

# IS THE HEALTH INSPECTION AGAINST OR IN FAVOR OF RAW MILK? THE CASE OF CATALONIA

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Generalitat  
de Catalunya



INTERNATIONAL  
SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE  
ON RAW MILK



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## THE PROBLEM

The sanitary inspection in Catalonia does not have uniform criteria on the use of raw milk. This leads, in some cases, to the prohibition of making raw milk cheeses with the consequent damage to producers and consumers



Figure 1. Catalan raw milk cheeses with different ripening time

## THE CONTEXT

In Catalonia there are 172 companies registered in the dairy sector, of which 143 have less than 10 employees and 36 have none [1]. Of these 143 companies, 95 are small cheese factories. It is impossible to know how many cheeses these companies produce on the total of 32580 t of cheese produced in Catalonia in 2015 [2], assuming a similar production in 2018, cheese production in Catalonia represents 7 % of the production in Spain (465,000 t, [3]), that is, it is a very small sector.

Of the 95 cheese factories examined, 35 of them produce raw milk cheeses of less than 2 months of maturation, the majority of goat and lactic coagulation but also sheep and cow and mixed and/or enzymatic coagulation, in 14 more cheese factories are also made raw milk cheeses matured more than 2 months. Grossly estimating the production of raw milk cheese less than 2 months of maturation, this would be between 30 and 60 t, which represents between 0.1 and 0.2 % of the total cheese produced in Catalonia, that is, a quantitatively unimportant but very important qualitatively problem.

## PROBLEM APPROACH

At the end of 2015, a few cheese makers appealed to the technical and scientific community in Catalonia and created the "raw milk commission", formed by ten people to respond to the requirements of the health inspection and raise a complaint to the Public Health Agency of Catalonia (ASPC). Of the multiple risks indicated by the sanitary inspection, we have chosen 2 for this presentation:

1. Tuberculosis in sheep
2. Presence of *Listeria monocytogenes* in cheeses

### TUBERCULOSIS IN SHEEP

Excerpt from the letter that ASPC sent to ACREFA on 12/21/2016, in reference to the cheese factories: "In case of providing milk from exclusive sheep farms in Catalonia, because there is no plan inspection approved by the competent authority, cannot make cheese with raw milk".

Decision that ASPC should justify as no sanitation of tuberculosis in sheep is done in any country in Europe. After a meeting of the Raw Milk Commission with ASPC and the Department of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Food of the Generalitat de Catalunya and several exchanges of letters and emails, finally the General Directorate of Agriculture and Livestock sent the 4 May 2018 the "Inspection plan to guarantee the sanitary requirements of producers of raw sheep milk in relation to tuberculosis", that's starts solving the problem

### PRESENCE OF *Listeria monocytogenes* IN CHEESES

Between 01/01/2014 and 10/19/2016, ALLIC (Associació Lletera Interprofessional de Catalunya) analyzes the presence of *Listeria monocytogenes* in 1056 cheese samples of which 288 are raw milk with different ripening times, the result is the *L. monocytogenes* is present in 10 samples: 8 of fresh cheese and 2 of cheese of 1 month of maturation, all cases are of pasteurized milk. There are no known alerts for *Listeria monocytogenes* in raw milk cheeses in Catalonia.

Figure 2. The raw milk cheeses of Serrat Gros cheese factory have won the first prize of the Fira de Formatges Artesans del Pirineu contest on numerous occasions



## THE HIGH QUALITY OF RAW MILK CATALAN CHEESES

Hygienically healthy cheeses are the basis, in general, of high quality sensory cheeses. Catalan raw milk cheeses have won numerous awards demonstrating their organoleptic quality in addition to hygienic-sanitary. The main competitions held in Catalonia are:

"Formatges Artesans del Pirineu" in which cheeses from the Basque Country, Navarra, Aragón, France and Catalonia compete, in the last 5 editions (2013 to 2018) Catalan raw milk cheeses have won 63 of the 84 possible prizes, distributed in 13 cheese factories, in the categories with the highest health risk.

In Lactium, only cheeses from Catalonia participate, in the last 3 editions (2017-2019), of the 21 possible prizes they have obtained 13, distributed in 8 different cheese factories.

## CONCLUSION

The hygienic and sensory quality of Catalan raw milk cheeses made with responsibility of the cheese makers and the willingness to collaborate with the administration is demonstrated. A minimum training program is required to be able to practice as a cheese maker due to the responsibility that entails

## References

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