

Footwear surpassed the Spanish region of La Rioja's most famous product, wine, in export values in the first four months of 2010.

Shoes top La Rioja export list



La Rioja, one of the most famous wine-making regions in Europe, has announced figures for the first four months of this year that show footwear is now its most important export.

The chamber of commerce for the autonomous community said export figures for the January-April 2010 period showed that La Rioja exported shoes valued at €71.25 million. This represents an increase of 16% compared to the same period last year. Local media quoted chamber of commerce

president, José María Ruiz-Alejos, as saying: "Hats off to Arnedo", a reference to the small town (the population is around 15,000) that has the greatest concentration of La Rioja's footwear factories. More noteworthy, perhaps, was that the corresponding figure for wine exports, which the Mr Ruiz-Alejos said was still the area's flagship export product, fell by 3.1% to €66.4 million.

The town of Arnedo, already known locally as Shoe City because of the importance of the footwear manufacturing industry there, has been growing in prominence in La Rioja, across Spain and internationally in recent years. For example, delegates at the International Footwear Congress paid a visit to the town when the regional capital, Logroño, played host to the event in 2007. More recently, Arnedo hosted the fifty-ninth Spanish national leather and footwear congress in May this year.

The town of Arnedo, known locally as Shoe City, has driven shoes to become the leader in export values in La Rioja, ahead of wine. CREDIT: ARPÓN/WIKIPEDIA



The organiser, the Spanish Leather Chemical Association (AQEIC), held its annual general meeting at the event and followed this with two special presentations. The first of these was a detailed talk about Arnedo and its role in the Spanish footwear industry, with Eduardo Rodríguez Osés, head of the business studies faculty at the University of La Rioja, as the speaker. His paper was followed by a talk on professional training in the tanning sector, for which the presenters were an Arnedo high school teacher, Miguel Ángel Cordon, and a government education adviser, Luciano Busquets. Thirteen technical papers followed on the second day of the congress, with a formal dinner and the presentation of the annual AQEIC awards to round off proceedings.

World exposure

Spain devoted the week from July 5–11 to La Rioja at its pavilion at the World Expo in Shanghai. Wine was an important feature of the week-long celebration of the autonomous community's industrial output not least because the seven days culminated in the final of the Fifa 2010 World Cup in South Africa, which Spain won, leading to the popping of lots of extra corks but so was footwear. The Rioja Centre for Footwear Technology (CTCR) in Arnedo supplied a series of samples to make up a display in the Shanghai pavilion of the region's footwear manufacturing expertise.

Since then, the CTCR has launched a "pioneering project" on corporate social responsibility for footwear manufacturers in La Rioja and their immediate suppliers. The aim of this new project is to encourage these firms to turn sustainability into a competitive advantage in the global marketplace, and so improve their image.

The centre has pledged its support to any company in the footwear industry that wants to make this commitment to corporate social responsibility. Shoe and footwear component manufacturers in La Rioja

One of La Rioja's most prominent footwear brands, Callaghan, at the Modacalzado exhibition in Madrid in March 2010.

CREDIT: IFEMA

who want to take part will receive a visit from an expert consultant who will tell them what aspects of their business contribute to corporate social responsibility (broadly, good practice in environmental and waste management, in worker relationships, in community relations, in fiscal probity, in their dealings with suppliers and customers and in their relationships with local authorities), and showing them how to measure their performance in these areas.

If this project is a success, La Rioja's footwear industry will continue to develop and to improve its performance. Wine production and shoe manufacturing are not direct competitors, but there is clearly a healthy rivalry in La Rioja between the two industries. The vineyards have had things their own way for decades: it's clear they now have a fight on their hands if they want to continue to produce the region's flagship export. 🍷



The authorities in La Rioja say that wine is still the region's flagship export, but it now has a fight on its hands from footwear. CREDIT: MODINO/WIKIPEDIA