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# Mapping the Terrain of Public Agri-Food Brands at a Regional Level in Spain: Keys to Build Strong Brands

## Mapeo de las Marcas Públicas Agroalimentarias de Ámbito Regional en España: Claves para Construir Marcas Fuertes

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### I. INTRODUCTION

The food sector is considered as a fragmented market. From a marketing point of view, the high number of substitute goods for each product reduces the power of brands. Moreover, as food products are considered trusted goods (Nelson, 1974), characteristics demanded by consumers are added to products as a differential value, to reduce uncertainty in purchase decisions.

Quality is one of the attributes in this differentiation process. In fact, creating a special alternative quality differentiation for mass products develops the food market and opens the doors to competitiveness for all agents in the sector (Sánchez, 2006).

The European agri-food quality certification strategy uses the term “differentiated quality” as “the set of peculiar and specific characteristics of a food due to the origin of the raw materials used and/or the production procedures” (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Food, 2018, p. 6). Thus, such products reach segments of the population that may be willing to pay higher prices.

The European Union has four specific quality regimes to protect differentiated quality; regional quality public brands are found at the regional level. However, it seems that the proliferation of quality brands creates confusion for both consumers and producers (Verbeke y Roosen, 2009; Crespi y Marette, 2002). Moreover,



### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This study aims to examine the category of regional quality public brands in the agri-food sector in the 17 autonomous regions in Spain. Moreover, some proposals of direct application for companies in the agri-food sector and Governments are made to build strong brands. Considering the context of “emptied Spain”, these findings are particularly relevant to strengthen the territory and to promote the agri-food sector.

### **RESUMEN DEL ARTÍCULO**

Este artículo analiza las marcas públicas de calidad agroalimentaria que hay en las 17 comunidades autónomas de España. Este trabajo realiza una serie de recomendaciones de aplicación directa para que los productores del sector agroalimentario y la Administración puedan mejorar en la gestión de la identidad de estas marcas convirtiéndolas en marcas fuertes. Estos hallazgos son especialmente relevantes en el contexto actual de la “España vaciada” para lograr defender el territorio e impulsar el sector agroalimentario.

quality brands tend to be compatible with each other. This situation in which a large number of initiatives coexist has been called “the jungle of labels” (Courvoisier y Courvoisier, 2005; Jeddi y Zaiem, 2010). The outcome of this abundance of initiatives is that the collective brand is less effective (Ilbery, 2005), and the value of each of the brands decreases for the consumer. Moreover, brands linked to a territory can be a differential element of the place of origin by contributing positively to its image (Cerviño y Baena, 2014, p.15).

In this context, this study examines the category of regional quality public brands that exist in the food sector in Spain and producers can include them on their labels if they meet certain requirements of use.

***...creating a special alternative quality differentiation for mass products develops the food market and opens the doors to competitiveness for all agents in the sector.***

This study has focused on this country because the food and beverage industry is the leading manufacturing branch of the industrial sector in Spain (MAPA Annual Report, 2020). Specifically, the number of companies amounts to 30,260, of which over 96.5% are Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and almost 80% have fewer than 10 employees (Memoria Anual del MAPA, 2020). Moreover, Spain has a long tradition of public support for agri-food quality. Furthermore, empty or emptied Spain is a worrying reality. Since 2001, 9 of the 17 autonomous communities have decreased. Of the 8,000 municipalities in Spain, 5,000 have lost 63% of the population. In this context, public agri-food quality brands are part of the solution by promoting the primary sector and defending the rural environment.

The objectives of this paper are the following ones:

1. To analyse the identity of the public regional quality brands in the food industry in Spain.
2. To determine the challenges facing these brands in defining the differentiation elements to build their personality.

Moreover, this paper provides a series of recommendations to those responsible for the public brands and commercial companies of the agri-food sector can manage these brands more effectively, and build strong brands.

## 2. BRAND IDENTITY AS A DIFFERENTIATION RESOURCE

Identity is the essence of a brand (Aaker, 1996). Research on brand management refers to identity as a symbolic construction (Ávalos, 2010; Black y Veloutsou, 2017)); in fact, a brand can be thought of as a “sign” that is intended to acquire and communicate meaning and identity provides brands with direction and purpose.

