



## Initiatives in Rural Galicia

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Video	<a href="http://www.diadocooperativismo2013.com/Image_0.jpg.flv?iframe=true&amp;width=740&amp;height=500">http://www.diadocooperativismo2013.com/Image_0.jpg.flv?iframe=true&amp;width=740&amp;height=500</a>

## The Experience

Feiraco is an agricultural cooperative created in 1968 in the region of Barcala. It is a large cooperative, which had the following figures in 2011: a turnover of 100 million Euros; 194 employees; 3.460 partners and 540 daily farms. The volume of collected milk was 112 million litres. The amount of sold fodder was 60.000 tons and 9 million litres of diesel fuel. The amount of land under cultivation for corn was 3.040 hectares.

As part of its cooperative identity, it carries out a commitment to the people who belong to the cooperative: partners, as well as Feiraco's employees.



## Origins

Feiraco is a community land exploitation cooperative, which was created in the sixties in the Barcala region, under the direction of the propriety registrar and agrarian intellectual Jesús García Calvo. It was created with the aim to contribute to the social and economic development of the area.

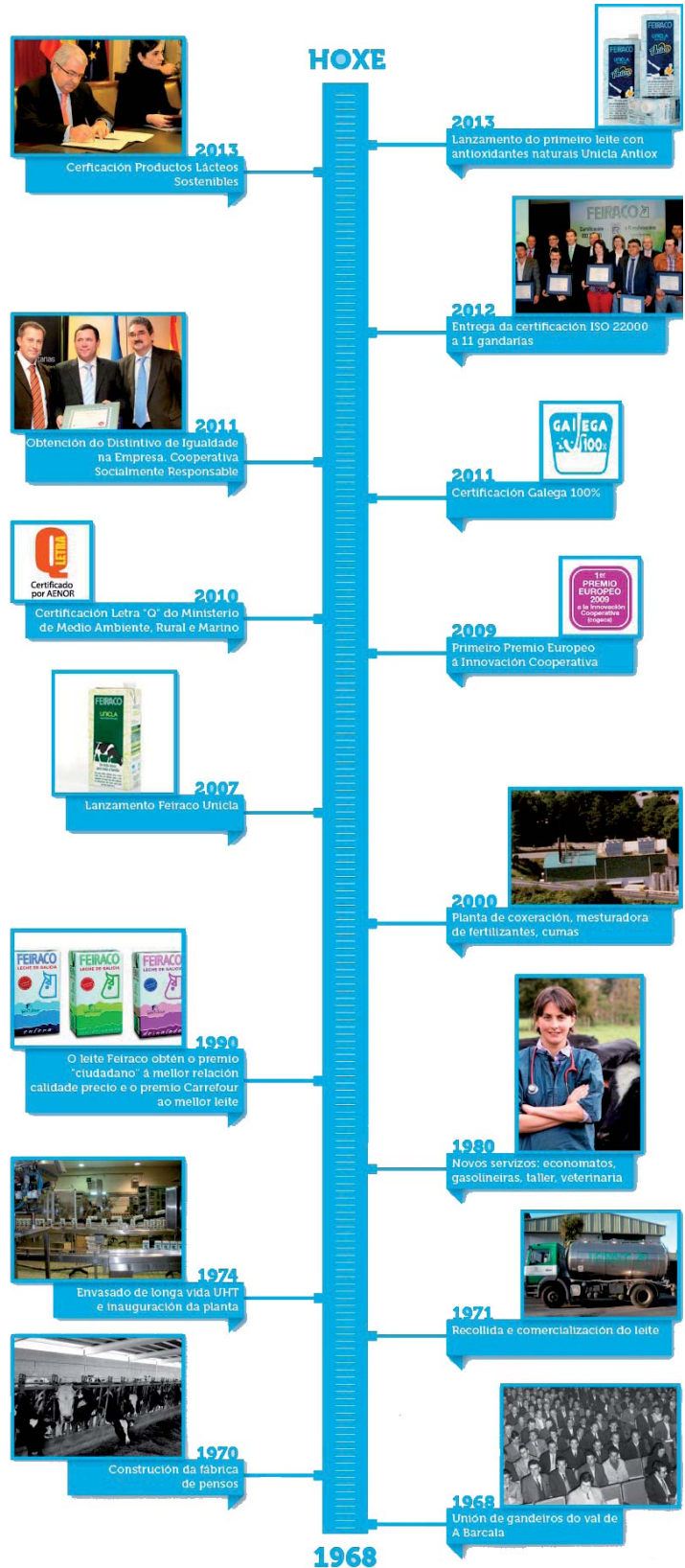
Its first steps were towards building a fodder factory for cattle holding, in addition to other initiatives, such as importing heifers of a high genetic value, buying seeds, selling fertilisers, etc.

