

# A QUALITATIVE STUDY TO DEVELOP AN “AGROFORESTRY” BRAND: THE CASE OF THE SPANISH DEHESAS

Escribano M<sup>1</sup>, Gaspar P<sup>1</sup>, Maestre LM<sup>1</sup>, Elghannam A<sup>1</sup>, Mesias FJ<sup>1\*</sup>

(1) Research Institute of Agricultural Resources (INURA). University of Extremadura. Avda. Adolfo Suarez, s/n – 06007 Badajoz (Spain)

\*Corresponding author: fjmesias@unex.es

## Abstract

This paper has focused on dehesa agroforestry systems, where the main productions are locally appreciated but often consumers are not able to identify and therefore, are not willing to pay a premium for. In this context, it was considered that the development of a brand covering dehesa products could be a useful tool to boost these systems, as long as it could evoke the set of benefits that dehesas provide. This research analyses consumers' view about the feasibility of a brand covering the products derived from dehesas using projective techniques. Results have shown that dehesa as a term to be used to label foods or other products would possess some positive meanings such as “natural” or “quality”. However, it lacks other interesting connotations that are linked to more “modern” concepts. In order to make the brand more attractive to consumers, it should include additional concepts such as sustainability or socially responsible production.

**Keywords:** brand, dehesa, qualitative research, projective techniques

## Introduction

Agroforestry systems provide numerous products and services to the citizens, who often are not aware of them, as they are not commercial products/services or, when found in the markets, are just considered as “another” product with no additional values and characteristics. Among the different alternatives to overcome these constraints that threaten Agroforestry systems, one of the most promising is the development of brands which could help consumers identify those products generated in these systems. In previous studies, stakeholders have stressed the need to explore new opportunities regarding product diversification and adaptation to market demands. It is considered that in this way agroforestry products would be valorized and therefore, it could be possible to increase the revenues for these systems.

If we focus on dehesa agroforestry systems (rangelands in the SW of the Iberian Peninsula), an additional issue is that the main products provided are animal products raised in extensive conditions. They are appreciated in their original regions, but in many cases they are commodities that consumers are not able to identify and therefore, are not able to valorize and pay a premium for.

In this context, it was considered that the development of a brand for products from agroforestry systems could be a useful tool to reach the abovementioned objectives, taking as a first approach the Spanish dehesas.

Due to the nature of this task, with different products covered and many subjective issues having to be considered, it was decided that the way to deal with this chore was a mixed qualitative methodology, using projective techniques within the framework of discussion groups that would allow participants to discuss the results of the preliminary tasks.

Qualitative research is a type of research used to approach a concern and its motivating factors and it is the most flexible and versatile type of research (Stewart et al. 1994) and has often been

applied in agricultural and forestry systems (Islam et al. 2015; Tadesse et al. 2014). Within qualitative research techniques, projective techniques are one of the most frequently used (Donoghue 2000). The use of these techniques comes from the idea that when consumers face unstructured and ambiguous stimulus it is easier for them to convey opinions, points of view, motivations and attitudes (Donoghue 2000).

In this study, the general purpose was to use projective techniques to get a glimpse both of the inner concepts that a brand covering dehesa products should include and also of other general aspects that could be interesting for the consumers and producers.

## Materials and methods

Six research sessions with consumers were carried out in municipalities with different characteristics in Extremadura between March and July 2017. In total 48 consumers participated, the main criterion for the selection of the participants being their willingness to participate in the study, since no special feature or previous knowledge about agroforestry or “dehesas” was required. The number of participants varied between 7 and 10 per session. The sociodemographic characteristics of the participants appear in Figure 1.

