

RAÍZ Y PÁRAMO DE GUZMÁN, SUCCESS THROUGH EFFORT AND CHANCE

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Raíz y Páramo de Guzmán is a family craft company located in Roa (Burgos). It is currently involved in manufacturing *Páramo de Guzmán* cheese and *Raíz de Guzmán* wine in addition to which it runs a small hotel-restaurant called *Raíz*, also offering wine tourism related activities. The firm employs thirteen people, each of whom lend their name to the different vats in the winery. The company was set up in 1985 when the cheese factory was opened, where cheeses were made following traditional and natural methods which require a minimum curing period of twelve months. Sales outside Spain commenced in 1990, the principal market being the USA. 1998 witnessed the opening of the winery in an effort to produce wines of the same high standards as the cheese. The firm embarked on e-commerce in 2005, focusing mainly on national sales. Finally, in 2008 the hotel-restaurant opened its doors.

The firm has always shown a clear desire to grow and over the years has been competing and it has gradually expanded. This has been reflected through its efforts to diversify and engage in new products development. Together with its early vacuum packed products, in the case of the cheese, product development include tinned cheeses in olive oil, in which it is a pioneer firm, as well as cheeses in glass containers. It has also added new and different variations such as grated cheese, and cheese wedges, to name but a few. The firm has also gradually developed its range of wine products. Through effort and dedication, the firm has not only won the hearts of its clients but has also gained recognition, reflected in a number of awards (the *1990 Tarro de Oro* at the *First National Cheese Competition in Spain* as well as the *1989 Gold Medal* at the *First Expoláctea International Cheese Contest*, and in the area of wines, the renowned *Tempranillo* and *Bacchus* awards, among others).

The summer of 2013 witnessed a substantial and rather surprising increase in orders for cheese through its online shop, first and foremost from the United States to be followed later by other countries. In line with its commitment to satisfy all its customers and despite its surprise, the company strive to meet all the orders whilst seeking to unravel the mystery surrounding the origin of such a sizeable jump in demand. The firm soon discover that this is due none other than to the recent publication in the USA of the book "*The Telling Room*", by the North American journalist Michael Paterniti who, deeply drawn by the *Páramo de Guzmán* cheese, had contacted the company in 2000 to discover more about how the cheese was made. Following up on his initial contact, he visited the cheese factory, learnt more about the process and decided to write a book. Leaving fiction aside, he tells the story of a cheese and with it of a family and a village: Guzmán. Over the course of three summers he rented a house in the village, spending the summer months there with his family, while finding out more about how the cheese was made as well as everything surrounding it.

The cheese develops into the focal point of the book "*The Telling Room*" ("La sala de contar"¹), which, after its publication, becomes a *best-seller* in less than three months. Between late July and early August, North American newspapers feature the book, with reviews, reports, and news appearing in the leading media (*The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* or *The Boston Globe*). One report by Steven Jenkins, the foremost master cheese-maker in the USA, appeared on 2 August 2013 in the *Wall Street*

¹ *Sala de contar* or *contador* was the name used by the locals when referring to the small wine-making rooms located in the hills where they would gather at the end of each day to relate the day's events, and which they also used as a store room. This was where wines and cheeses were stored and where the cheeses were kept while they cured.

Journal. In it, Jenkins says that the story is one abounding in values, prominent amongst which are sacrifice, endeavour, and the will to succeed, and he also reveals that such renowned figures as Frank Sinatra were keen consumers of the cheese. Páramo de Guzmán thus became the fashionable cheese in the USA and possibly in other countries as well, given the impact some of these media has around the world. Today, the company is striving to adapt to the situation which its new and fortuitous circumstances have brought about, and which have led to online sales rocketing by 70% at the end of 2013, with the USA as the main destination.

Information sources (accessed 12 November 2013):

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Images



² It can be seen in <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424127887324110404578625792974457754>