Kapferer draws parallels between brand identity and people's identity cards (1994), stating that it is important to know why and for what a brand exists, when it was founded, what stage of life it is in, who is its owner, and other formal and legal aspects. A strong brand is characterised by a rich and clear identity that makes a unique value proposition (Davis, 2002; Aaker, 2007). Thus, brands must be endowed with a unique identity through which differential and clear associations translate into a unique value proposition. According to Zaichkowsky (2010), brand managers need to start with a vision of what they want their brand to represent and then use the appropriate identity elements to build the brand.

Brand identity elements are wide ranging. Both from academia and from the profession, brand identity is a combination of various elements such as name, design, colours, or symbols used to identify a brand's (Ward et al., 2020). Elements of a brand should establish a singularity and contribute to publics' assessment; among these features, are the brand's values (Keller et al., 2002; Cai, 2002; Chen, 2001).

In short, the elements of the brand must contribute to generating identity meaning. The brand's logo, name, or graphic and verbal style should help to communicate the brand identity. These are elements of great value for visually distinguishing and recognising brands: “the most important thing is that the brand is recognised in them, not so much that the brand is recognised by them” (Kapferer, 2007: p. 75). A logo refers to the graphic design that a company uses, with or without its name, to identify itself or its products. A logo has been defined as “a graphic or image that triggers memory associations of the target brand” (Walsh et al., 2010, p. 76). A logo simplifies the purchase decision process, reduces risk, and increases trust (Keller and Lehmann, 2006). According to various studies, logos are the elements that share the fewest associations with competing brands (Ward et al., 2020); in fact, it looks like the official visual representation of the brand.

### KEYWORDS

Agri-food brands, brand identity, brand management, emptied Spain, differentiation.

### PALABRAS CLAVE

Marcas agroalimentarias, identidad de marca, gestión de marca, España vaciada, diferenciación.

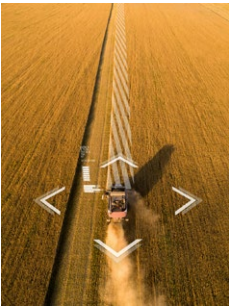
Colours are another element of brand identity, in fact, they are the first point of identification of the brand (Zaichkowsky, 2010). It seems that colour combinations should be limited because designs with a multitude of colours have no specific identity, whereas designs with one or two colours are recalled with ease. Moreover, it is important to remember that the meanings of colours vary across cultures and nationalities. In summary, colour is an element of meaning, so they are used to tell the public what the brand means.

Brand name is another important aspect in the act of building brand identity. A name transmits the speaker's personality, culture, and values; it is a sound and a written reference that evokes an image or several, transmits a personality, and communicates an identity. A few brand-naming classifications have been offered (Arora et al., 2015). It is important for brands to be coherent and to define a unique communication style according to their identity (Kapferer, 2007). Conversely, the role the brand will play should be considered when defining identity: Supporting brand? Line brand? Umbrella brand? Co-brand? (Aaker, 1996). This role determines what position the brand occupies within the organisation's brand hierarchy (Keller, 2008).

### 2.1. The Identity of Public Quality Brands

Public sector institutions are assuming a certain role in co-branding. Shared brands are those that join forces to promote a brand name, or use a common brand to support other brands (Tregear y Gorton, 2009). These types of brands are closely linked to the concepts of sharing brand value, information transfer, economy of scale or familiarity (Miklós-Thal, 2012).

Public agri-food quality brands are shared brands. The Administration puts these brands at the service of companies to help identify products that meet quality requirements. So, in addition to the classic concepts related to brand identity, there are unique features that make up their identity. These features include who can belong to the brand, what controls are carried out to ensure that all members of the group comply with these requirements, what obligations the associates must meet, and what rights they can benefit from. As to Cerviño and Baena (2014, p.13) affirm, "in an economy of services and knowledge, the competitive core of companies and countries are their intangibles. In this sense, its protection is virtual, both by the company and the country through its institutions". Thus, the Eu-



European Union passed a regulation that forbids regional public quality brands from making explicit reference to the name of the region, only the quality marks can bear the name of the origin if they are the figures DOPS e IGP.

