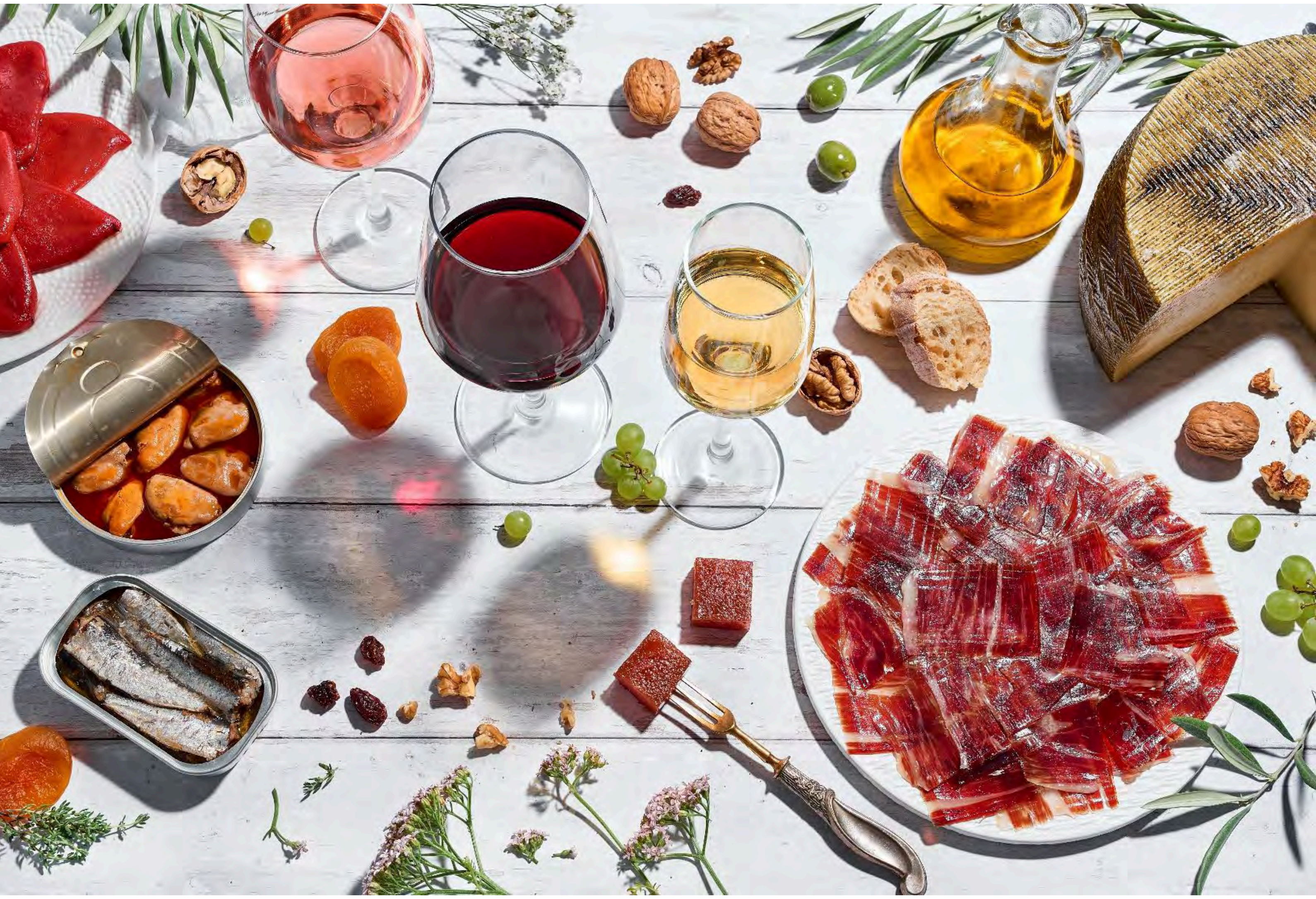
#SpainFoodNation
Summit Panels



Meeting Report and Recommendations

United States

September 30, 2025 - Trade Commission of Spain in New York

FWS Foods and Wines from Spain

#alimentosdespaña

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Introduction

ICEX, Spanish Commercial Office, MAPA and #SpainFoodNation

ICEX Spain Trade and Investment (ICEX España Exportación e Inversiones) is a Spanish public body established in 1982 whose main purpose is to promote the international development of the Spanish economy. ICEX is attached to the Ministry of Economy, Commerce and Business and is responsible for developing and implementing the Ministry's international economic policy. Since its foundation, ICEX has played an important role in the modernization of the Spanish economy.

ICEX's original mandate was to promote the export of Spanish products to international markets. ICEX's mandate has been extended and updated to also include boosting the competitiveness of Spanish companies, especially SMEs, and attracting direct foreign investment to Spain. It has also been key in the expansion of Spain's direct foreign investment in international markets, coordinating the different policies and types of support provided by public entities in Spain to offer companies a broad range of assistance.

To achieve its mission, ICEX has an extensive network of professionals in this field. These professionals work at ICEX's headquarters in Madrid, the 30+ Territorial and Provincial Trade Offices based in different Spanish cities, and the almost 100 Economic and Commercial Offices of Spain established in Spain's Embassies and Consulates worldwide.

To this end, every year, in coordination with ICEX, the Spanish Commercial Office plans, executes, and monitors a wide range of events, bringing together industry professionals, and occasionally includes the end consumer. Gastronomy plays a central and key role in this strategy as a means of promoting Spain's food and beverage products to various audiences and stakeholders.

The activities carried out each year include a series of educational and promotional activities, which consider the market's opportunities, challenges, and trends as well as Spain's position relative to that of its major competitor countries.

