

## Reseña

**Lourenzo Fernández Prieto y Daniel Lanero Táboas (eds.).  
Leche y lecheras en el siglo XX. De la fusión innovadora  
orgánica a la revolución verde. Zaragoza, Prensas de la  
Universidad de Zaragoza, 2019, 286 pp.  
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Galicia is one of the European Union's top ten milk-producing regions. Since the withdrawal of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) milk quotas in 2015 its producers have been suffering from fluctuating milk prices below the Spanish and European average and rising relative prices for commercial feed (López Iglesias/Vadês Paços, ch. 7, pp. 221, 233-241). Reasons for this specific crisis may be found in an agro-industrial model that separated animal husbandry from the land and thus abandoned traditional local-input based mixed farming (Soto Fernández, ch. 6, pp. 195, 199-213) and/or lack of demand from a local processing industry, and hence large raw milk exports to the rest of Spain (López Iglesias and Vadês Paços, ch.7, pp. 241-245). While the second issue has deep historical roots, the current agribusiness model lies in the rather late modernization of Galician agriculture from the 1960s. Until then, a Galician dairy sector as such did not exist. There certainly were cows, but even breed improvement initiatives aimed to create dual to triple purpose cows (milk, beef, work), almost by design unlikely to bring about a specialized dairy industry. Most milk was consumed locally and unprocessed, and demand from the small Galician cities was not particularly dynamic (Martínez López, ch. 2, pp. 84-85, Conde Gómez and Fernández Prieto, ch. 3, p. 110). Incomes were low and milk products not central to the prevailing diet (*ibid.*, p. 98). The quality of milk was questionable due to diseased animals (bovine tuberculosis, *ibid.*, p. 110-111) and milk adulteration (in 1911, the new municipal laboratory in Ourense found 75% of milk samples to be pre-skimmed or watered down, Simón Lorda and Rúa Domínguez, ch. 1, p. 45). Given the absence of local entrepreneurship and investments into milk processing, live cattle exports were the main external link for Galician animal husbandry, first via Portugal to England, and after the 1880s via new railways to the rest of Spain. Export success was frustrated by sanitary regulations abroad and Spanish grain tariffs that increased the cost of feed (Martínez López, ch. 2, pp. 67-72, 81-82). Contemporaries discussed whether beef or grain should be produced, but apparently, there was little interest in fomenting milk production or its processing into longer living tradeables (*ibid.*, p. 72), inaugurating the lack of a local processing industry. Even in beef processing, municipalities seem to have been more entrepreneurial (and more inefficient) than the private sector, as the proliferation of municipal slaughterhouse projects in the 1920s shows (*ibid.*, pp. 83-90). Lack of private entrepreneurial initiative then became an apparent characteristic of animal husbandry: All initiatives

to improve the production of or raise demand for milk explored in the reviewed volume were designed from above. Before the Civil War, they depended on isolated initiatives of individual physicians, veterinarians and agronomists (Simón Lorda and Rúa Domínguez, ch. 1; Otero Rodríguez, ch. 4, pp. 121-126), and after 1939 on institutions like the Junta Coordinadora de Mejora Ganadera or the Cámaras Oficiales Sindicales de Agricultores. Their technicians, for example, attempted to introduce (with little success) multi-purpose South Devon cows to Galicia (*ibid.*, 133-135). They were more successful with Dutch Frisian dairy cows, although even the process of "Frisonification" seems to have been quite slow: Between 1960 and 1975, the share of Frisian cows rose from 6 to 23%, mirroring the slowly declining share of traditional Galician mixed-use breeds (80 to 60%, *ibid.*, 135-145). The real rise of Galician dairying therefore took place between the 1970s and 2000s.

This short and evidently partial summary illustrates the wealth of insights into milk production in Galicia in *Leche y lecheras en el siglo xx*. Although slightly more limited than the "evidently partial" "exploration to the history of the milk production in Europe" promised by Fernández Prieto and Lanero Táboas in the introduction (p. 9), the focus on Galicia is a strength, not a weakness of this collective volume. We also learn about Galician agriculture beyond dairying: In his material flow analysis, Soto Fernández (ch. 6) gives at least equal space to forestry and meat (mainly chicken) production as protagonists of Galician trade-oriented specialization since 1972. Lanero Táboas' chapter 5 provides as nice contrast to the Galician experience a study of the Beira Litoral in Portugal. There, the growth of Lisbon, a number of considerable private enterprises and a largely non-corporatist cooperative movement apparently exhibited the kind of entrepreneurship or, at least, farmer agency that was missing in the government-driven, low value-added Galician experience outlined above. Also, Nordéus' (ch. 9) contribution on the prohibition of antibiotic growth enhancers in Sweden (mainly for meat, not milk production) provides a nice contrast by exploring how in state-administered Swedish agriculture interest groups and trade associations shaped policy.

Whether the role of producer agency in the chapters on Sweden and Portugal, in contrast to the chapters on Galicia, is a consequence of Galician technocratic top-down development or of a focus by historians on administrative sources is somewhat to judge. It might, nevertheless, be fruitful to explore the reaction, agency and potential resistance by producers to political and structural forces more in detail, and the volume provides valuable starting points: How did Galician farmers receive the improvement initiatives, and why did Frisian, but not South Devon cows, enter their herds? How were the pros and cons of the considerable investments and reorganization required by more feed-intensive breeds that started the path

to import dependency discussed when implemented? (cf Otero Rodríguez, ch. 4, pp. 139-413; Soto Fernández, ch. 6, pp. 207-210). What was the role of associations such as catholic syndicates or traditional *mutuas pecuarias* in the (apparently not very effective) modernization attempts before the Civil War? (cf. Martínez López, ch. 2, pp. 69, 83). At the other end of the story, how was the business model of buying up CAP milk quotas developed and diffused among farmers? (López Iglesias and Vadês Paços, ch, 7, p. 229-230). How did COREN emerge as a large meat-processing cooperative (cf. Soto Fernández, ch. 6, p. 202-203), apparently without a dairy equivalent? (López Iglesias and Vadês Paços, ch, 7, p. 245). Repeatedly, the establishment of Centrales Lecheras in 1952 to treat milk professionally is mentioned (Conde Gómez and Fernández Prieto, ch. 3, p. 112, Otero Rodríguez, ch. 4, p. 129). Why did they not become the basis of a strong processing industry?

While some of these questions will have been answered long ago in the sizeable existing literature, the collective volume discussed here tellingly illustrates how even through dramatic breaks long-run continuities emerge. It also adds an important, in many dimensions contrasting experience to the Northwestern-Europe centered literature, where dairying evolved earlier and under much different circumstances. Differences across experiences motivated the majority of the questions formulated above and shed new light on existing accounts for traditional dairy regions. This is no small achievement.

Markus Lampe  
Vienna University of Economics and Business

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