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Title: Siete Cueros del Piedemonte Llanero Cheese: Sustainable Livestock Breeding and Territorial Quality in the Quest for the Denomination of Origin.

Summary:

Queso Siete Cueros' is an emblematic product of the Colombian plains foothills, mainly produced in the departments of Meta and Cundinamarca. This region is characterised by being the transition between the eastern mountain range of the Colombian Andes and the extensive plains of eastern Colombia, with a unique ecological diversity and a strong livestock farming tradition. The 'queso siete cueros' is a fresh spun paste cheese that stands out for its specific sensory quality linked to its territory of origin. Sensorially, it could be described as an off-white cheese with light yellow tones, a rounded spiral or snail-shaped shape, a sour and salty smell and taste (flavour) with sweet notes of fresh milk and fermented notes of whey and yoghurt, an elastic, semi-hard and fibrous texture. Its production is closely linked to the soil and climatic conditions and the traditional livestock farming and processing practices of the Colombian plains foothills. Historically, 'queso siete cueros' is linked to the municipality of Cumaral, Meta, and is a variant of 'queso de mano', a round, spun cheese (arepa-shaped), which is considered to be part of Colombia's culinary heritage. In this context, the territory of origin seeks to obtain protection as a Denomination of Origin (DO) for 'queso siete cueros' and thus protect the originality of its unique characteristics, derived from the natural and human factors of the territory. The quality of 'queso siete cueros' is directly influenced by the milk produced in the plains foothills, where forage and browsing plants contribute to its distinctive sensory attributes. The interaction between natural factors and traditional livestock and processing practices are essential to preserve the typicality and differential quality of the cheese. Similarly, the acid whey from the 'queso siete cueros' itself, which is used as a lactic culture in its production, gives it a uniqueness derived from the distinctive characteristics of the microbiota present in the Piedemonte llanero environment. For its part, Colombia's Sustainable Cattle Farming policy emphasises the importance of an integrated approach that considers the interactions between natural and human elements (landscape approach). Within this framework, the Collective Public-Private Partnership (APPC) of the dairy sector in Meta and Cundinamarca is working to define the quality characteristics of seven hides cheese and to establish a governance structure for a future DO that incorporates elements of sustainability from this approach. The recognition of the DO for "queso siete cueros" will not only protect its unique characteristics, but will also revitalise llanero traditions and strengthen the sustainability of the dairy sector in the Colombian piedmont. The preservation of these practices and knowledge will ensure that future generations will continue to produce a cheese of high quality and reputation, reflecting the cultural identity of the Colombian plains.

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