Foods and Wines from Spain, a brand belonging to ICEX, is used to promote Spain’s Wine and Food sectors and gastronomy in major export markets.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación, MAPA) is the department of the Government of Spain responsible for proposing and implementing government policy on agricultural, livestock, and fishery resources, the food industry, rural development, and human food.

MAPA is the official institution responsible for the development and writing of State legislation on agriculture, fisheries, and food in Spain; it proposes and implements the general guidelines of the Government of Spain on agricultural, fisheries, and food policies. MAPA represents Spain in the international organizations in these matters; as well as coordinates actions, cooperation and agreements designed for the implementation of policy

#AlimentosdEspaña, a brand belonging to MAPA, is used to promote Spain’s Agrifood Industry in Spain.

#SpainFoodNation is a joint initiative by ICEX Spain Trade and Investment and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Foodstuffs of Spain to educate and build awareness around the diversity and quality of Spanish food products, alcoholic drinks, and gastronomy in major export markets.

1

#SpainFoodNation Summit

The Summit was held on September 30, 2025, in conjunction with the Great Match, an annual event held in New York City to promote foods and wines from Spain. The Summit was held approximately two weeks after the Advisory Councils (described in Section 1.1 below) met at the Trade Commission of Spain in New York.

This year's Summit consisted of three sessions:

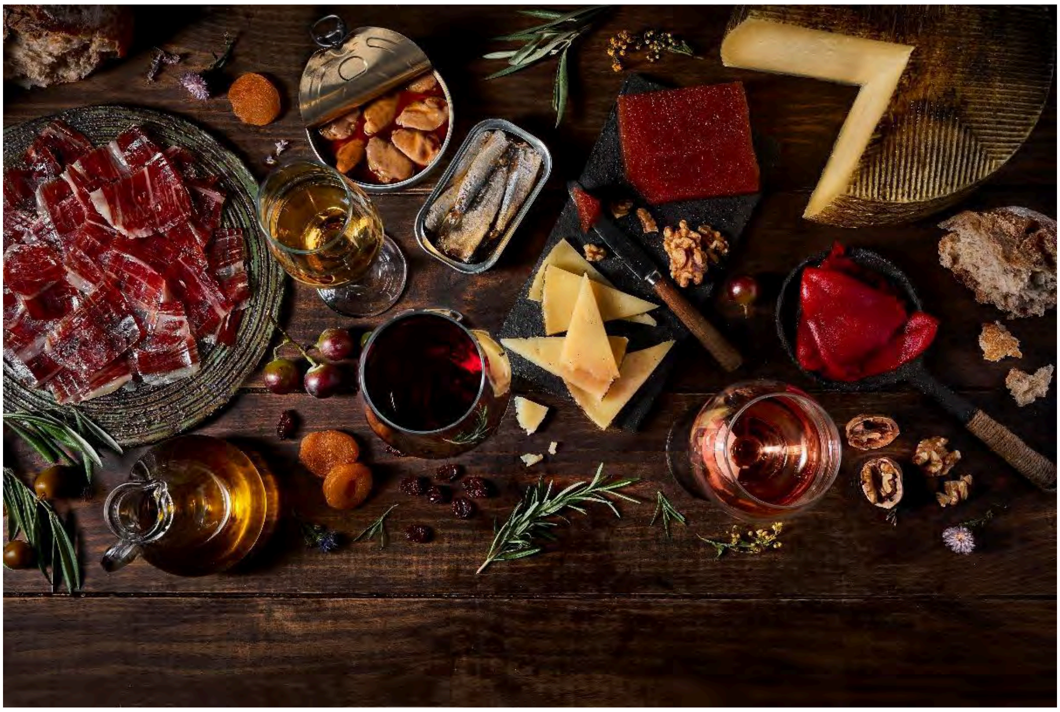
1) **Food Summit Panel Discussion** — A panel of experts discussed recommendations for Spanish food producers to succeed in the United States market.
2) **Food pitch exhibition** — three producers from Spain presented their companies and products to a panel of experts.
3) **Wine Summit Panel Discussion** — A panel of experts discussed recommendations for Spanish wine and alcohol producers to succeed in the United States market.

The Summit panels were composed of leading, respected professionals from the food, beverage, wine, and alcohol sectors. These experts have a profound knowledge and understanding of the market and current trends and were willing and able to offer their insights and recommendations for action to help inform the U.S. strategies of Spain's foods and wines producers.

This document reflects the compilation of the Summit discussions and conclusions.

1.1.

Project scope & objectives 2025



The theme for this year's Summit was "Winning in the U.S. Market." In prior years, the Summit focused on actions that the Trade Commission and other trade promotion groups can take to help Spanish producers. This year, the focus shifted to actions that Spanish producers can take to maximize their chances of success in the US market.

The Trade Commission, on behalf of ICEX and MAPA, hired Vdriven, a consulting and brokerage firm in the United States specializing in helping small and medium brands grow their business in the food and beverage industry. Vdriven prepared case studies of eight food companies and eight wine and alcohol companies. From these case studies emerged a set of six recommendations for food and beverage companies and six recommendations for alcohol companies to succeed in the US.

Vdriven, in partnership with the Trade Commission, convened the Advisory Councils on September 15 (see attached report for more detail) to seek input on these recommendations. Based on their diverse experiences in the industry, council members provided input to support, refute, validate, or refine the recommendations.

The Summit shared highlights from the case studies, the recommendations and insights from the Advisory Councils, and provided a forum for the Summit panelists to share their insights, as well as answer questions from the audience.

Food panelists brought a range of viewpoints, including food service, retail, distribution, and importing.