Moreover, knowing that the brand identity originates from the company, in the case of the conceptualisation of public shared brands, it is necessary to bear in mind that the administration promotes the brand and the entrepreneurs join the labelling scheme voluntarily (Chameroy, 2014). This fact explains that the ownership of a shared public brand is different from the companies that can use it.

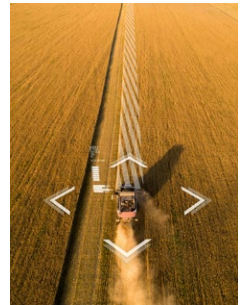
These brands represent the state's commitment, an official quality guarantee that is publicly recognised. Belonging to the public administration gives the brand a reputation and facilitates its association with the values of authenticity, trust, and credibility (Carpenter y Larceneux, 2008). However, these brands are not very well known. Furthermore, voluntary labeling with a shared quality brand in itself is not enough for its full effects to occur.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study aims to analyse the shared agri-food quality brands created and promoted by the autonomous regions in Spain. There are 17 autonomous regions in Spain, of which 16 agreed to participate in the study. As the community that did not participate is the only one that does not have a public agri-food quality brand, the sample represents the entire study population.

A qualitative methodology was used that combined two techniques: in-depth interviews and content analysis. As the study population is finite, interviews were conducted to determine the identity of each brand and delve into the contents of the analysis. Because the objective was to study the identities of the public brands as defined, rather than the consumers' perceptions of these identities, the interviewees were responsible for the quality brands in the autonomous regions.

In total, 24 interviews were conducted: 19 in person and 5 by telephone. The profile of those responsible was diverse, some were the heads of the agri-food public quality brand both in the government and in the public company, while others were administration professionals with a more technical profile. The average duration of the interviews was 70 minutes.



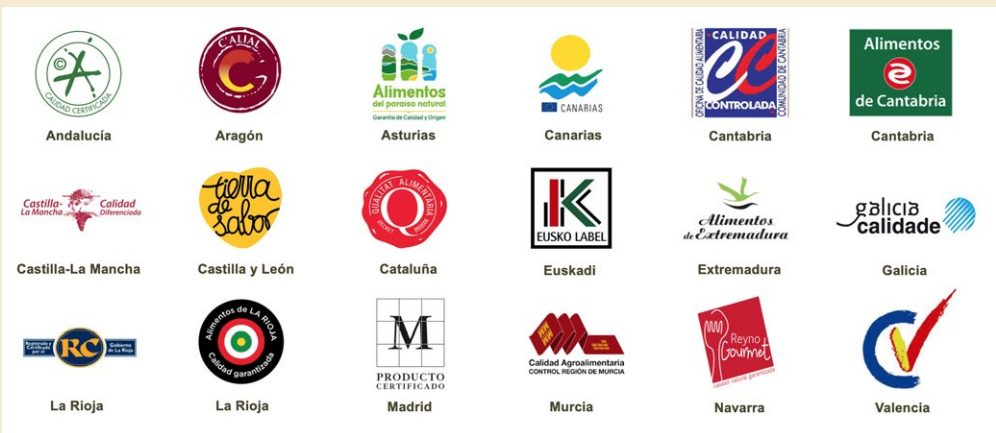
The other technique used was content analysis. The contents analysed consist of informational or promotional documents, such as press releases issued by the regional governments, material produced in advertising campaigns, sectorial publications, and information disseminated on social media or on the brand's website, or legislative documents such as the current regional regulations on food quality and brands.

#### 4. METHODS

As displayed in **Figure 1**, eighteen quality regional agri-food public brands exist in Spain and were identified in this study (see **Figure 1**). Of the 17 autonomous regions in Spain, the community of the Balearic Islands is the only one that does not have an agri-food quality public brand. Conversely, the Cantabria and La Rioja regions each have two agri-food quality public brands.

