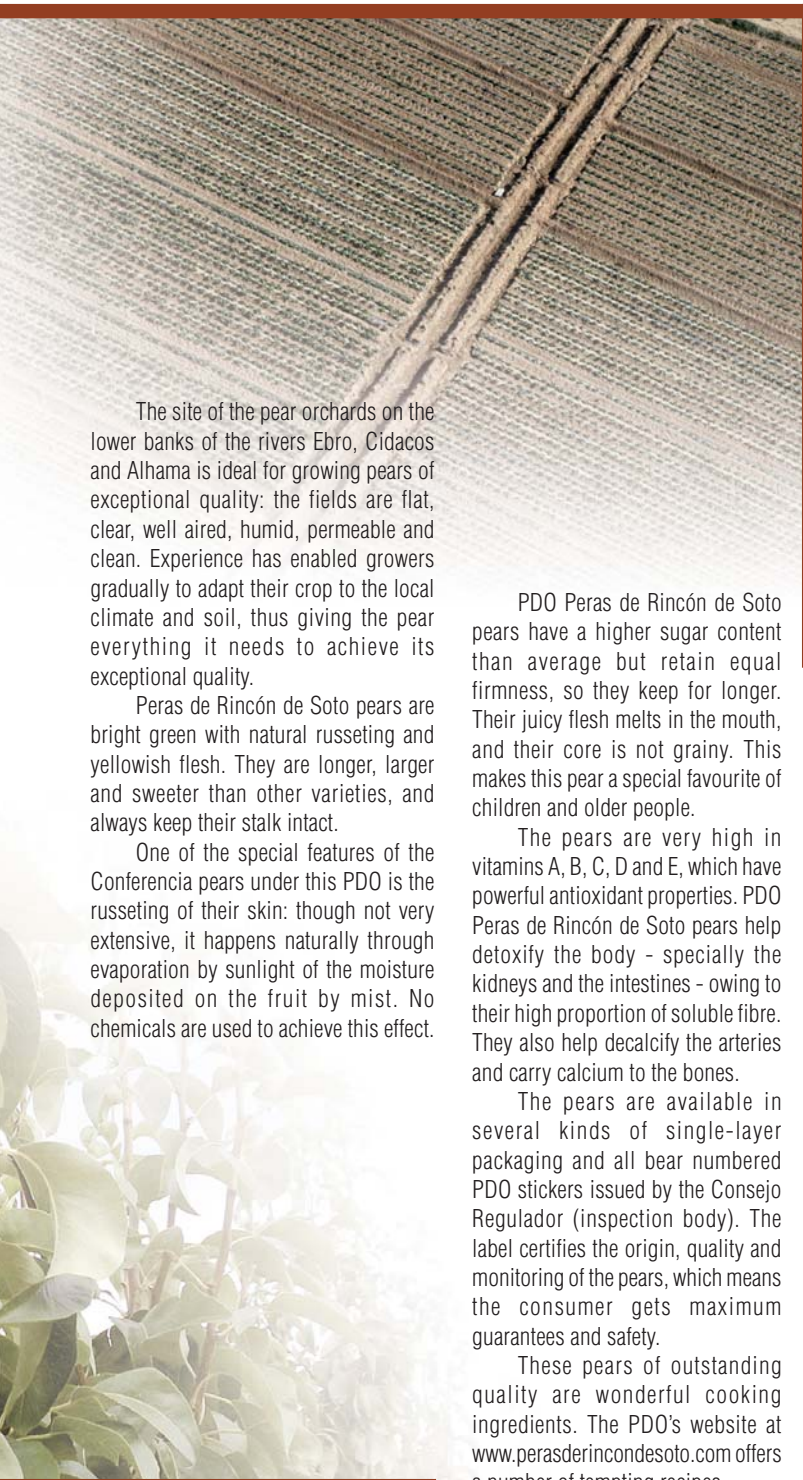
La Rioja Quality

PDO Peras de Rincón de Soto (pears)

The PDO Peras de Rincón de Soto - the first PDO for pears in Spain - covers 'extra' quality Blanquilla and Conferencia variety pears grown using traditional methods in Aldeanueva de Ebro, Alfaro, Calahorra and Rincón de Soto, in La Rioja.