The wine panel comprised a range of viewpoints, including importers, distributors, retailers, bars and restaurants, and wine journalists.

The Summit and the Great Match were held at José Andrés' Mercado Little Spain in New York, with an audience of invited guests from the industry and relevant media.

1.2.

Food Summit Panel Members

Luke Abbott (Moderator)
Founder and CEO of Vdriven, Former President of KeHE Monterrey Provision, and Jimbo's Naturally

Luke Abbott, Founder and CEO of Vdriven, is a serial entrepreneur, consultant and leading voice of innovation in the food industry. As the former President of Monterey Provision, a national food distributor, he scaled the company's revenue from $32 million to over $250 million while successfully launching three startups. Luke's teaching contributions as a Professor of Supply Chain at the University of San Diego have helped equip the next generation of business leaders with practical insights and real-world experience. Today, he leverages his deep expertise and industry connections to help emerging brands scale and succeed in the retail market.

John Lawson
Forager at Whole Foods Market

John Lawson is a Local Forager at Whole Foods Market, with more than two decades of experience in sourcing, purchasing, and supplier partnerships. In his current role, John specializes in identifying and promoting high-quality local and emerging food and beverage brands, particularly within the New York and Boston metro markets. In addition to his role at Whole Foods Market, John is a board member for Naturally New York. His work on the board centers on an ongoing endeavor to support, grow, and build leadership in the natural, organic, and sustainable CPG industry in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut.

Dan Portnoy
Former Chief Merchandising Officer at the Fresh Market

Dan has 40+ years of experience in leading transformative change in the food & beverage industries. He currently is an operating partner for both Shore Capital Partners and Ronin Equity Partners. Most recently Dan was the CMO for The Fresh Market, and led branding, merchandising and marketing efforts. Prior to this, Dan was the Chief Merchandising & Marketing Officer for Winn Dixie, and was President & CEO of Kings/Balducci's, a division of Marks & Spencer. He was SVP Sales & Marketing for Cott Corp in Toronto and a Group Vice President for Daymon Worldwide, the leading private label marketing firm. He now is active in advisory work specializing in sales & marketing opportunities in the retail/CPG space.

Pere Selles
Branded Products Manager at José Andrés Group

Pere Selles was born in Barcelona and has lived in the US for the last 35 years. In 1998 he founded the specialty food import company Power-Selles Imports (Culinary Collective) that specializes in importing food products from Spain. He created the brand "Matiz" for the US Market. Over 26 years the Company became a leader in importing Spanish food products. Culinary Collective was sold to a Canadian Corporation in 2021. In 2021, he created Olo Foods, a consulting firm for several Spanish Manufacturers. In 2023, he was hired by Chef Jose Andres to lead the branded product portfolio of Jose Andres Foods.

Wine Summit Panel Members

Brandon Borcoman (moderator)
Writer-at-Large & Reviewer for Northwest Spain, Wine Enthusiast

Brandon Borcoman is a Writer-at-Large for Wine Enthusiast and reviews wines from Northwest Spain including Castilla y Leon, Extremadura, and Galicia for the magazine. Borcoman is the founder and owner of Vin-Decision, a company that has provided more than 600 in-person tastings and virtual wine experiences around the globe. Previously, Borcoman was the wine director at Charlie Bird in NYC for five years, where he gained a deep knowledge of fine varietals and vintages. Borcoman holds a Master of Fine Arts in poetry from The New School and a Master of Arts in English literature from The City College of New York (CCNY). Borcoman is a published poet, teaches composition at CCNY, and is pursuing his PhD at CUNY.

Susan Kilgore
SVP of Marketing at Deutsch Family Wine & Spirits

Susan Kilgore is a seasoned marketing executive with over 25 years of experience driving brand growth and innovation in the CPG and wine & spirits industries. As Senior Vice President of Commercial Marketing at Deutsch Family Wine and Spirits, she led transformative initiatives—from launching award-winning products to building the company's first shopper marketing function. Her strategic leadership has consistently delivered higher ROI, stronger brand equity, and breakthrough campaigns. Susan is also a dedicated mentor and advocate for talent development, known for blending data-driven insights with creative vision.

Patrick Mata
Spanish Distributor

Patrick Mata is the co-founder of Olé & Obrigado, a leading importer of artisanal wines from Spain and Portugal. Born in Málaga, Spain into a winemaking family, Mata launched the company in 1999 while still in college. What began with one winery has grown into a portfolio of over 75 producers, all selected for their regional authenticity, sustainable practices, and quality. Recognized as a driving force in the U.S. wine industry, Mata was named a "40 Under 40 Tastemaker" by *Wine Enthusiast* and "Personality of the Year" by *The Wine Advocate*. Food & Wine also included him among the top 10 importers of Spanish wine.

Clay Risen
Writer and Author at The New York Times

Clay Risen is a reporter for The New York Times with two decades of experience covering the spirits industry. He is the author of six books on whiskey, including "Bourbon: The Story of Kentucky Whiskey," "Single Malt: A Guide to the Whiskies of Scotland," and "American Whiskey, Bourbon and Rye," which has sold more than 125,000 copies across two editions.

Gretchen Thomas
Chief Creative Officer at Barcelona Wine Bars

Gretchen Thomas is the Chief Creative Officer for Barcelona Wine Bar, where she oversees one of the largest Spanish wine programs in the United States. The program has received numerous awards including "Best Organic Wine List in the World" by World of Fine Wine Magazine.Thomas was previously the Wine & Spirits Director of Barteca Restaurant Group, the parent company of Barcelona Wine Bar and bartaco. At Barteca, Thomas built the beverage programs for Barcelona Wine Bar and bartaco over her 17-year tenure. She is a certified Spanish Wine Educator and has developed and taught numerous classes.

