



CEO of 'Garcia Baquero' cheese manufacturer, Miguel Angel Garcia Baquero checks Manchego cheeses in the company's factory of Alcazar de San Juan. — AFP photos



Manchego cheeses in production at 'Garcia Baquero' cheese manufacturer's factory in Alcazar de San Juan.



An employee of 'Garcia Baquero' cheese manufacturer works at the production line of the company's factory in Alcazar de San Juan.

SPANISH CHEESEMAKERS DEFEND MANCHEGO FROM MEXICAN 'COPY'

In central Spain, the arid plains of La Mancha are famous for their windmills and Manchego, a cheese made out of ewe's milk that is one of the best-known representatives of the country's gastronomy. But local producers there are furious with Mexico which they accuse of "crude plagiarism" of their cheese, an issue so touchy it has become a point of discord in drawn-out talks for a new trade deal between the EU and the Latin American country.

"We have to defend our Manchego tooth and nail," says Francisco Tejado, walking through the factory of Spain's biggest cheese producer, Garcia Baquero, in the small town of Alcazar de San Juan, some 150 kilometers (90 miles) south of Madrid. Tejado, in charge of the ripening stage of the cheese-making process, says he comes to the plant every day to "watch, touch, pamper these cheeses, these living foods" that are maturing in air-conditioned rooms.

Two different cheeses

Manchego is an EU Protected Designation of Origin (AOC) product, which is respected within the bloc but not always further afield. And in Mexico, in particular, manufacturers have used the names of several "European cheeses, including Manchego, to reap profit from crude plagiarism", complains Santiago Altares, head of the group that gives out AOC labels to Manchego producers.

The original and the copy, he stresses, are completely different. "The Mexican Manchego is made from cow's milk within seven days, and the authentic Manchego with the milk of ewes of 'Manchega' race, is ripened for at least a month."

Such is the controversy over the matter that it has been one of the issues in talks aimed at sealing a new version of an 18-year-old trade deal between the EU and Mexico. The Europeans want exclusive right to the "Manchego" name, along with other products. But that is a problem for cheese producers in Latin America's second-largest economy, where Mexican Manchego represents nearly 15 percent of total cheese sales. So the National Chamber of Dairy Industries in Mexico has said it will continue using Manchego as a name, which it says is "generic".

Struggling region

Under the portrait of his late father Hersilio who ventured into producing Manchego in 1962, the head of Garcia Baquero tries to be conciliatory, saying the conflict "is one of the small elements of friction that mark the globalization process". "But for us, this protection of Manchego as an AOC product is of utmost importance in a semi-arid, austere, under-populated region," says Miguel Angel Garcia Baquero. "We can't lose the little we have." The birthplace of Spain's celebrated film director



An employee of 'Garcia Baquero' cheese manufacturer works at the production line of the company's factory in Alcazar de San Juan.

Pedro Almodovar, La Mancha is known first and foremost for being the scene of the adventures of Don Quixote, the delusional wanna-be knight who stars in Miguel de Cervantes' 1605 novel, in which he eats a lot of cheese.

The Manchego AOC label even includes the silhouette of the wandering knight. More than 700 Spanish farmers and 65 producers depend on the cheese for their livelihood. Every year, more than 15,000 tons of Manchego are produced — 60 percent of which is exported. But

"when the \$7 Mexican cheese and Spain's \$14 Manchego hit the American market, the consumer buys the cheapest", says Altares, denouncing "unfair competition".

Export to Turkmenistan

In the town of La Solana, round cheese blocs weighing one, two or three kilos bathe in vats of salt water belonging to the La Caseta family business. "Our Manchego is 'artisanal' because it is made from unpasteurized milk" in machines, says the owner, Paqui Diaz Pintado Borja, 55. With its 10 employees, La Caseta is a small structure that exports its cheese to Germany, Britain and even Turkmenistan. In the afternoon, seven workers are busy milking the 1,500 "Manchega" ewes of their farm.

"They have less wool than the others, no horns, but provide a better quality milk, rich in protein," says one of Paqui's sons, Antonio Araque. In the name of all such producers, Altares wants a ban on using the name Manchego in Mexico. "But it's going to be complicated because there are many interests at play in give-and-take negotiations" between the EU and Mexico, he says. — AFP

A movie a day for 60 years: Cinema sustains a Berlin love

It's a love that was born in a cinema in 1950s Cold War Berlin and that has been nourished for over six decades by taking in at least a movie a day together. At this week's Berlin film festival, Erika and Ulrich Gregor, now in their 80s, are absolute fixtures. Year after year, they can be spotted gingerly making their way, arm in arm, from theatre to theatre to catch as many screenings each day as they can. "We've watched thousands and thousands of films together," Ulrich, 85, told AFP in an interview at the Arsenal cinema they helped found. "We're curious and we want to be on the cutting edge, so to speak. So we watch five movies a day (at a festival), sometimes even six. And when we're not watching movies, we're talking about them."