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Figure 1. Quality regional agri-food public brands in Spain.



Source: own elaboration.

From a historical perspective, the results obtained indicate the incessant continual creation of regional shared public brands since the end of the 1980s. The oldest brand is the Q de Qualitat of Catalunya, which was established in 1986. The introduction of the largest number of new brands was concentrated at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century; some of which these were newly created, and others arose due to a change of name. **Figure 2** illustrates this historical evolution.

Figure 2. Birth of public agri-food quality brands in Spain.



Source: own elaboration.

The reasons that have led the autonomous regions to bet on the multi-product quality brand strategy are five: (1) to support the agri-food sector, promote differentiated quality, and promote rural development. A practitioner pointed out: "It is a tool for territory structure, a tool for employment in rural areas or so that there is no depopulation"; (2) to facilitate regional agri-food promotion under a unique label. As explained by an interviewee: "We have some small productions that defend themselves badly. Placing the protection of a guarantee mark will probably defend them better and it is also an argument for the defense of the territory that concerns us"; (3) to simplify the purchase decision process. A professional explains: "the distribution channel asked us in some way for a clearer identification of the Rioja product"; and (4) to act as a public guarantee that confers credibility. One of the interviewees explains: "here Galicia Calidade acts, in one hand, as a tool at the service of the business community and the Galician productive fabric, to have differentiated products in the market, but on the other hand, it serves to give the consumer information and guarantee and confidence towards the products". (5) Finally, some communities seek to build a strong region-brand that supports the entire territory, achieving synergies in different areas such as culture, economy or sports, among others. In this sense, a manager stated: "We are interested in quality brands serving to promote agri-food, but also to defend territories."

From the point of view of names, the results show that they used to be descriptive. **Figure 3** shows that 78% of the brands are descriptive. On one hand, there are some names that only indicate the origin (Alimentos de Extremadura, Alimentos de Cantabria



and Alimentos de La Rioja), some that refer explicitly to quality or certification (Calidad Certificada in Andalucía, M Producto Certificado in Madrid and Marca Q in Cataluña), and others that mention the origin and the quality (Eusko Label and Galicia Calidade). Some of the regions use a double meaning in their name to refer to the quality and the origin, as in the case of the brands CV and RC. CV, which means Conformity and Validation, makes explicit reference to the initials of the region: Comunidad Valenciana. RC, used in La Rioja, means Registered and Certified but also appeals to its origins, namely the initials of the Rioja Calidad brand, previously in force.

Although the European Union passed a regulation that forbids public regional quality brands from making explicit reference to the name of the region, the results show that some regions still incorporate the name of the region into the brand. In fact, of the 18 brands analysed, eight meet this requirement and regions ten incorporate the name of the region into the brand. This fact is a difficulty for those responsible for managing these brands, as expressed by an interviewee: "In terms of origin, we lost when Alimentos de Andalucía disappeared. It has been very difficult for us to create an image of Andalusia with a word where Andalusia or Andalusia does not appear". In addition, various communities criticize and question compliance with European regulations, speaking of a certain permissiveness and a lack of control. In this sense, a person in charge stated: "I have always doubted because there are other guaranteed brands, such as Alimentos de Extremadura, and nothing happens."

In some cases, the selection of the name is more symbolic and emotional and appeals to the identity of the brand, like Tierra de Sabor in Castilla y León and Reyno Gourmet in Navarra. There is only one public brand that uses strong distinctive words without meaning. **Figure 3** shows the types of brands based on the name following the typology established by Zaichkowsky.

From the point of view of the logotype, the results show that most public co-branding logos share several elements, the most common of which is the use of a seal in a stamp format that helps to convey a message of guarantee and quality. The use of the colour range of the regional flag as a symbol of identification is also common: 11 of the 18 regional quality brands use regional colours. Thus, these brand logos try to convey the brands' two main values: quality and origin. In that sense, Eusko Llabel stands out for its unequivocal

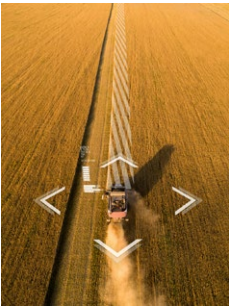


Figure 3. Naming of public quality brand following Zaichkowsky typology.