Julie Wagner
Director of European Wine (excluding France) and Oceania at Total Wine & More

Julie Wagner has over eight years of experience in the wine industry and is a Director of Wine at Total Wine & More, the leading wine retailer in the United States. She oversees the European portfolio, along with Australia, New Zealand, and Japan, managing categories, assortment, and supplier partnerships. Having spent six years living in Germany and Italy, Julie brings a global perspective and deep appreciation for the families and traditions behind the wines she curates. She is passionate about translating those stories into meaningful experiences for customers and inspiring them to discover new favorites.

2

Food

2.1.

Insights from the Summit Panel

The Summit panel's perspectives closely aligned with those of the Advisory Council's, reaching consistent conclusions on key themes. For additional detail on the Advisory Council's recommendations, refer to the Appendix.

Recommendation #1: Challenge conventional wisdom

Even in crowded or commoditized categories, brands have an opportunity to capture consumer attention through new design, taste, packaging, and marketing. What matters is execution: entrepreneurs can redefine category mores long thought as "off limits," as recent brands have done by elevating tinned fish.

Conventions become mutable when brands show consumers a better or more exciting way or reimagine a prior standard. However, there are limits: reinvention should not feel too far out of step with how consumers already experience a category.

Key takeaway for Spanish companies: don't assume you are completely bound by convention. Any category can be redefined by bringing quality and creativity. Ensure that the positioning makes sense for how US consumers shop and consume the product.

Recommendation #2: Do something novel

Novelty can drive trial and repeat purchasing in food, whether through packaging changes, new placements, or formats. Small shifts, such as the olive oil company Graza bottling in a plastic squeeze bottle to make the product easier to use, can transform awareness, especially when the novelty appeals to a consumer need. Novelty must feel intuitive so it's easy for the consumer to understand and use. In Graza's case, it provided a benefit, not a gimmick.

Done well, novelty drives attention and drives trial without alienating existing category buyers.

Key takeaway for Spanish brands: use novelty as a means to stand out, but anchor it in how US consumers already shop. Innovation can drive curiosity, but not confusion.

Recommendation #3: Launch bullets before cannonballs

Spanish companies may underestimate the complexity of the US market, treating it as a single, uniform opportunity. In reality, success comes from starting small, learning fast, and scaling only after proving the fundamentals

Launching "bullets"—smaller, lower-cost tests in select geographies—helps avoid expensive, larger-scale failures. These early pilots reveal who is buying, who is not, and why. They allow brands to refine their product, packaging, and price points before committing to large-scale distribution.

Equally important, beginning with controlled launches lets companies stress-test their supply chains. Scaling too quickly without this stress test can lead to operational breakdowns, hidden costs, or underperformance at major accounts.

Key takeaway for Spanish brands: start with a handful of SKUs in one or a few regional markets, analyze performance, and use the insights to refine positioning and execution. After validating product-market fit, the target consumer, supply chain capability, and a successful marketing formula, brands can more confidently launch the "cannonball" of a broader rollout.

Recommendation #4: Niche-in at the beginning

Niching-in means finding and winning over a focused audience first. Whether through food service, specific retail channels, or cultural groups, targeting a niche helps brands build loyalty and credibility before broadening out. Chefs and other early adopters, in particular, can set trends that ripple across the market.

A risk is choosing a niche that's too narrow or trend-driven, leaving little room for growth. The goal is to identify an authentic niche with room to scale, not just a temporary fad.

Key takeaway for Spanish companies: start with a clear niche and let your early adopters amplify your brand. But choose a niche that has durability, not just hype.

Recommendation #5: Develop a tailored route to market

Bringing a product to the US should not involve haphazard distribution expansion. Success requires research, strong relationships, and disciplined execution.

Listening is critical: to retailers, distributors, and especially to consumers at the shelf. The best data comes from conversations with stakeholders, not just reports. Use that information to create tailored, focused strategies.

Key takeaway for Spanish companies: build your route to market with precision. Adapt to US norms where needed. Focus on fewer, deeper relationships backed by strong execution.

Recommendation #6: Choose your partners carefully.

The right partners (e.g. consultants, distributors, or brokers) can make or break US market entry. Strong relationships are two-fold commitments: brands drive direction and strategy whereas partners represent the brand and fulfill orders.

Outsourcing everything to third parties can be a mistake. Brands that stay close to the market, maintain direct relationships to retailers and distributors, and actively support sales on shelf have greater context and knowledge to drive appropriate strategy.

Partner selection should be a careful process. What works for one brand may not work for another because each partner has its own area of expertise. Having planned a tailored route to market first, brands can select partners best-positioned to help them execute on those plans.

Key takeaway for Spanish brands: pick partners that have expertise in the targeted market segment. Stay actively involved with distributors and retailers; don't hand over all communication and control.

Pitch Exhibition

Three companies pitched to a panel of industry veterans with decades of experience selecting brands for major national retailers. The pitches featured olive oil, tinned seafood, and dried pimenton.

Common questions that came up among the panel of experts included:

- What is your retail shelf price in the United States?
- How does your shelf price compare to the competition?
- What is the origin story behind your product?
- If your order volume increases, can your supply chain fulfill those orders?
- Is your packaging clear, distinctive, and easy for consumers to understand at shelf?

3

Wine

3.1.

Insights from the Summit Panel

The Summit panel's perspectives closely aligned with those of the Advisory Council's, reaching consistent conclusions on key themes. For additional detail on the Advisory Council's recommendations, refer to the Appendix.

