Basque dairy: tradition inspiring innovation

FACE NETWORK 2026

esneki zentroa Leartiker

MARKINA - XEMEIN

1. SAIOA

“Esneki Zentroa: the reference centre for the artisan dairy sector”



Malen Sarasua

FACENetwork2026 · Urriak 19-21 · Markina-Xemein

01

Thanks



Rovijn, 2025

FACEnetwork, thanks!!!



Markina-Xemein, 2026



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02

“Basque dairy: Tradition Inspiring Innovation”

“Basque dairy: Tradition Inspiring Innovation”



Basque Cheesemaking Tradition

- **Centuries-old heritage rooted in shepherding and livestock farming**, closely linked to mountain-based production systems and the local territory.
- **The value of native breeds**, such as the Latxa sheep, the Pyrenean goat, and local cattle breeds, which provide the foundation for high-quality milk.
- **An expression of the territory**, where the influence of pastures, climate, and biodiversity is reflected in the cheeses’ organoleptic characteristics.
- **Cheesemaking knowledge passed down through generations**, preserving artisanal techniques and local expertise.
- **Cheeses with a distinctive identity**, ranging from iconic varieties such as Idiazabal to a diverse selection of high-quality artisan cheeses made from cow's and goat's milk.

“Basque dairy: Tradition Inspiring Innovation”



Basque Cheesemaking Tradition

“This tradition is not merely a cultural heritage: it is the starting point for today’s scientific, technological, and productive innovation.”

“Basque dairy: Tradition Inspiring Innovation”



Innovation in Basque Cheesemaking

- Product diversification
- Improved quality and professionalization
- Integration of research and scientific knowledge
- First steps towards digitalization
- Commitment to sustainability
- Strengthening collaborative networks
- Internationalization and recognition

“Basque dairy: Tradition Inspiring Innovation”



Innovation in Basque Cheesemaking

““Over the last decade, Basque cheesemaking has built on its rich tradition to integrate innovation, scientific knowledge, and sustainability, addressing future challenges while preserving its unique identity.”

ESNEKI Dairy Centre has been a key partner throughout this entire journey.

03

The Basque Dairy and Cheesemaking Sector: Key Facts

The Basque Dairy and Cheesemaking Sector: Key Facts

- **Around 150 cheesemakers in the Basque Country**
- **Family-based and artisanal model:** 95% are micro-enterprises (1–9 employees)
- **85% keep their own livestock**
- **Milk production by species:** 65% cow, 29% sheep, 6% goat
- **Annual dairy production:** approximately 2,250 tonnes
- **Annual cheese production:** approximately 1,500 tonnes
- **42% of all cheese produced is Idiazabal cheese**
- **A sector closely linked to rural areas, Basque culture, and gastronomy**
- **Cheese consumption in the Basque Country:** 8–10 kg per person per year
- **More than 90% of the cheese consumed in the Basque Country is imported from outside the region**, representing a major opportunity for innovation and growth for local cheesemaking.

04

Sector Organization

Sector Organization: Associations

ARTZAI GAZTA ELKARTEA

Productores lácteos de Euskadi · Euskal Esnekigileak · E

AHUNTZAI

Sector Organization: Quality Labels



EUSKAL GAZTAK
Gure esnearekin eginak
Elaborados con nuestra leche

EUSKO LABEL

Euskal Esnea
Leche del Pais Vasco

But above all... diversity is our strength!









05

ESNEKI Dairy Centre

Who are we?

Leartiker
MEMBER OF BASQUE RESEARCH & TECHNOLOGY ALLIANCE

esneki zentroa Leartiker

Zientzia, Teknologia eta Berrikuntzaren Euskal Sareko eragileen Erregistroa

Registro de agentes de la Red Vasca de Ciencia,Tecnología e Innovación

BRTA
BASQUE RESEARCH & TECHNOLOGY ALLIANCE

ESNEKI Dairy Centre in Number (2016-2026)

- **106 innovation projects** completed
- **69 product development projects** (**65%** of all projects)
- **171 new products** developed
- **132 products successfully launched on the market** (**77% commercialization rate**)
- **A specialized team of 9 professionals** today (up from **1.5 staff members in 2015**)
- **Experience working with clients and partners** across the Basque Country, Spain, and internationally
- **More than 10 years of experience** in dairy and cheesemaking innovation

Key Achievements

- **Establishing a leading specialized innovation hub** for the Basque dairy and cheesemaking sector.
- **Development of a wide range of new cheese varieties.**
- **Diversification of fresh dairy products:** yogurts, kefir, ice cream, butter, whey-based drinks, curds, and desserts.
- **Active participation in strategic European networks** (FACE Network, QUERED, MONS Formation, IDF-FIL, etc.).
- **Leadership and participation in international research projects** (Interreg POCTEFA, Interreg SUDOE, etc.).
- **Development projects in South America.**
- **One patent and six industrial secrets** developed and protected.
- **Promotion of both fundamental and applied research** related to artisan cheesemaking.
- **Provision of training, advisory services, and technology transfer** to the artisan cheesemaking sector.
- **Promotion of the Esneki Championship (Esneki Txapelketa)** since 2022.

“Over the past 10 years, Esneki Zentroa has supported the development of more than 170 new products, driving innovation, diversification, and professionalization across the Basque dairy sector.”

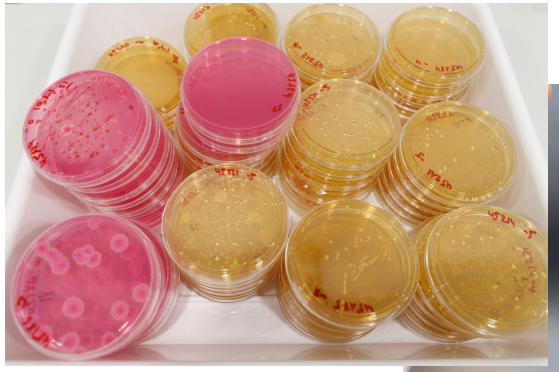
06

R&D&i Projects

Research, Development and Innovation

Microbiological and physicochemical quality of milk

Technological suitability for cheesemaking









- MILKSUIT
- ESNEKAL
- DAIRITAL
- HETEGAZ
- ESNEA2
- PROTEBAL
- EMALIN
- KALIKOLZA
- NUTFOOD

Safety in Milk and Cheesemaking



- SHIGA
- CRISPR25
- ELAMINA
- EZtaphTOX
- GAZTANOLA
- SEGAZ
- TECAM

Cheesemaking technology









- HETEGAZ
- MILKSUIT
- DAIRITAL
- BEHITEK
- ONDTEK
- KNOW N CHEESE
- PRO20
- GAZTAKAL
- BLUECARE
- EGOT
- EUSKAL GAZTAK
- SMARTFOOLD
- INNOTRANSLACT
- GAXURE

Ripening



CAFIQUE

kide

Development of Innovative Products in Collaboration with Cheesemakers

Development and Innovation (D&I)

Development of Innovative Products in Collaboration with Cheesemakers


>70 PROIEKTU
>170 PRODUKTU

07

Future Challenges

“Building on tradition, ESNEKI Dairy Centre main challenge is to help shape the future of the Basque dairy sector through knowledge, innovation, and collaboration.”



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Farmhouse and Artisan Cheese & Dairy Producers European Network

UDALA MARKINA XEMEIN

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EUSKO JAURLARITZA GOBIERNO VASCO

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