Source: own elaboration.

graphic association with the Basque Country due to its lines and colour range, and all this in a stamp format.

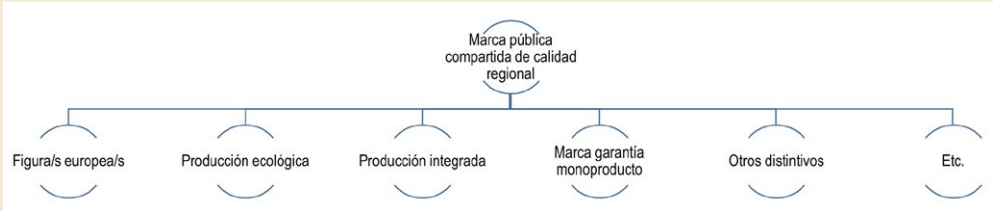
In general, logos do not usually contain symbols related to the agri-food sector. According to the interviewees, the seal must represent a wide range of foods. The only exception is the Castilla-La Mancha, which uses the icon of Don Quijote de la Mancha along with the most representative foods of the community as its symbol. Galicia Calidade reformulated its logo using a recognisable icon: the scallop, which is related to the Camino de Santiago, and a lowercase typeface with its own personality using Celtic traits for the word “Galicia”, which enhances the Celtic origin of that territory.

Moreover, in some cases, the main associations between origin and quality coexist with other values such as cooperation, innovation, and respect for the environment, among others, but very few public agri-food brands write and talk in public about the values they defend. Tierra de Sabor in Castilla y León and M Producto Certificado in Madrid stand out among the brands that do so, for example by including this information on their web pages.

In relation to the role that each region gives the brand, we identified three models corresponding to the roles assigned to the brands in each region: “umbrella brand”, “product brand”, and “region brand”,

which is also called “identity brand”. In the “umbrella-brand” model, the autonomous community decides that the agri-food quality brand will act as an umbrella brand, so that the relevance of this brand in promotion prevails over any other food quality emblem. The regions that use this model are Andalucía, Navarra, Madrid, Extremadura, Asturias o Castilla y León. **Figure 4** summarises this hierarchical structure in which the main brand is the shared regional public quality brand.

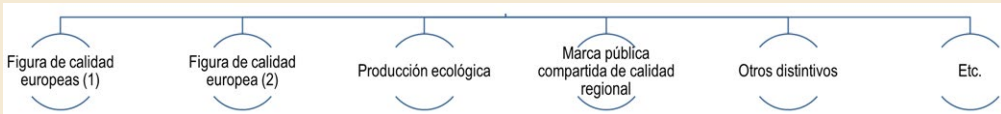
Figure 4. Resulting hierarchy in the umbrella brand model.



Source: own elaboration.

Further, in the “product-brand” model, the regional food brand becomes a certification mark that represents some of the regional quality products. In this way, it operates at the same level as other quality brands of the autonomous community. This model is used in Aragon, Castilla-La Mancha, Valencia and Murcia. **Figure 6** shows this brand structure, which usually places all brands at the same level, without prioritising some over others (see **Figure 5**).

Figure 5. Resulting hierarchy in the product brand model.

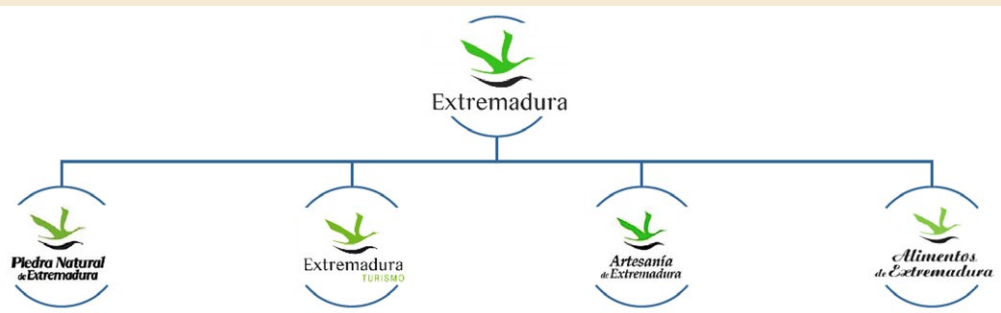


Source: own elaboration.