Recommendation #1: Be true to your story– and tell it

Consumers in the US want to understand the people, values, and passion behind the brand. Even if brands don't have a founding story that is centuries old, they can lean into the vision of its founders, the craftsmanship of its product, or the principles that guide production. In short, all brands have a story to tell.

Equally important is how and when the story is told. Consumers need to hear of the brand before the moment of purchase: through social media, from bartenders and sommeliers at restaurants and bars they visit, and at retailers. This builds awareness and credibility so that by the time the consumer is making a purchase, they already understand its value proposition and can have confidence in their decision.

Key takeaway for Spanish companies: be honest and authentic in storytelling. Identify the elements of the brand that resonate the most with consumers and communicate them consistently through the trade and direct-to-consumer channels. A real, well-told story is more powerful than a fabricated heritage.

Recommendation #2: Do something novel, surprising

Innovation is a core driver of growth in the US spirits and wine market. Every year, there are hundreds of new entrants but only a handful succeed in capturing the attention of consumers. Novelty captures attention, through levers such as bold packaging, new varietals, new formats, or even the alcohol-concentration of the beverage. Consumers also increasingly expect brands to align with values like sustainability or employee welfare.

Adhering completely to existing category norms risks blending into the background, making it hard to differentiate a brand. Taking well-placed risks, when rooted in authenticity, creates memorability and can open entirely new consumer segments.

Key takeaway for Spanish companies: producers need not rely on tradition alone. Differentiate with a novel twist, whether in packaging, product, or values, that feels authentic and makes consumers take notice.

Recommendation #3: Niche-in at the start

The US market is too large and fragmented for a broad launch across the country from day one. Brands that start with a clear niche, such as a specific terroir, a unique varietal, an unusual cultural identity, or an unusual demographic, build loyal early adopters who form the foundation for growth.

The best niches are those with staying power, beyond fleeting trends. That way, the brand can remain authentic and expand later without losing credibility.

Key takeaway for Spanish brands: focus first on a narrow, well-defined audience. Prove value there, then build outward after establishing loyalty and resonance.

Recommendation #4: Invest in trade education

Retailers, restaurants, and bars shape what consumers buy and drink, yet many brands treat trade education as an afterthought, or assume the distributors will represent them well with the trade without additional investment. Done well, trade education isn't a sales pitch but a value-added learning experience that equips trade to tell the story behind a product, explain how to use it, and recommend it confidently.

Effective tools for trade education events include clear one-pagers and engaging in-person classes and tastings. The education should make the product memorable.

Key takeaway for Spanish brands: prioritize trade education as a marketing investment. Equipping the trade to champion the brand multiplies reach and influence at the point of sale.

Recommendation #5: Leverage your regional groups

Regional development groups can extend marketing budgets and increase visibility in ways individual producers cannot. Pooled resources support research, consumer education, and promotional campaigns that highlight a region's identity.

For new brands, regional affiliation often builds trust faster than brand identity alone. It is easier for a US consumer to understand and accept a new product "From a place you know."

Key takeaway for Spanish companies: use regional groups strategically to amplify reach and credibility. Lead with the strengths of a region, then layer in what makes each brand unique.

Recommendation #6: Invest in your marketing channels wisely

The US has a three-tier distribution system: vineyards and winemakers are required to use distributors when working with retailers, restaurants, and other institutions. Because of this, the consumer is further removed from the brand, and so how you market matters. Each audience requires a tailored marketing approach. Additionally, simply copying another brand's playbook rarely works – success depends on designing an approach that aligns to the brand's unique audience and long-term strategy.

Growth comes from clarity on what makes each brand different, who its consumer is, and how best to reach the buyer at each tier in the market.

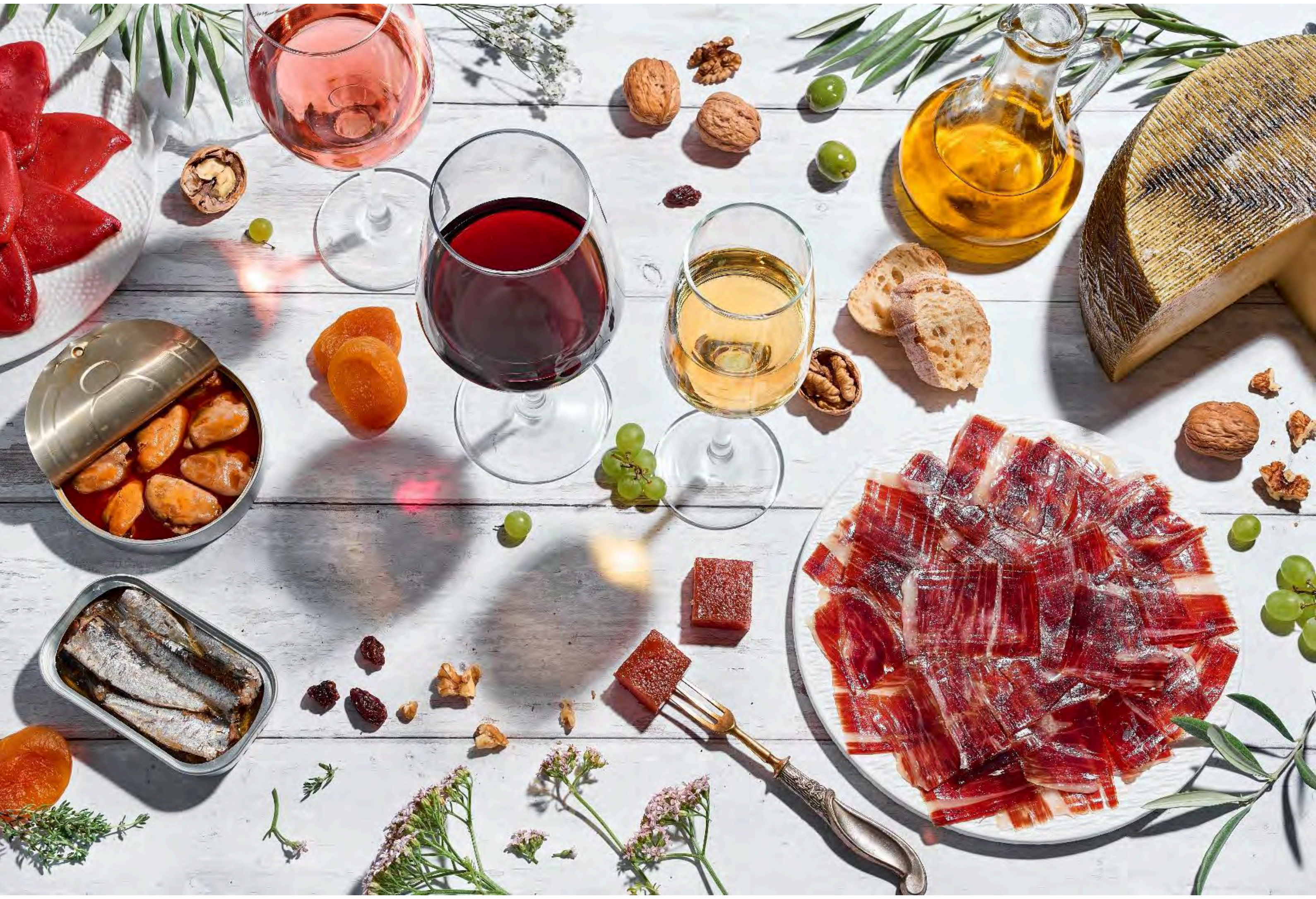
Key takeaway for Spanish companies: be strategic with marketing investments. Understand the intended audience, target the right channels, and tailor the approach to distributors, retailers, restaurants, and consumers, separately.