The quality and special features of Peras de Rincón de Soto pears are chiefly due to the physical setting, with its natural and human factors, and to the fact that growing, handling and packing are all done within the defined geographical area.





The site of the pear orchards on the lower banks of the rivers Ebro, Cidacos and Alhama is ideal for growing pears of exceptional quality: the fields are flat, clear, well aired, humid, permeable and clean. Experience has enabled growers gradually to adapt their crop to the local climate and soil, thus giving the pear everything it needs to achieve its exceptional quality.

Peras de Rincón de Soto pears are bright green with natural russetting and yellowish flesh. They are longer, larger and sweeter than other varieties, and always keep their stalk intact.

One of the special features of the Conferencia pears under this PDO is the russetting of their skin: though not very extensive, it happens naturally through evaporation by sunlight of the moisture deposited on the fruit by mist. No chemicals are used to achieve this effect.

PDO Peras de Rincón de Soto pears have a higher sugar content than average but retain equal firmness, so they keep for longer. Their juicy flesh melts in the mouth, and their core is not grainy. This makes this pear a special favourite of children and older people.

The pears are very high in vitamins A, B, C, D and E, which have powerful antioxidant properties. PDO Peras de Rincón de Soto pears help detoxify the body - specially the kidneys and the intestines - owing to their high proportion of soluble fibre. They also help decalcify the arteries and carry calcium to the bones.

The pears are available in several kinds of single-layer packaging and all bear numbered PDO stickers issued by the Consejo Regulador (inspection body). The label certifies the origin, quality and monitoring of the pears, which means the consumer gets maximum guarantees and safety.

These pears of outstanding quality are wonderful cooking ingredients. The PDO's website at www.perasderincondesoto.com offers a number of tempting recipes.



Pimiento Riojano (peppers)

Pimiento Riojano peppers stand out for their excellent flavour, fine flesh and pleasant taste. These features are due to the careful selection and traditional roasting technique used historically in Rioja households.

The Najerano variety of pepper is native to La Rioja, and is grown almost nowhere else. It accounts for half the region's total output of peppers. The protected geographical indication covers Najerano peppers for fresh eating and tinned.

Direct-flame oven roasting preserves the consistency and colour of the pulp of the pepper. The peppers are peeled, cored and deseeded by hand, and are not washed by immersion in water or



chemical solution; hence its natural flavour and digestive properties are kept intact.

PGI Coliflor de Calahorra (cauliflower)

La Rioja is one of the leading cauliflower-growing regions in Spain, and now has the protected geographical indication Coliflor de Calahorra. This quality mark protects extra- and primera-quality fresh cauliflower grown in Calahorra and neighbouring riverside districts.

The outstanding quality achieved in the PGI area mainly rests on the local climate and soil, which, watered by the rivers Ebro and Cidacos, is highly fertile and allows for the crop to develop slowly - this makes it firm and gives it a creamy white colour, depending on the variety. The cauliflower heads are firm and compact, and of a minimum diameter of 11 cm.

The product is picked manually and within 12 hours reaches a warehouse registered with the cauliflower producer organisation (Asociación Profesional de Productores y Comercializadores de Co-

liflor). The crop is then handled with exquisite care to ensure it reaches the end consumer in the best possible conditions. A control body monitors the entire process.

Cauliflower has excellent nutritional and health properties: one portion provides double the recommended daily intake of vitamin A, which helps prevent heart disease. Its high vitamin C content provides 100% of the recommended daily intake. The calcium and potassium in cauliflower regulate blood pressure, while the fibre may help prevent colon cancer and the sulphur-compound content enhances the activity of the enzymes that help the body get rid of certain carcinogens.