In the “identity-brand” model, the food quality brand becomes an extension of its public brand-region. The brand-region is the umbrella brand that encompasses all areas of economic interest: tourism, food, and so on. This is the case of Extremadura, Asturias and Galicia. “This idea of having a brand for food, another for tourism, among others, which are similar but are not the same, is

good because it allows us to sell a common image of the Principado, but respecting the singularity of the things we do," explained an interviewee. **Figure 6** reflects this model that is followed in the community of Extremadura.

Figure 6. **Public brands architecture in Extremadura.**



Source: own elaboration.

Conversely, we find that some brands do not conform to the models we identified, such as the Eusko Label brand, which uses a model in which the Eusko Label guarantee brand predominates but is not the only guarantee brand nor the only quality label promoted by the regional government.

We have confirmed that these trademarks are registered with the Spanish Patent and Trademark Office with public ownership. They are usually Trademarks of Guarantee according to Law 17/2001 of December 7 of Trademarks Title VII, Chapter II, articles 68 to 73 (BOE, 2001). They are owned directly or indirectly (through a public company linked to the Administration) by the regional Administration. Usually, these brands depend on the regional portfolio with competencies in agriculture, which have different names in each of the regions. Exceptions include the regional trademarks of a different legal nature, which are the following:

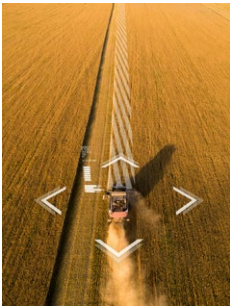
- Logo RUP (Canary Islands): quality certification of public law owned by the European Union and common to all of the community's outermost regions. The Government of the Canary Islands regulates and manages this brand in its region.
- Galicia Calidade (Galicia): a transversal brand that covers all Galician economic areas. The Galicia Calidade company, SAU, which is dependent on the Regional Government (Ministry) of Industry and Commerce, is responsible for its management.

- Q de Qualitat (Catalonia): an individual brand. When it was established in 1986, the possibility of registering it as a guarantee brand was not even considered.
- Food from Extremadura (Extremadura): a promotional brand owned by the Junta de Extremadura.

In the legal field, these quality brands usually operate under a law of the autonomous community on regional agri-food quality that facilitates the creation of regional quality brands. The use of these guarantee brands is laid down by specific regulations, which are published in the official gazettes of each of the autonomous regions. For many of the brands analysed, the interviewees explained that the autonomous community itself draws up additional specific regulations that govern the basic quality standards that certain agri-food products must meet to belong to the quality brand. Based on these specifications, companies offering each of the products that meet these requirements can apply for a trademark registration. Therefore, if there is no prior interest in standardising a product or intention to do so on the part of the sectors of activity, there is no possibility that these sectors will benefit from the brand. This is the case of several autonomous regions, such as the Basque Country (the Eusko Label brand only represents the 16 agri-food products that have their own regulations).

The trademark application process is standardised and public. Usually, regional administrations are in charge and the process is conducted online. The concession of the trademark is usually indefinite or occurs over a long period and is renewed automatically. This process is usually free, except for some cases in which the payment of a fee is requested, such as Reyno Gourmet in Navarra, CC Calidad Controlada in Cantabria, and Galicia Calidade in Galicia. Occasionally, brands have an association of brand entrepreneurs who collaborate in the management and promotion of the brand. This is the case of ADEPACA, the Association for the Development and Promotion of Food Quality Products of the C'alia brand in Aragón.