4

Appendix

#SpainFoodNation

Advisory Councils



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1

#SpainFoodNation Advisory Councils

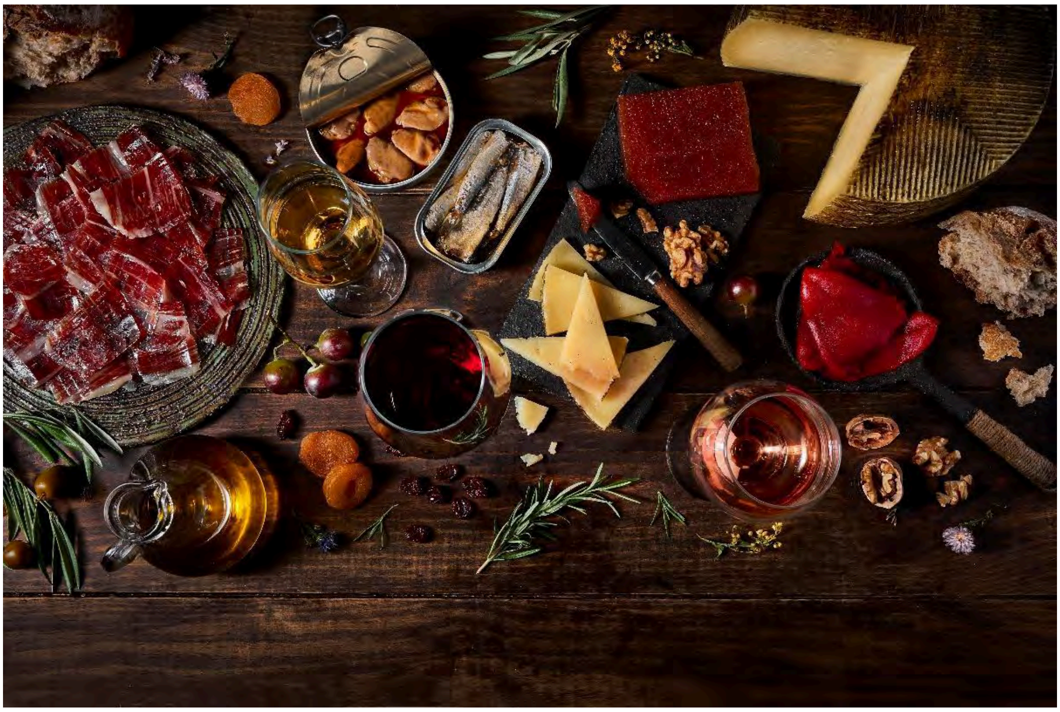
The Advisory Councils are composed of leading, well-respected professionals from the wine, food, and beverages sectors. These experts have a profound knowledge and understanding of the market and current trends and are willing and able to offer recommendations and guidelines for action to help inform the strategies of Spain's wines and food producers in the market.

The Advisory Councils discuss and debate a set of issues identified beforehand by Spain´s Economic and Commercial Offices, which are tasked with leading the councils' meetings, at their premises. Given that the features, channels, agents, media, and regulatory framework differ for wine/alcoholic beverages and food, the Advisory Councils' discussion groups meet in separate sessions, with each analysing the sector concerned.

This document reflects the compilation of both Advisory Councils' discussions and conclusions.

1.1.

Project scope & objectives 2025



The theme for this year's Advisory Councils was "Unlocking the Road to Winning in the U.S. Market." In prior years, these panels have focused on actions that the Trade Commission and other trade promotion groups can take to help Spanish producers. This year, the focus shifted to actions that Spanish producers should take to maximize their chances of success in the US market.