Subsequently, it is established a new section dedicated to sell milk from producer partners through the dairy processing partners industry. This process culminated in the direct commercialisation of the product under the label FEIRACO.

The cooperative collects, processes, and commercialises the production of its more than 3,000 partners. Partners' economic activities are supported by Feiraco, which promote territorial development in the area where they are carried out, social cohesion of population, and direct employment, as well as industry development and services for 200 people.

Feiraco is a multi-product cooperative. It covers every productive need of its associates through its different sections, which include dairy products, animal feed, livestock assessment, ground, fertilisers, seeds, workshop, fuel, agrarian market, insurances, business advice, etc.

From 1995, it had been dedicated to promote social and cultural initiatives for its members and society as a whole. This work is done through the "Fundación Feiraco" (Feiraco Foundation).



## Territory

Feiraco was created in the Barcala region (Negreira and A Baña), when 400 cattle breeders united. The bordering area with the left bank of the river Tambre is very close to Negreira, therefore, Ames and Brion were key councils from the beginning. Later on, all the united with the before mentioned: Mazaricos, Santa Comba, Val do Dubra, Santiago's rural area, or Rois. Already in 1969, the influence area covered between eight or ten councils.

Some of these councils, such as Negreira and A Baña, due to their proximity to the city of Santiago de Compostela, changed into councils that offered more services, and residences were built. Their agrarian and cattle breeding economy weakened.

Feiraco progressively cover other areas, as well as decentralised its services opening new centres, such as the centre of "Picota", in Mazaricos, which is the council that has more farms (around 120). At the present moment, Feiraco has a total of 512 farms, but it is necessary to bare in mind that it had 3000 in the past. Nevertheless, the present 512 farms have a higher production than the past 3000. They have higher cattle number, almost 3000 cows.

The previously mentioned councils, have as a sign of identity to be rural and cattle breeding. Most people working in Feiraco belong to the initial four councils.

Feiraco's influenced can be seen in the whole of Galicia, due to prize protection against multinationals.



## New Generations Rooting

The issue of the younger generations leaving rural areas and farms is changing. Previously, it was common that younger generations decided to leave: to study at the city, perhaps while living in an apartment owned by their parents, and to seek their future in the city. It was also usual that parents did not want their sons and daughters to work at the farm.



Feiraco trained and trains its partners so that they involved their sons and daughters.

At the present moment, and already before the economic crisis, there are medium and large farms in which parents send their sons and daughters to obtain training related to dairy farming and cattle breeding, so that they can continue the economic activity. The number of younger people who are farm holders is now close to a 50%.

## Women's Role



Women's preponderance was increased. Many women take over the farm when they have the possibility.

65% of dairy farms have a woman as farm holder. Members of the board are also women, and one of the female members of the board, leads a group of women to encourage a higher women preponderance in corporate bodies. They collaborate with other Spanish agrarian cooperatives to favour women's visibility and implication in cooperatives.

Feiraco had an aiding role: it provided training, promoted sensitive awareness through talks and conferences, and it helped improving its male and female partners' well-being, which is also now asked by its partners.

## Working Quality

Livestock breeding activities are more demanding than others, as there are no free days. However, it can be combined with other activities. It allows breeders to organise their time with the help of mechanization. In addition, services provided by the cooperative allow partners not to be completely absorbed by their job.



Some partners carried out an initiative promoted by the cooperative: substitution teams. First it was the cooperative who organise it, and then partners continue doing it. At the present moment it is highly demanded. There are two people hired to work in three farms of Val do Dubra, they also received training in them.