One of the elements that is common to most of the brands that the interviewees mentioned is the need to periodically control the quality required of the associated products to allow the use this quality brand. In products that already belong to European quality figures, this control usually occurs in the same way as for other regulated brands. For the other products, the regulations usually require

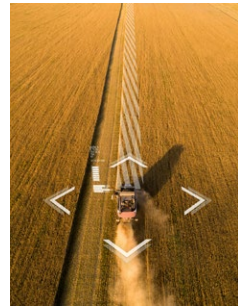


companies to subcontract an accredited external certification body to carry out these controls. However, as observed in the interviews, it seems that it is not a common practice for these controls to be carried out periodically and none of the administrations impose strict requirements. One practitioner whom we interviewed stated: “behind a high quality there is an inspection and control plan which we are not carrying out, to be honest. And I also doubt that the rest of the autonomous regions are.”

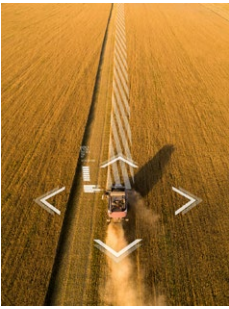
From the perspective of the number of products or companies belonging to a brand, we determined the absolute and relative representativeness. Tierra de Sabor de Castilla y León is the brand with the highest absolute representation; specifically, it has 956 companies and more than 6,000 products. These data correspond to 30% of the agri-food companies in the region. This is followed by the M Producto Certificado of Madrid with 470 companies, the Calidad Certificada of Andalusia with 465 companies, and the Alimentos de Extremadura with 450 companies. The Eusko Label is another brand with high representation in the sector; it has 3,000 associated producers. It should be clarified that the Eusko Label brand mainly includes beef producers. We detected a low representation of some of the brands analysed. This is the case of the Castilla-La Mancha Calidad Diferenciada brand, to which a single agri-food company belongs to it, ; the two brands of La Rioja, RC, with two companies; Alimentos de La Rioja with eight; Calidad Alimentaria Control Región of Murcia with nine; and the Q brand of Cataluña with thirteen associated companies.

We also analysed the relative representativeness, that is, the relative significance of each of the brands in relation to the importance of regional agriculture. We have crossed the representativeness data of the brand with the dimension of the agri-food sector of each community, for which the final agricultural production of each of the regions has been taken as the input of the analysis. The most relevant brand in terms of products and associated companies is M Producto Certificado of the community of Madrid, which is followed by Tierra de Sabor of Castilla y León, Calidad Certificada of Cantabria, Alimentos de Extremadura, and RUP of the Canary Islands. In last place is Castilla-La Mancha, where there are practically no products labelled with the regional brand even if it is a territory where the agri-food sector has a prominent role.

Regarding the profile of the associated companies, the interviewees



confirmed that there is no fixed pattern but, in general, they are SMEs. They are mainly micro-companies because most of the agri-food business networks are highly fragmented, and it seems that these agents value this public quality brand more because of its contribution to the image and marketing. “Concentrate efforts to make generic promotion. It’s the vehicle we have for promotion,” said an interviewee. Another professional highlights: “We find small companies whose products, by carrying the label, feel fully supported by the regional government, which is what they want.” Finally, the ups and downs that the brands have experienced constitute significant data on how the brand is being managed and the interest it awakes among associates. In this sense, an interviewee points out: “The lawsuit is obviously not innocent: the lawsuit is bastard. People want it if they can make a profit out of it. We don’t give money to people for using the brand. What we do is that when we go around the world with the promotion, our promotion is Alimentos del Paraíso and there he goes”. Another interviewee points out along the same idea: “We have two facts that confirm that for the moment we are on the right track: first, we have not had any leave in these years. Second, we have increased in this legislature 100% of companies from all previous years”.



## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Regarding the aim of this study, to examine the category of regional quality public brands in the agri-food sector in Spain, the results allow researchers to conclude that these brands should consider some recommendations, to defend the territory, fight against rural depopulation and promote the agri-food sector.

Firstly, each regional government must consider the identity of the regional public brand as a differentiated element. Following the identity elements indicated in the literature review, the brand must be endowed with a singularity, the value proposition must be written, it is necessary to formulate simple, coherent and consistent differential associations over time, since not in all the cases analyzed have carried out these steps.

