

**A critical perspective on the current paradigm of high-quality products marketing strategy**

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The Spanish long sheep farming tradition is reflected in the large variety of native breeds, production systems and products which coexist nowadays. However, despite its historic and cultural importance, the Spanish sheep sector has suffered an almost two-decade long crisis. This crisis caused a drop of sheep numbers and a decrease of meat consumption from 2.7 kg per capita (2006) to 1.7 kg (in 2014). Conversely, cheese production has increased slowly but steadily during the last decade. These trends respond to changes in consumption habits and in consumers preferences which are influenced by urban lifestyles. One of the current paradigms to overcome this crisis is by creating breed-product specific labels and link them with high-quality and environmental and cultural values. This way, labelled products would increase profitability either by increasing the market share of the product or by entering into added-value markets. As part of iSAGE H2020 EU project, four consumers' focus groups, of 10-12 participants each, were conducted in Madrid. These focus groups explored urban consumers' awareness, attitudes and preferences towards meat and dairy sheep products to understand how to develop new marketing strategies for the sector. Focus group showed that despite their high consumption of cheese, participants lacked knowledge on cheese products, sometimes not even knowing whether they are purchasing cow, sheep or goat cheese. They also showed a wide lack of knowledge about of sheep meat products and sheep production systems. Participants also perceived environmental and animal welfare issues as important, however acknowledged that price continue to be the main driver of sheep products consumption. We argue the paradigmatic strategy explained above might not be directed toward the most common consumer type but to a less frequent consumer profile, and therefore oriented towards the development of niche market and not towards mainstream markets. We conclude that the paradigm explained above should be followed with care as its success depends on the consideration of some critical issues. These issues will be analysed and discussed during the presentation.

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