It's that kind of shared passion that the Gregors say has kept their relationship thriving after nearly 60 years of marriage. The pair met as students at West Berlin's Free University in 1957, when Ulrich was hosting a film evening. "It was 'People on Sunday', a 1930 German silent film, "and there was one woman who had very strong views," he said. "Everybody loved the movie but I thought it was sexist and said so," recalled Erika, 83. "There was a stormy debate but I wouldn't back down. When it was over I walked out and the moderator (Ulrich) ran after me and said 'Please come next time' and

promised to show a film that was more humanistic. And he did, it was terrific."

'Polish films and vodka'

She was immediately taken with Ulrich, who stands two heads taller than his petite wife. "I thought he was the cleverest of all of them. And I think cleverness is something wonderful," Erika said, adding: "Especially for men, who in general are not very smart." She ended up joining the film club's board. Ulrich returned from the Cannes festival one year raving about Polish directors such as Andrzej Wajda and Andrzej Munk. Erika suggested they start showcasing cinema from behind the Iron Curtain a controversial move with capitalist West Berlin on the front lines of geopolitical tensions.

"We hopped on a Vespa and rode to the Polish military mission in East Berlin and rang the bell," she said. "We said 'hello, we're students and we'd like to show some Polish films'. They were quite surprised and offered us vodka. But they finally agreed and said we could come back and pick up the films." Ulrich said that because of "strong anti-communist prejudices" they had to fight hostile administrators to show Eastern European films, but Erika's more impulsive style and his diplomatic skills "complement each other in a really special way".

"Together no one can beat us because we're always stronger."

Eventually, children came too

The Gregors married in 1960 — a year before the Berlin Wall went up—and soon started a family. But it didn't stop their nearly obsessive moviegoing.

"It wasn't easy because we had two children. We were lucky because they could have hated the cinema—it took their parents away from them. But the kids got used to it and we raised them that way," he said. "It was a different time, when I see how mothers parent today," Erika said. "When I needed to go to the cinema I told them 'I trust you so be good and Mama will be home again in a few hours'. Eventually we started taking them with us to the movies." That meant bringing the children to film festivals as well: Venice, Locarno, Moscow and the biggest of all, Cannes, which they still attend every year.

'What's love?'

The Gregors collaborated on writing about film history in books and articles, founded an arthouse cinema and ran a section of the Berlin film festival showcasing avant-garde movies that is still going strong. They were early champions of filmmakers such as Wong Kar-wai, Theo Angelopoulos, Aki Kaurismaki and Belgium's two-time Cannes winners Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne. "Everything we did ended up being a shared project—you couldn't draw a dividing line between my work and hers," Ulrich said. For all their love of cinema—and each other—both say that it's a difficult emotion to capture on film. "What's love? It's respect, it's affection, it's trust."

But the love stories we love on screen are all tragic," Erika said, citing Michael Haneke's "Amour", "The Cry" by Michelangelo Antonioni and Yasujiro Ozu's "Tokyo Story" among their favorites. Ulrich said as much as they both enjoy a satisfying ending, there's still nothing quite like the promise held in the start of a film. "When the cinema goes dark and an image appears, it's a primal feeling that never fades. You're electrified every time." — AFP



German married couple Erika and Ulrich Gregor pose in the lobby of a movie theatre in Berlin. — AFP photos



German married couple Erika and Ulrich Gregor pose at a movie theatre in Berlin. — AFP photos

Watson gives £1m to UK women's justice fund ahead of Baftas



Emma Watson

Actress and activist Emma Watson has donated £1 million to kickstart a new British fund to help women facing harassment and abuse at work, launched ahead of Sunday's Baftas and backed by hundreds of female entertainment stars. The justice and equality fund was announced in an open letter supporting the US Time's Up movement, signed by around 200 women, including actresses Kate Winslet, Emma Thompson, Kristin Scott Thomas, Keira Knightley and Saoirse Ronan.

The letter is addressed to "dear sisters"—as was a similar missive signed by Hollywood stars last month—and calls for an international movement to stamp out a culture of abuse exposed by the Harvey Weinstein scandal. The fundraising page for the new fund shows Watson, who won fame in the Harry Potter films and is now a UN Women goodwill ambassador, made the opening £1 million (1.13 million euros, \$1.4 million) donation. Knightley and British actor Tom Hiddleston have both given £10,000 to the fund, which will be used to set up a network of advice, support and advocacy projects to tackle abuse across all sectors of work.

It follows a legal aid fund set up by A-list stars in the United States to help both women and men abused at work. "In the very near past, we lived in a world where sexual harassment was an uncomfortable joke; an unavoidable, awkward part of being a girl or a woman," the letter published in The Observer newspaper says. "In 2018, we seem to have woken up in a world ripe for change. If we truly embrace this moment, a line in the sand will turn to stone." — AFP