Another example are young people who united to work at a farm. They take working shifts and holidays of 15 days, as an instance. This is a new possibility that did not exist before and it encourages young people.



## Change in Rural Identity



The cooperative helps people to unite farms. 99% of unions were supported by the cooperative with training services, viability researches, infrastructure and machinery researches, etc. Currently, the cooperative supports and aids with its technical support a farming plan. It is aimed to professionalise farming.

At the present moment, cattle breeders are no longer persons who do not feel valued (this problem still exists but in a small number). They are owners of an important cooperative, which has economic value. There is a different atmosphere.

## Progress in Equality

Feiraco is one of the first cooperatives with a plan on equality, and on conciliation measures (such as maternity leaves). These measures are always directed to working staff. At the present moment, in order to direct these measures to female partners, Feiraco is working on a training plan, as well as on conferences to be able to respond to their needs, such as day care centres.



In addition, Feiraco is working on the access to extra or alternative income for their partners. Therefore, horticultural production is being promoted, which is compatible with breeding activities, as well as part of them.

Regarding horticultural production, Feiraco already attempted to promote it unsuccessfully, as Feiraco did not have its own commercialization network. The new attempt is carried out through a specialised cooperative (Horsal) already working on that sector, which assures commercialization.



## Caring

Feiraco regards as important that old people in villages have someone to take care of them, and to create groups to provide home aid, so that women can work in the farm. Therefore, Feiraco offers installations, training with their staff, research on day care centres projects carried out by the university, which considers three centres.

Feiraco is not able to work directly on these initiatives, but it can encourage and promote them. In addition, through "Rede Eusumo", Feiraco encouraged the creation of a social services cooperative to provide these type of services.

Feiraco is aware of the existence of this problem affecting its partners, but what they offer is also open for other people. There are partners who are not farm holders. In fact, there are 500 farms but 3200 partners, and the offer is open for all of them.



## Land Access

Feiraco wanted to promote a bank of land. At the present moment they are working on this project but they also need help from the Administration, since authorizations are needed, permits... There is a high number of cattle and a scarcity of land, as the desired number of cattle was doubled or tripled.

Therefore, the cooperative seeks not to lose the land that they already own and to recover working land. Land that belonged to no longer working farms are incorporated to the already owned land. However, some land is abandoned.

Among partners without farms, there are enquiries about what can they do with their land. These farm-less lands could be useful for the cooperative.

## Outsider's Role

It is not common for outsiders to buy a farm. Only when someone is born in a farm is able to feel it, and to defend it. Feiraco's partners are people living in the territory. Those who left can come back, since they might not have other job opportunities. This is only happening in horticultural activities, since they need small funding.



Livestock breeding does not allow the same return. This activity needs a big investment and there will be no possibility of a milk quote at the present moment. The quote is not idle. It always belongs to other farms, or it is rented, or sold. Feiraco attempts that the quote is sold to other partners. It commercialized many partner's quotes to other partners in order not to lose it.

## Agents Relations

As in every cooperative, Feiraco is an autonomous project of its partners. However, it needs to maintain relations with different agents, *we are a chain*. Inter-cooperation with other cooperatives is an important aspect that is becoming more relevant and that is present in more of its activities.

Regarding innovation, they have a tight relationship with the three Galician Universities, especially with the Campus in Lugo, where dairy issues are dealt with. Feiraco also has a technical relation with the laboratories it works with, especially concerning genetics.

On the other hand, Feiraco has a good relation with different councils, in fact, many councils are members of the board of trustees of the "Fundación Feiraco" (Feiraco Foundation), such as Ames, Brión, A Baña, Negreira, Mazaricos. They work together with Feiraco in common projects.

Feiraco also collaborates with agrarian training schools. It is an opportunity to carry out farming courses with students, as well as with their teachers. They work with schools, students...