The Trade Commission, on behalf of ICEX and MAPA, hired Vdriven, a consulting and brokerage firm in the United States specializing in helping small and medium brands grow in the food and beverage industry. Vdriven prepared case studies of eight food companies and eight wine and alcohol companies. From these case studies emerged a set of six recommendations for food and beverage companies and six recommendations for alcohol companies to succeed in the US.

We convened the Advisory Councils to seek input on these recommendations. Based on their diverse experiences in the industry, we asked council members to help us support, refute, validate, or refine our recommendations.

1.2.
Methodology

Food

Companies for the case studies were selected in consultation with the Trade Commission of Spain in New York. The food cases included six food companies, one beverage company, and one supplement company. Four of these companies were small or emerging specialty brands in the United States, illustrating how domestic brands have navigated the US market. The other four companies source their products abroad; two are US-based and source in Spain, one is US-based and sources in Australia and New Zealand, and one is Colombia-based, selling in the US.

Prior years' Spain Food Nation programming in New York placed a greater emphasis on food service, which in the US comprises sales to restaurants, hospitality, institutional dining, and manufacturing. While some of the companies in our case studies and the expertise of our panelists included food service, this year, the Trade Commission placed a greater focus on branded retail products (branded products sold in a grocery store).

Each sector of the US food and beverage market has pros and cons. In food service, highly competitive segments can be lower margin than retail, whereas less competitive segments of food service can allow for higher margins than retail. At the same time, because the end consumer (for example a restaurant patron) is not making the ingredient buying decision in food service, vendors are more susceptible to buyers shifting suppliers without the end customer even knowing.

Retail offers the promise of giving producers more control over their destiny: the power of building a brand and connecting directly with consumers, and typically allows for lower cost of capital and higher valuations by investors. However, participating in retail can come at great peril and expense. Vendors do not sell directly to consumers in offline channels and must navigate a thicket of distributors, brokers, and retailers to get their products in the hands of consumers. Each of these middlemen takes some margin and typically requires the vendor to indemnify the middlemen for many expenses. Securing shelf space and gaining consumers' attention can be challenging. Failing in retail can be quite costly.

Against this backdrop, we invited our council to share its food service and retail expertise. Our panel represented a range of viewpoints, including food service, retail, distribution, and importing.

Wine

The companies for the case studies were selected in consultation with the Trade Commission of Spain in New York. We prepared eight case studies of alcohol-related companies: four wine producers, two alcohol products, one distributor, and one nonalcoholic beverage company. Similar to our set of food case studies, four of our alcohol companies source domestically in the US and four are sourced abroad.

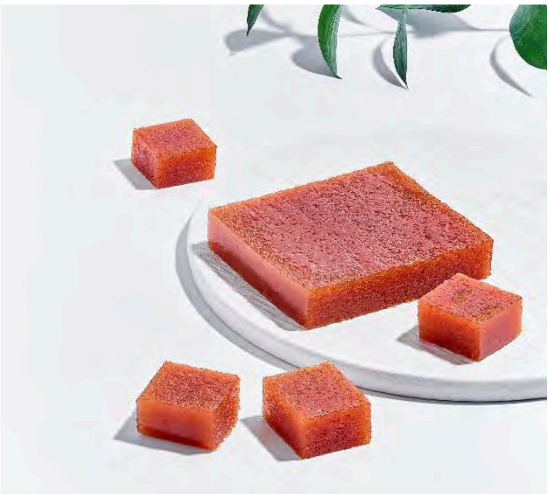
Each sector of the wine and alcohol market has its own pros and cons. The on-premise channel comprises restaurants and hospitality venues where customers order from a menu, in person. Off-premise comprises various retail channels, including grocery stores, specialty alcohol stores, and online sales. As described above in the food methodology section, companies find success in different subspaces within these larger channels. However, unlike for food vendors, on-premise has a far greater influence on off-premise sales, particularly in certain product categories, such as wines from niche appellations and emerging spirits. In other words, bartenders and sommeliers can be "taste makers" who identify new and up-and-coming products and serve them in their on-premise venues, prompting consumers to purchase these products for consumption at home. Understanding how its products fit into this patchwork of channels is crucial for producers to be successful.

The US wine market has been challenging over the past 5 years. While dollar values have increased with inflation and premiumization, case volume (and therefore liters shipped) has contracted.[1] While growth in the total market has been challenging, individual companies can still succeed in a large and diverse market.

Against this backdrop, we invited our council to share its expertise on how alcohol producers from Spain can succeed in today's US market environment. Our panel comprised a range of viewpoints, including importers, distributors, retailers, and a wine writer.

Food and wine

We analyzed these cases along four key success factors: product and differentiation, brand and positioning, promotion, and distribution. Where available, we looked at the people and partnerships that brands used to succeed.



[1] Wine Institute
https://wineinstitute.org/our-industry/statistics/california-us-wine-sales/

1.3.

Food Advisory Council Members

Luke Abbott (Moderator)
Founder and CEO of Vdriven, Former President of KeHE Monterrey Provision, and Jimbo's Naturally

Luke Abbott, Founder and CEO of Vdriven, is a serial entrepreneur, consultant and leading voice of innovation in the food industry. As the former President of Monterey Provision, a national food distributor, he scaled the company's revenue from $32 million to over $250 million while successfully launching three startups. Luke's teaching contributions as a Professor of Supply Chain at the University of San Diego have helped equip the next generation of business leaders with practical insights and real-world experience. Today, he leverages his deep expertise and industry connections to help emerging brands scale and succeed in the retail market.