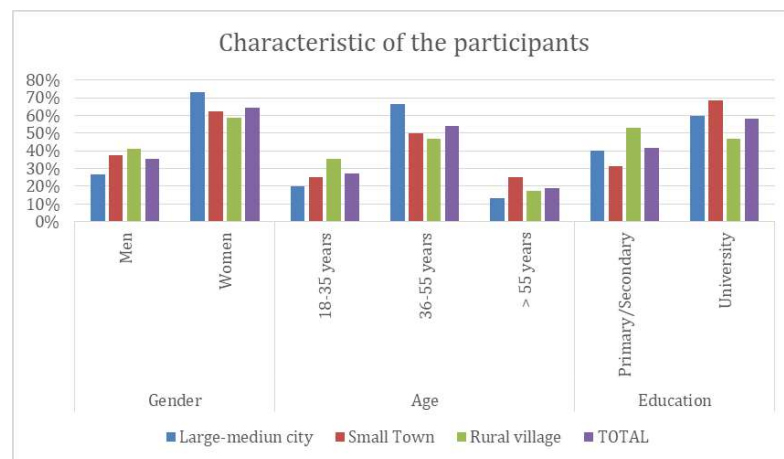


Figure 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the participants

All sessions were led by an expert and recorded on video for later analysis. The work sessions were developed following a common protocol which included different projective techniques (word association, sentence completion and brand personification) with intermediate discussion and sharing of the results.

## Projective techniques

### Word association

In word association participants are requested to say the first thing that comes to mind when hearing some words. In this research the word association task involved four concepts (traditional production foods, sustainable production foods, organic foods and dehesa foods) in order to compare the different associations that they arouse.

### Sentence completion

In sentence completion respondents are provided with incomplete sentences and are asked to complete them, usually with the first word or sentence that comes to mind (Eldesouky et al. 2015). In this task, participants were asked to complete a sentence regarding them finding a food product in a supermarket labelled with a quality brand “Dehesa”.

**Brand Personification**

In this technique participants were asked to attribute personality characteristics (age, sex, origin, hobbies, etc.) to brands, and imagine them as if they were people or individuals. In this chore, different brands were presented to the consumers (Dehesa Brand, Sustainable Production Brand, Traditional food Brand and Socially responsible production Brand) that would gather the main features of agroforestry products in southwestern Spain. The objective was to get a comparison of the attributes assigned to the different concepts in order to identify those constraints associated to the agroforestry systems by themselves and those positive aspects linked to the other ideas but which are also related to dehesas.

**Results**

Firstly, Table 1 shows the results of the word association task. The size the different concepts are shown reflects their frequency of mention.

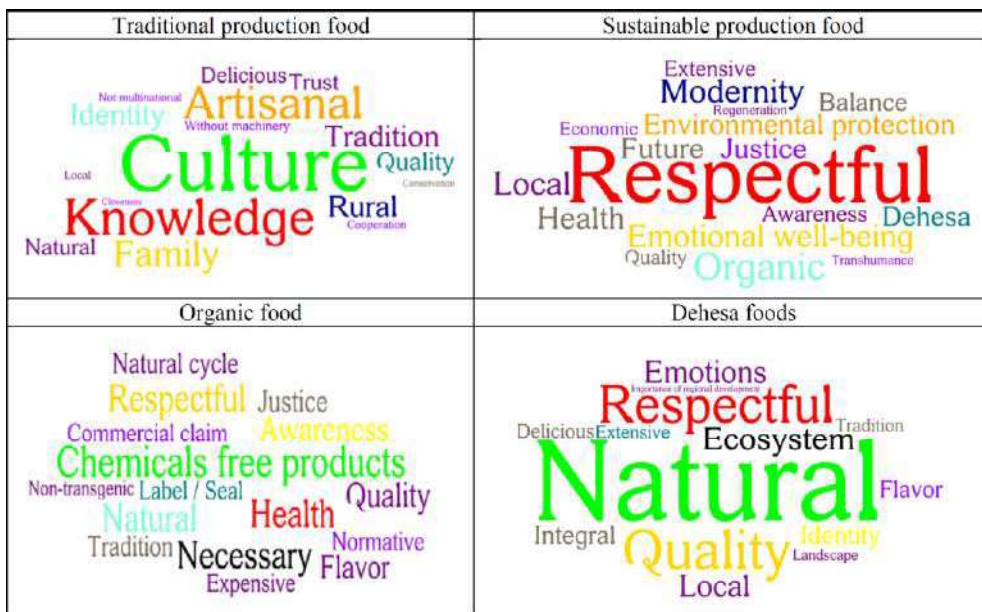


Figure 2: Main concepts identified through word association.

