



Javier Suárez
Alonso

FINE ART

From small beginnings to a multinational dairy company producing traditional and innovative award-winning cheeses, Reny Picot's journey is anything but ordinary, and a sizable wedge of the company's recent success is down to Javier Suárez Alonso.

JAVIER SUÁREZ ALONSO

GM, CEO of Spanish Plants @ Reny Picot

Sixty years ago in the parish of Anleo in northern Spain, a group of villagers tried their hand at producing French cheese. On their first day they churned out 15 kg of camembert from 125 litres of milk, and the Reny Picot company was born. Back then, Spain's dairy market was fairly undeveloped so the group's humble offering still made a splash, and it wasn't long before its President Francisco Rodriguez and his son Juan Manuel set their sights higher. Just a year later Reny Picot was producing several types of cheese and quickly became a big hitter in the industry. Today, it's a multinational dairy company headquartered in Madrid creating renowned soft, semi-soft, and hard cheeses, as well as infant formulas, UHT products, and butter, among other things.

Overseeing this huge operation is General Manager and CEO of Spanish Plants Javier Suárez Alonso, who joined the company in 2011. Before taking on his new senior roles he was COO for eight years. The Spaniard's background in the automotive and technology industries working for the likes of Peugeot has proven to be useful in his role overseeing Reny Picot's production, as he's pushed the company to adopt new manufacturing processes to

boost output and quality. "I'm all about efficiency, efficiency, efficiency," he says. "Making cheese is a fine art and our global operations are working around the clock, so we need to make sure all processes are running perfectly."

Traceability and going green

With an annual turnover of €700 million (€200 million export) and 1,700 employees, business is good for Reny Picot. The company has a strong presence in Europe with factories in Asturias, Zamora, and Madrid, and several sales offices covering distribution across Spain. It has also set up a plant in France specialising in traditional goat's cheese and another in Poland dedicated to the production of cheddar and demineralised whey powder. America and Asia are huge markets: it has one plant in the Mexican state of Chihuahua and another in Michigan in the US, where Reny Picot makes soft ripened and semi-soft cheeses. Its commercial footprint is also growing in China as it strives to meet the demand for milk powder and infant formula. Javier has been instrumental in ensuring product traceability through the use of blockchain, while green energy is used where possible. →



Reny Picot's factory complex in Anleo, northern Spain

With six decades of cheesemaking experience, Reny Picot's products range from the artisan to the innovative. Its cheeses are so good that they're often showered with prizes at competitions all over the world. Take its zamorano, for example, which has been granted *Denominación de Origen* under European Union law, and the

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goat's milk varieties handcrafted in the French Dordogne. Then there's Reny Picot's camembert, the cheese that started it all, and its much-loved brie.

In 1982, the company launched its first venture outside of Spain by opening a factory in Mexico. The common language and cultural affinity that unites the two countries were major reasons for going transatlantic, while the opportunity to make use of the excess whey produced by Chihuahua's cheese industry was too good to turn down. Eighteen years later and the company's Mexico plant is the sole producer of demineralised whey in the country, which it exports to Europe and Asia. The *Industrias Lácteas Chihuahuenses*, as the factory is called, also makes milk powder.

Across the pond

Following this success, it was a no brainer to head north and cross the border into the United States. Then, in 1988, Reny Picot bought the Old Europe Cheese Inc. in Michigan, which was pumping out varieties including edam, gouda, and fontina. To date, its factories in the US and Zamora have scooped more than 100 accolades for their delicious cheeses.



On top of making sure Reny Picot's cheeses are a cut above the rest, Javier is spearheading the company's drive to automate its production processes to help cope with the huge demand. "Before, the company was focused on competing with other companies' factories to produce the best product, but now it's all about creating the most efficient supply chains," he says. To do this, strong relationships with suppliers have been built over the years. "We work with 920 farmers and 215 suppliers, so 1,135 in total!" Javier adds. "On average, the contracts we sign with our suppliers last nine to 10 years, ensuring long and prosperous relationships for everyone involved. The minimum length of contract Reny Picot is willing to consider is no less than five years, so we have time to build trust with the people we work with."

Reny Picot touched down in Asia for the first time in 1995. The market for infant formula – both powder and liquid – is massive in countries like China, where the company is thriving. Javier explains that taking advantage of Asia's demand has driven ground-breaking research in microbiota. "We have two projects

based on goat's milk powder that we're going to launch on the market in the near future," he says. "We're also producing an organic infant formula."

Research and development

Adopting new technology and innovation is an important aspect of Reny Picot's progression. In 2003 it developed a way to separate and treat fatty acids from milk to obtain various types of fractionated butter. Going forward, the R&D department is looking into a new nanofiltration process to reduce minerals in dairy whey and new food products for children and babies with allergies to milk proteins. Javier is concentrating on finding digital solu-

tions to increase the flexibility, efficiency, and sustainability of value chains and food manufacturing processes.

Reny Picot's acquisition of the Ciechanów Dairy Cooperative in Poland in 2007 marked another big step. Some of the facilities in Anleo, where it all began, were relocated to Eastern Europe to produce commodity cheeses, and the company's Polish subsidiary now supplies its plant in northern Spain with cheese to be grated or processed further. Ciechanów also has its own line of demineralised whey powder.

When it comes to quality of product and taste, Reny Picot is always one step ahead of the game. At the 32nd World Cheese Awards held in Bergamo in Italy, two of its goat's cheeses won top awards – le fleuret bagged a gold medal and le sarlet a silver in their respective categories. Both are made in the company's factory in Le Chèvrefeuille, France, and demonstrate the dedication that is poured into each and every cheese. Take a moment to look at the Hall of Awards on the company website and it's plain to see how highly regarded its cheeses are. [👉](#)

“We want to build trust with the people and suppliers we work with”

KERRY

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