



Interview

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Exquisitarium was set up in March 2005. Since then, the mission of this Catalan company has been to cook products as varied as appetisers, first courses, second courses, desserts, sauces and dish bases (more than 250 references in the catalogue). Recently cooked, the products are ultra-frozen to preserve their properties, texture and flavour and are stored in the freezer at -18°C for a minimum period of 12 months, without the need for additives and preservatives. We spoke with Sònia Plana, the co-founder of Exquisitarium, about the benefits of using frozen products in the HORECA sector (hotels, restaurants and caterers), including not only saving time but also saving money.

– **What products do you offer and which ones are most in demand?**

– We cooked IV- and V-range frozen foods for hotels, restaurants and caterers (HORECA sector). Those that lead the demand are appetisers for banquets and second courses for



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the menu.

– **For example?**

– We propose our clients appetisers and tapas (burgers and skewers, croquettes and fritters), we make first courses (eggplants stuffed with meat with béchamel and cheese, moussaka, cannelloni), we cook creams (pumpkin cream and pea cream), lasagne and pasta, rice dishes (vegetable risotto, funghi risotto and four cheese risotto), main courses (cod with tomato, raisins and pine nuts, fish and seafood dishes such as salmon tartare, meat dishes such as shoulder of lamb, beef cheek with red wine sauce, Iberian pork cheek with honey and mustard, Iberian puff pastry with chestnuts, dishes of lamb and many others).

– **Do you make desserts too?**

– Yes, I can mention chocolate donuts, sweet Italian macarons, quince and curd cannelloni, fried milk (flavour of fried milk with a touch of citrus and cinnamon) and *torrija* (a delicious dessert made with coconut milk and cooked in the oven).

– **You are implementing the International Food Standard (the IFS). What does it mean?**



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Sònia Plana

Co-founder of Exquisitarium

«The false myth that needs to be debunked is that frozen foods lose nutrients»

– We currently have a quality certification in food safety, ISO 22000, and we are implementing another standard that has more international impact: the IFS.

– **They say that ice crystals destroy**

the structure of a product. Therefore, frozen foods with a long shelf life lose vitamins, thus becoming useless to humans. Do you agree? Which foods do not lose vitamins when frozen?

– Proper freezing of food plays a

key role here. Very fast freezing produces very small ice crystals and does not damage the fibres and structure of the product.

The false myth that needs to be debunked is that frozen foods lose nutrients because the effect of

freezing on the nutritional content of foods is minimal.

Frozen food at the beginning of its useful life retains nutrients better than the same fresh food consumed at the end of its useful life.

The second key point is correct defrosting.

Freezing should be understood as a pause that prolongs the time during which we have to consume food. If this freezing and subsequent defrosting are done correctly, the product remains as it was before it was frozen.

– **What freezing technologies do you use? Do you use preservatives?**

– The freezing technology we use is ultra-freezing, which means that the product goes from cooking temperature to -18°C very quickly. As I have said before, the ice crystals remain tiny and the texture and structure of the fibres are unaffected.

Freezing is the most natural form of preservation. Already in the Neolithic, human beings used the cold as a method of preserving food and stored provisions in natural caves and frozen ground cavities.



«The IV- and V-range of frozen foods is THE SOLUTION, as it allows professionals to have real help in the kitchen»

We do not use any type of added preservative for our products. Freezing allows us to keep them in optimal conditions for months.

– **Who are your main consumers? Are they mostly supermarkets or restaurants? Which regions of Spain do you work with? Where do you export your products? Do you export them to Andorra?**

– Our main customers are hotels, restaurants and caterers (HORECA sector). We work in all the provinces of Spain, and we export them to Andorra, France, Holland, Germany, Greece, England and Bulgaria.

– **What advantages of IV and V range frozen foods can you name besides saving time to prepare meals?**

– The advantage of using our products is that it allows our clients to rationalise storage (the packaging in which it is presented can be stacked while filling minimal space). In addition, the use of such products allows our clients to minimise the required kitchen space and infrastructure, optimise resources (multiple products can be heated at the same time), increase

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food stocks because our products have long-term expiration, and also our clients can increase the variety of dishes on the menu without increasing fixed costs.

Finally, the use of our products allows for optimally distributed working time, improves the staff's quality of work and opens up the possibility of offering fast and high-quality service.

- How much can we save by using frozen food?

- Savings from using frozen food depends on the establishment and how well it manages raw materials and working time.

- How much profit can be increased for a traditional restaurant by using IV- and V-range frozen foods?

There is a study that indicates that the savings of using the IV- and V-range of frozen foods means that a restaurant can go from a pre-tax profit of 8% to 15.3%. This is a saving of 7.3% of your turnover.

- What can you say about the rise of the IV- and V-range of frozen foods as a solution to the lack of labour experienced by the HORECA sector?

- The IV- and V-range of frozen



► Exquisitarium has more than 250 references in the catalogue.

foods is THE SOLUTION, as it allows professionals to have real help in the kitchen. They can dedicate themselves to all those dishes that have a higher added value for their place. And we offer the rest, with the same quality as if they had been made on-site.

- Do you have many competitors? What are your competitive advantages?

- Many companies make the IV- and V-range of frozen foods in Spain, but there are not many that make the wide range of quality that we do.

Our competitive advantages are product innovation, the variety of products we offer and their quality.

- How do you plan to develop your business? What are the investment plans for 2023 and the expected profit?

- We have had sustained growth since we were set up in 2005. Our mission is to be a reference company in our niche in the HORECA sector in Spain and Europe. The investment for 2023 is high, as we plan to expand the current facilities, and the profit should allow us to continue investing and growing autonomously. ≡

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