As Figure 2 reveals, a great variety of concepts have been identified, and although it should be expected that some of them would be shared by the four types of foods, it is clear that consumers have in their minds plainly different images when some terms are mentioned, such as the association of organic with “free of chemicals” or that of sustainability with terms like “respectful, environment, justice or modernity”.

Table 1 shows the results of the Completion task where participants were asked to complete the following sentence: If I am in a supermarket and I find a food product with a quality brand named "Dehesa" I ....

Table 1: Categories identified in sentence completion task

Categories identified	Frequencies of mention (%)	Examples
I will buy it	25,6	"I would buy it without hesitation. Although the price would be higher "
I value it, but it is not decisive	23,1	"It strikes me; You may buy it; I think it has more value (quality, environment) "
I think about quality	17,9	"I perceive that it has been prepared and processed in such an environment and therefore guarantees quality"
I'm looking for more information	10,3	"... I keep reading, who produces it, where it comes from ..."
I value it but it is not determinant, it also price	10,3	"I would try to buy it as long as it was not excessively expensive"
I think "it's natural"	10,3	"I understand that it has occurred naturally in the middle of the dehesa"

As it can be observed, a high percentage of participants (25.6 %) showed recognition towards a Dehesa brand and were favourably disposed to purchase it. However, sometimes the Dehesa brand can be related with products having a high price. Likewise, 23.1 % of participants value the attributes of environment and quality that the brand can convey but they are not decisive factors in the purchase.

Finally, Table 2 shows the results of the Brand Personification study.

Table 2: Brand personification

Characteristics	Brand dehesa	Brand sustainability	Brand Traditional product	Brand Socially responsible production
Age	More than 50 yo	Less than 30 yo	More than 50 yo	Less than 30 yo
Sex	Male	Indifferent	Female	Female
Job	Farmer	Environmental professional	Farmer	Liberal professional, civil servant
Origin	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban, cosmopolitan, European
Character and personality	Quiet, kind and nice	Cheerful, kind, nice and enthusiastic	Cheerful, kind, nice and enthusiastic	Cheerful, kind, nice and enthusiastic
Physical appearance	Traditional, rural	Serious and informal	Traditional, rustic, tough	Intellectual, serious, caring
Hobbies	Landscaping and ornithology	Walking in the countryside, landscaping	Family and hobbies linked to the environment	Walking in the countryside, landscaping, reading Hiking and sports in nature Activities with friends

Table 2 shows the main results of the Brand Personification study. As it can be observed, when analyzing the different aspects of the personality some brands complemented each other, while others showed totally opposite aspects. This is an interesting finding to highlight, since the brand image should be attractive to as many consumers as possible.

So much so that, for example, it was appreciated that while Dehesa or Traditional Product Brands conveyed an image of mature-older people (47.62% in the Dehesa brand and 83.37% in Traditional Product), this result was in contrast with the Sustainability and Socially Responsible Brands, whose images were fresher or oriented towards young consumers. On the other hand, Dehesa brand is related to the male sex in 60.87%, while the other brands are associated with women or are indifferent regarding sex.

## Discussion and conclusion

The word association shows that dehesa as a term to be used to label foods or other products would possess some positive meanings such as “natural” or “quality”. However, it lacks other interesting connotations that are linked to more “modern” concepts, for example, the protection of the environment or the contribution towards consumers’ health and wellbeing.

Brand personification has shown that character and personality are similar in the four brands, while the physical appearance conveys a traditional and rural image in the first two brands, as opposed to Sustainability which is associated with a dynamic, young and informal character, while at the same time serious and socially committed with the natural environment. These aspects are reinforced by the association of the first two brands with rural environments, as opposed to Sustainability and Socially Responsible Brands, clearly considered as urban and cosmopolitan brands.

Finally, it can be seen that all the brands are closely linked with hobbies related to the natural environment and healthy life, which are element of great value when considering the development of a brand for agroforestry products.

To conclude, it should be taken into account that these results, due to the qualitative nature of the study and its convenience sampling, must not be considered as definitive. Further quantitative research with representative samples would be needed in order to extend the outcomes of this paper to the whole market.

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