Joan Mir: "innovation is the differentiating element that makes companies excellent"

The cooperative group Anecoop has been commemorating, throughout 2016, 40 years of growth, evolution and commercial expansion, thanks to its constant commitment to innovation and the adaptation to the needs of the consumer, making quality and food safety, the respect for the environment, social economy and the promotion of healthy eating, its main distinguishing features. From this and many other issues, we spoke at ECA with its director general, Joan Mir.

By Milagros Jurado

e-Comercio Agrario: what would stand out from the business philosophy of your company? What are your main lines of business and marketing and for what actions and/or projects you bet on in the future to continue to differentiate you in offer, quality and services?

Joan Mir: at Anecoop we aim to become leaders for our partners and an agri-food company with

great international recognition, thanks to excellent strategic and operational management, based on innovation and permanent adaptation, product quality, efficiency and growth .
The philosophy and social responsibility of Anecoop is based on four pillars: to promote healthy eating in society through the consumption of fruits and vegetables, especially in children; ensuring food security; respect the environment and generate social economy projects that improve the welfare of our farmers.

At Anecoop we are aware that innovation is the differentiating element that makes companies excellent, in this line, we apply innovation in all areas, from management to product logistics. Strategic plans help us to identify where innovation is needed, at what time and at what level.

With regard to future projects, note that more than 100 Anecoop professionals are working on 20 real cooperative integration projects through the Avanza Plan, which aims at the competitive improvement of the member cooperatives. With this plan we want to create a future for our farmers, for our cooperatives and for Anecoop itself.

In this sense, to emphasize that in 2016 Anecoop has integrated four new hortofrutícolas companies, two of them located in Andalusia. These integrations generate competitive advantages for our partner companies: the expansion of the offer, an extensive marketing calendar and joint R & D projects.

ECA: **what are your most significant productions in terms of volume and turnover? Do you plan to incorporate any new products or alternative productions?**

J.M.: the initial citrus cooperative has evolved over time to become a major international distribution company of citrus, vegetables, non-citrus fruits and wine. Anecoop has been expanding its offer of products and its commercial offer, which makes it possible to have an important offer throughout the entire campaign.

During the 2014-2015 marketing year, with 746,342 tonnes marketed and 577.2 million euros in turnover, the most significant products marketed by volume were: citrus (338,811 tonnes); Other fruits (243,343 tons) and vegetables (145,440 tons). The growth in vegetables and, above all, the remarkable increase in fruits, led a record campaign, despite the slight decrease in the volume of citrus fruit marketed.

> In Anecoop, the success of sales of kakis and watermelons stands out, with more than 70,000 and 104,000 tons marketed, respectively. Watermelon represents 20% of national exports and kaki 40%

For the product offer has been especially important the consolidation of the Tangerine Clemensoon, *extra early variety property of Anecoop, with very positive results.* Also worthy of note is the agreement reached with the company that owns the Nadorcott variety whereby the cooperative farmers of Anecoop cooperatives have 200,000 licenses that will strengthen our presence of citrus in the second part of the campaign.

The panorama of possibilities and alternatives to citrus fruits is being expanded with non-citrus fruits, such as stone fruits, papaya, pomegranate or kiwi.

Also worthy of note is the consolidation of the supply of stone fruits such as peach, nectarine and plum, both in varieties and in the calendar, since the opening in 2015 of a new commercial office in Spain: Anecoop Valle del Ebro. The so-called "bio" also gain ground among our customers, especially in the United Kingdom in the case of the former and in France for the latter.

ECA: what is the current positioning of this company in the markets? (Leadership, etc.)? In short, what phrases would summarize the importance and scope of Anecoop in its sectors of activity?

J.M.: since its founding in 1975, Anecoop has become one of the largest international distribution companies for citrus, vegetables, non-citrus fruits and wines. It is the first horticultural company of the Mediterranean and the first exporter and second commercializer of citrus of the world. Anecoop is a business model that, at present, is unique in Europe because of its size and its degree of internationalization. Anecoop is today and, for a long time, an international reference of the agri-food sector. Together, we have formed one of the largest horticultural groups in Europe. We have more than 40 years of experience in the market; 69 cooperatives and partner companies (2 of them wineries), with thousands of associated farmers, 69 countries to which we export; Average annual turnover of 750 million euros; 9 subsidiaries; 2 international logistics platforms and 5 offices in Spain.

ECA: what is your assessment of the current marketing year?

J.M .: the current campaign is being difficult and complex. At the moment we are analyzing the damages caused by the rains of the last weeks, reason why it is still soon to make a more exhaustive evaluation.

ECA: since diversification is a characteristic feature of Anecoop, what could you tell us about other productions of yours as wine?

J.M .: we are very proud of the growth of our partner wineries and of the many international awards obtained. They are the best proof of the continuous effort made by Anecoop Bodegas to adapt its wine offer to the market's challenges. Currently the offer of our associated wineries (La Viña and Bodegas Reymos) of the DO Valencia and the cooperative winery, Bodegas San Martín, DO Navarra, makes diversity one of its most competitive advantages. We exported to 42 countries and marketed in 2014-2015, 187,483 hectoliters of wine that resulted in a turnover of around 25 million euros.