## Learnings

Feiraco's growth struggles against the pressure caused by multinationals, as they can provide services that a cooperative cannot offer: Feiraco cannot treat a partner different than other. Multinationals can offer different conditions. This sometimes causes Feiraco to lose partners, although it can also benefit it when someone decides to leave the multinational after not been treated fairly. Feiraco pays the best prize for milk in Galicia, but sometimes farmers trust more a multinational's fame than a cooperative. Past cooperative attempts that failed had also a negative effect in Feiraco and other cooperatives, and gave them a bad name.



*On the other hand, we were not always as close to the partner as we should have. Therefore, our new challenge is to be closer to people and to bring them together once again.*

## Participation

Cooperatives are democratic and it is needed to take decisions in assemblies, in which every partner participate.



As Feiraco is a large cooperative in which there is not a proximity relation, in addition to the large territory it covers, makes partner's participation more difficult than in a small cooperative. Not all partners want to participate, for instance, those partners close to retirement do not have an active participation.

Nevertheless, Feiraco attempts to stimulate participation by informing, encouraging initiatives in which partners have management responsibility. There are, in fact, people in active and constant working teams.

In the Board the six main areas that the cooperative covers are represented. There is a more tight relation with some producers, since there are specific working groups meetings every 15 days, or monthly, in addition to training courses that are permanently running. Partner's needs are transmitted through six representatives of the area and another eleven people. Challenges now are:

- Loyalty: to make all production be developed by the cooperative. It will be carry out annually a satisfaction survey to measure partner's satisfaction and to acknowledge their needs.
- To create women's groups for women to be more represented in relation to their predominance, and to lead the cooperative's management. In four years time, they should at least be in the 50%.

There is an important technical factor in participation motivation, since profitability is the key factor to activate people's participation. It is important to carry out serious researches. Feiraco's leadership today is not in one single person but in the cooperative, which is leader in the sector. The cooperative achieved years ago its own dynamics, without the aid of its founder. Many people lead: many of the improvements were done thanks to the technical staff. There are charismatic people, such as the general manager, who created outside relations.



## Impacts

### Intelligent Territory



We made many positive things regarding milk quality and innovation. The issue of integration is also very important. The cooperative has a strategical project on innovation aimed to optimise animal feeding as a determinant factor to produce healthy milk. Therefore, the traditional cattle feeding system is reproduced, enlarging the nutrients of green spring grass through the whole year. The final product is UNICLA milk.

This product is included in the “Hesíodo” program, which is aimed to add value to the cattle breeders participation in the productive process and, therefore, to contribute to humanising and dignifying all tasks which are including in livestock breeding. This initiative obtained the European Prize for Cooperative Innovation, awarded in Brussels by the European Cooperatives.

Other recognitions are: the certification of “Leite Galega 100%” (100% Galician Milk); “Letra Q de Trazabilidade” (Q Letter of Traceability), which ensures the highest possible quality in the whole production process. For the first time in Europe; in addition, 11 Feiraco farms obtained a ISO 22.000 certification for safety and food quality, which proves the first level of the food chain: the production.

### Inclusive Territory

Feiraco's main contribution is to dignify farmer's life, and people in rural areas. It helped them to recover their self-esteem, to value their way of life, to make them gain awareness that they can pull themselves ahead and to be part of an important company.

On the other hand, it was the first Spanish cooperative to be certified as a Family Responsible Company by AENOR. The company has a gender equality plan since 2009, and it is adhered to the Spanish Network of the United Nations Global Compact, an initiative that promotes fundamental values related to the fulfilment of human rights, environmental rights and the struggle against corruption.

### Sustainable Territory

Feiraco's environmental policy focuses on the reduction of energy and water consumption, on the use of recyclable materials, on the efficient management of waste, and on the increase in sensitivity through specific training courses. It also works on reducing the CO2 footprint. For instances, UNICLA farms have reduced a 25% of CO2 emissions.

We implement energy saving programs in the main producing dairy farms. In addition, we reduce the use of fertilisers and promote renewable energies. We optimise milk collecting routes by reducing costs in transportation and minimizing environmental impact. As a result of our preoccupation on reducing CO2 emissions, a research was carried out on the relation of cattle feeding and CO2 emissions. Feiraco's milk containers are produced using certified FSC paper, which is produced with raw materials from sustainable managed forests.