

Conference/Lectures SPEAKERS

16th European Farmhouse and Artisan Cheese & Dairy Meeting 2026



Malen Sarasua

Head of ESNEKI Dairy Centre

Session 1: The role of ESNEKI as a reference dairy center for the artisan dairy sector.

Malen Sarasua leads the Dairy Centre ESNEKI, where she works in applied research, technical support, and knowledge transfer for artisan and small-scale dairies. She is a food scientist specialising in the development of artisan cheeses, with a strong focus on innovation in the dairy sector.

Her work combines scientific expertise with hands-on experience, spanning both traditional practices and innovative approaches. It focuses on the production of milk suitable for cheesemaking from a dairy technology perspective, as well as on the development of innovative, value-added dairy products and differentiation through affinage. She places particular emphasis on dairy biodiversity and product identity.

She has further strengthened her expertise through advanced training in cheese maturation in France and regularly contributes as a speaker, trainer, and judge at national and international cheese events.



Ana Arroyo

Laboratorios Arroyo

Session 2: Types of rennet and starter cultures used in artisan cheesemaking. Current trends

Ana Arroyo Fernández holds a degree in Economic Law from the University of Deusto and works as a practising lawyer. She is also a cheese competition judge, Director of the Institute of Agricultural Studies of Cantabria, and a member of the Cantabrian Academy of Gastronomy.

She is the managing director of the companies Suministros Químicos Arroyo and Cuajos Caporal, specialising in equipment, ingredients, analytical services, and training for cheesemakers, as well as in the production of lamb and kid rennet extract.

She delivers training in legal aspects and dairy business management, new product development, labelling, and related areas. She also gives lectures on a range of topics linked to the dairy sector and is responsible for the organisation of training programmes and cheesemaking courses.



Maria Arroyo

Laboratorios Arroyo

María Arroyo Cerro studied Biological Sciences at the University of Oviedo, a degree that provided her with far more than academic knowledge, equipping her with the tools to explore and understand the natural world. Upon returning to Santander, she continued her training at the University of Cantabria, where she completed two master's degrees: one in Recombinant DNA Biotechnology and another in Dairy Technology.

The professional opportunity that shaped her career (and influenced other aspects of her life) came from someone especially significant to her: Manuel Arroyo, known as Don Manuel in the workplace and as her uncle in her private life. Over the years within the company he founded, she has taken on a wide range of roles, including teaching, analysis, and consultancy. Above all, she has sought to honour his legacy, fostering a deep respect for the craft of cheesemaking and a firm conviction that artisan production is her true calling.



Ph.D. Igor Baroja

Head of Molecular Biology at
ESNEKI dairy center

Session 3: Practical application of metagenomic techniques to adjust cheesemaking and ripening processes, as well as to ensure the safety of dairy products

Igor Baroja is the Head of the Biotechnology Laboratory and a researcher at the ESNEKI dairy centre. His work focuses on the study of food-associated microbiomes, with a particular emphasis on fermented products.

During his PhD, he conducted a study on the microbiome of Txakoli wine, which laid the foundation for his research trajectory in microbial ecology of fermented foods. Since 2022, his research has been centered on cheese microbiota at ESNEKI, combining molecular biology and DNA-based techniques—such as PCR, whole-genome sequencing, and metagenomics—with bioinformatics approaches to characterize microbial diversity, function, and dynamics in dairy ecosystems.



Jon and Martina

Garoa dairy

Session 4: Shepherding as a traditional practice of the Basque Country's cheesemaking sector and its connection to our semi-hard sheep's cheese

Jon Arregi and **Martina Urbistondo** shepherds and cheesemakers behind Garoa Dairy, a pastoral cheese project based at their farm in Zerain, in the Goierri area of Gipuzkoa. They manage their own flock of the local Latxa sheep breed and oversee the entire process, from grazing and milking to cheesemaking.

Their work follows a seasonal cycle, producing mainly PDO Idiazabal cheese along with some blue cheese in winter in Zerain, before moving with the flock to the Aralar mountains in spring and summer. There, they produce Mendiko Gazta, a raw milk mountain cheese made from freshly milked milk. Their approach is deeply rooted in traditional pastoral practices, seasonal rhythms, and minimal technological intervention.

They are members of **Artzai Gazta**, the association of shepherds producing artisan sheep's milk cheese in the Basque Country and Navarre.



Aitor and Sarah

LA LLELDIRIA dairy

Session 5: Presentation of a success story showing how rural areas can be revitalized through cheesemaking models that combine tradition and modernity

Aitor Lobato and **Sarah Hart** are the founders of La Lleldiria, an artisan cheesemaking and fermentation project based in the Valles Pasiegos, Cantabria. They collaborate closely with local livestock farmers, producing cheeses made from nearby milk and strongly linked to origin, landscape and people.

Founded in 2022, following experiences in both Spain and the United States, La Lleldiria reflects their commitment to rural revitalisation, traditional practices, and contemporary approaches to artisan cheesemaking. Their work highlights the connection between fermentation, territory, and local farming communities.

They are members of **QueRed**, a national association that brings together artisan and farmhouse cheesemakers across Spain.



Iker Izeta

ELKANO 1 - GAZTAGUNE
dairy

Session 6: Innovative cheeses made from Latxa sheep's milk

Iker Izeta is an artisan cheesemaker and owner of Elkano 1-Gaztagune, located in the small village of Aia (Gipuzkoa), in a mountainous setting overlooking the sea. There, he works with milk from Latxa sheep, supplied by a local cooperative of shepherds, to craft a distinctive range of cheeses that highlight both the qualities of the raw material and his innovative approach.

In addition to his production activity, he complements his work through direct sales at his specialised cheese shop, also named Elkano 1-Gaztagune, located in the centre of San Sebastián. The shop offers both his own products and a carefully curated selection of cheeses from other artisan producers.

Together with his team, he is committed to diversifying the local cheese offering, combining tradition with innovation and contributing to the promotion and development of artisan cheesemaking in the region. He is a member of **Euskal Esnekigileen Elkartea** and **QueRed**.



Alicia Gonzalez

MORAITA dairy

Session 7: Diversification of goat's milk cheeses and its impact on local tourism and gastronomy

Alicia González is an artisan cheesemaker and founder of Quesería MORAITA dairy, located in La Guardia, in Rioja Alavesa. She works exclusively with milk from her family herd of Malagueña goats, ensuring full control over the quality and traceability of the raw material.

At her dairy, situated in the historic centre of the village, she produces a range of cheeses, including fresh, soft, and semi-hard varieties, combining traditional methods with a focus on diversification through product innovation. Through her work, she contributes to the local gastronomic and cultural offering, reinforcing the area's appeal to visitors within a renowned wine-producing and tourism-oriented region.

She is also committed to quality certification, producing cheeses under the Eusko Label scheme, which guarantees the origin and quality of Basque agri-food products.

She is a member of **Auntzai Elkartea**, **QueRed**, and **Euskal Esnekigileen Elkartea**.



For these sessions, simultaneous translation will be available through a dedicated device provided to participants. Languages available: basque, spanish and english.