ECA: what percentage of your production do you destine to foreign markets and what to domestic consumption? What are your main export destinations? Do you plan to tackle new markets? In which case, what and what type of promotional actions or campaigns do you propose? What about the Latin American market, is it among your future goals?

J.M.: Anecoop currently exports its products to 69 countries. Europe is the main export destination with France, Germany and Spain at the top, followed by Sweden, the United Kingdom, Italy, Poland, the Czech Republic and the Netherlands.

The European market represents more than 90% of Anecoop's exports, with Spain

> accounting for around 10% of its total marketing

France is the main destination for its exports and, precisely at the end of 2015, Anecoop was recognized as Company of the Year In France, awarded by the Official Chamber of Commerce of Spain in France. *It is an award given to companies of great international renown and investing significantly in France.* The second export bloc is the countries that make up Eastern Europe, which account for 4% of exports. In recent years, Anecoop's market share has grown in a very representative way in the countries of Eastern Europe. Our commercial network is located in strategic points of the international market of fresh fruit and vegetables: Spain, France, UK, Holland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Russia and China, the latter oriented to the commercialization of wines, favorable share of all subsidiaries in their respective markets and equally positive economic performance despite the complex international situation.

As for the Latin American market, we are already working with some countries, most notably Brazil and Costa Rica. Little by little we are opening the market.

ECA: to what extent has the decision of the Russian veto been affecting you commercially and therefore in economic terms? How much do you estimate in losses despite the aid granted by the European Union to productions affected by this veto? Do you consider that they are enough?

J.M .: the 2014-2015 campaign was one of the most complex campaigns for Anecoop, the first one we deal with the Russian veto, a very important market for our wines and our fruits and vegetables in volume and turnover.

Due to the Russian veto we have stopped selling 20,000 tons of product in the country during the last campaign.

> "In Anecoop we have compensated for the temporary suspension of the Russian market, with the sale of 12,000 tons more than the previous year in alternative markets and with an increase in commercial work to which the remaining 8,000 respond"

ECA: continuing with foreign policy issues, How do you understand that you can pass on the future exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union?

J.M.: the impact would be important, both in the case of the agri-food sector as a whole, and for Anecoop since the UK is one of our main markets. At Anecoop we have a subsidiary there, FESA UK. According to the opinion of those responsible for this subsidiary, the future exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union will have a greater instability effect on the economy. *In addition, a possible devaluation of the pound would affect the cost of products and would have side effects*

in the supply chain and consumer confidence. This is the viewpoint of most companies in our industry and the whole of the British business community, especially those who base their business on imports.

ECA: in your opinion, is the TTIP a threat or an opportunity?

J.M .: in my opinion, the impact in Europe of the death of the TTIP announced by Trump, is negative. "No domestic effort can supply the impact on the external contribution to the GDP of the fall of trade and Europe has gradually reduced its imbalances via exports" At the moment, it seems that the Spanish export model is not in danger because in the first ten months of 2016 Our exports are still growing. But we will have to strengthen the Spanish export position and not ignore what is happening.

ECA: in what lines are you researching and innovating to remain pioneers, as you did in your day with your seedless watermelon "Bouquet" brand?

J.M.: we continue to develop new R & D & I projects in our two test fields, such as the development of new citrus varieties; experimental crops of varieties of watermelons, papayas, California pepper varieties and super-flavored tomato specialties. In addition, we have a certified plot in organic farming where proofs of varieties and cultivation techniques are performed to improve their profitability. In the end, the results of all these projects are disclosed to our partner cooperatives.

> "It should be noted that all our research is based on non-transgenic products and the development of environmentally friendly farming systems"

ECA: do you plan to undertake any major investment in the future? (In infrastructures, facilities, etc.).

J.M.: at the moment we are expanding our warehouse in Poland, doubling its capacity. *On the other hand, we have planned the start-up of a company of IV Range.*

ECA: this year Anecoop celebrates its 40th anniversary, what have you prepared to commemorate it? How do you value this stage and what has been the main feature of this cooperative in all these years? What do you think are the challenges and challenges that you will face from now on?

J.M.: in fact, we have organized throughout this year events commemorating our 40th anniversary in Spain, with the motto "40 years working. 40 years of cultivating the future", as well as meetings with all our partner cooperatives. We have organized four days in Valencia, Murcia, Almería and Seville with the presence of more than 1,400 farmers, representing the 30,000 farmers who make

up Anecoop. There have been 40 years of positive evolution, 40 years to celebrate with all our cooperative partners, working to achieve the highest profitability for fruits, vegetables and wines. 40 years providing value and experience to be present in the main points of sale of about 70 countries worldwide and 40 years betting on innovation and continuous training. Factors that have made Anecoop one of the largest and most important international companies.