Quality appears as one of those associations that must be linked to the agri-food public brand to achieve differentiation in the market and, above all, attract the interest of consumers. After analyzing the results, we conclude that it is ineffective to promote differentiated quality -as indicated among the reasons for promoting these

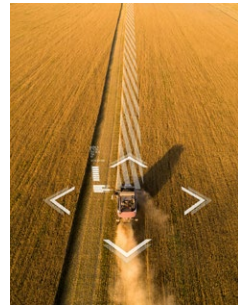
brands-, and that some requirements that ensure a significant appreciated quality by the consumer are not specified. At the same time, it's essential that the Administration establish control systems and ensure compliance with the established requirements to generate strong brands.

Moreover, emotional associations must be established that make the brand be loved. In this process, the name of the region constitutes an emotional attribute; it's a value that consumers take into account in their purchase decision (Martín & Cerviño, 2011). However, the agri-food quality public brands that exist in the autonomous regions of Spain face the difficulty that they are territorial quality marks that, due to European regulations, can't include the region in their name. Despite this regulation, many of these brands continue using the name of the region and it can be said that it has worked well in the case of some of them, such as Galicia Calidade. Therefore, the managers of these brands, in order to be loyal to the regulations, have the challenge of building their identity based on other elements such as the colours of the regional flag, or appeal to other emotional attributes to build a brand that supports and defends the territory.

Secondly, we can conclude that only those regions that have opted for the "single umbrella brand" model have built great brands. The regional public brand that follows this model becomes the star brand on which the rest of the quality brands in the autonomous region pivot, creating an inclusive brand that coexists with the rest of the quality brands. Therefore, our recommendation is to prioritize the "single umbrella brand" or "identity brand" model. In any case, the "product brand" model should be avoided because resources are limited, and they are not enough to build brand value. Hybrid models that create confusion should also be avoided.

Thirdly, it has been verified that these brands constitute an example of public-private collaboration. Entrepreneurs in the agri-food sector, which are the primary audience for this type of trademark, expect to obtain benefits from the use of these labels. These benefits can be image, commercials and others that the Administration can provide (aids, priority in commercial presence, among others). Therefore, the benefits must be defined and must be clear to achieve the adhesion of the producers to the public brand. Specifically, the Administration and companies must work hand to hand in this process, formulas must be found to jointly build the shared brand; it is all about cooperating so that the brand has meaning and is sustainable over time.

At last, it has been verified that only those regions that have a representative brand for the entire agri-food sector have become a strong brand. Thus, it has been seen that the size of the group

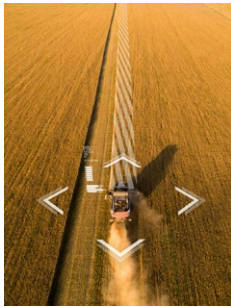




is key for the brand to be perceived as interesting for consumers and for the Administration to invest in it. It is a circle of brand value: businessmen adhere to the brand if they have a real interest in the benefits they obtain and if they see that the Administration supports the brand. Therefore, a sufficient critical mass must be reached for there to be a real interest in supporting it on the part of the Administration. At the same time, large groups can be more difficult to control, so it is important to avoid dispersion among group members and set clear criteria so that there is cohesion among group members in order to build a brand without contradictions.

In any case, for a quality public brand to be strong, it must be representative of the territorial reality. The pioneering agri-food regions in Spain, such as Andalucía or Cataluña, do not currently have a strong quality public brand. Other less representative regions in the agri-food sector, such as Madrid or the País Vasco, have achieved a unique brand and identified clear associations of differentiated quality food in their territory. This disconnection between agricultural production and the public brand image opens a reflection on whether regional governments have the responsibility of creating strong brands to promote their agri-food leadership.

Finally, we consider that this work allows us to define new studies related to public agri-food quality marks. Although the object of this study was to examine the identity of these brands in Spain and for this reason, those responsible for the public brands in each autonomous region were interviewed, it would be interesting to carry out studies on the perceptions of consumers towards these brands or to analyse the strategies of their promotion and communication. In any case, we consider that this work has practical implications for both professionals and academics.



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