Andrea Berti
President, Cheese Importers Association of America (CIAA)
Senior Director, Atalanta Corporation

Andrea Berti serves as President of the Cheese Importers Association of America (CIAA) and Senior Director at Atalanta Corporation, leading the Cheese & Deli Imports division. Andrea began his career in the food business at a young age in Italy, working in his family's specialty food store. After moving to the United States, he entered the import business in 2006 and has since built a distinguished career in international food trade. At Atalanta, Andrea has expanded the company's Spanish portfolio—from Manchego cheese to Jamón Ibérico and Spanish octopus – across both retail and foodservice channels.

Patty Dicarlo
Former Deli Category Manager at Sprouts Farmers Market

Patty Dicarlo is a transformational leader with 30+ years of success driving growth, innovation, and profitability across the specialty food industry, including retail, manufacturing, distribution, and brokerage. She is known for building high-performing teams, forging strategic vendor partnerships, and delivering category strategies that scale nationally. Patty is recognized for advancing specialty deli and cheese programs into growth engines by blending consumer insight with disciplined P&L management. She is skilled at curating assortments and anticipating trends that connect with today's shoppers while shaping tomorrow's retail and foodservice landscape.

Alejandro Espinal
President, AF International Inc.

Alejandro Espinal is a global business strategist with over 25 years of experience in marketing, strategic planning, business development, and market intelligence. He specializes in helping international companies structure compelling value propositions and navigate go-to-market strategies—particularly for entry and expansion into the U.S. market and their core regional territories. As founder and president of AF International in Miami, Alejandro has led over 1,700 projects across North America, Europe, Latin America, Asia, and the Caribbean.

John Lawson
Forager at Whole Foods Market

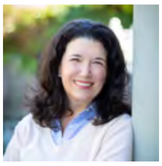
John Lawson is a Local Forager at Whole Foods Market, with over two decades of experience in sourcing, purchasing, and supplier partnerships. In his current role, John identifies and promotes high-quality local and emerging food and beverage brands, particularly within the New York and Boston metro markets. In addition to his role at Whole Foods Market, John is a board member for Naturally New York. His work on the board centers on an ongoing endeavor to support, grow, and build leadership in the natural, organic, and sustainable CPG industry in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut.

Alex Raij
New York Restaurant Operator, Txikito

Alex Raij is a first-generation Argentine-American who grew up in the Midwest, attended culinary school, and lived in Milan and the Pacific Northwest before falling in love with Basque chef Eder Montero. Together, they have opened five restaurants. Alex and Eder are six-time James Beard Award Semifinalists for Best Chef: New York City and Finalists in the 2019 Outstanding Restaurateur category. *The Basque Book: A Love Story in Recipes from the Kitchen of Txikito* is Alex's deeply personal writer's debut inspired by home cooking traditions of the Basque country.

Brian Scott
CEO, Gourmet Foods International (GFI)

Brian Scott has served as President and CEO of Gourmet Foods International (GFI) since 2017, following a steady rise through sales leadership roles since joining the company in 2002. With prior experience at Hormel Foods, Brian has driven GFI's rapid growth in retail and food service distribution. He oversees a national network of 12 distribution centers, leading initiatives in marketing, operations, and value-added services. Under his leadership, GFI has embraced a mission to change lives through good food, while advancing digital transformation and supply chain efficiency. His strategic focus includes predictive analytics, compressed supply chains, and building meaningful customer relationships in B2B and B2C channels.



Jennifer Sussman
VP of Category Management, The Chefs' Warehouse, Inc.

Jennifer Sussman brings 25 years of expertise in the specialty food industry and currently serves as Vice President of Category Management at The Chefs' Warehouse. A premier distributor, The Chefs' Warehouse partners with restaurants, hotels, country clubs, and fine food retailers across North America and abroad. Importing products from all over the world, and with access to over 3,000 suppliers and nearly 100,000 SKUs, Jennifer's leadership ensures the company delivers world-class ingredients and products while upholding the highest standards of quality, service, and innovation.

Wine Advisory Councils Members

Jen Schenker (Moderator)
Former Director of Loyalty Programs, Total Wine & More

Jennifer Schenker, Vdriven's wine consultant, brings together a lifelong passion for wine and hospitality with a career devoted to creating memorable customer experiences. At Total Wine & More, she designed and launched the company's loyalty program, giving millions of wine lovers access to rare allocations, private tastings, and intimate events that deepened their connection to wine culture. She also worked at American Express, where she helped shape dining and hospitality partnerships, connecting cardmembers to exceptional restaurants and culinary experiences. Jennifer thrives at the intersection of wine, food, and community, and she is especially inspired by the role Spanish wines play in celebrating tradition, culture, and shared tables.

Annalise Friedel
Manager of Spain, Portugal, and Australia/NZ Wines at Total Wine

Annalise Friedel is a wine retail professional with nearly 10 years of experience in category management, supplier partnerships, and strategic sourcing. As Buyer for Spanish and Portuguese imports at Total Wine & More, she curates assortments that reflect market trends and the rich stories behind each bottle. With a passion for wine history, travel, and winemaking traditions, Annalise focuses on connecting the care and legacy of winemaking families to the customer experience.

Alex Joerger
wine.com

Alex Joerger is the Chief Merchandising Officer at Wine.com, the leading online wine and spirits retailer in the USA. His wine industry experience spans over 20 years, starting at boutique NYC-based retailer Best Cellars in 2002 as a Wine Buyer. In 2007, Alex joined the A&P Supermarket chain as Director of Wine Beer & Spirits before moving to California in 2014 to take over as Director & Divisional Merchandise Manager of Wine, Beer & Spirits at World Market until 2020.

Susan Kilgore
SVP of Marketing at Deutsch Family Wine & Spirits

Susan Kilgore is a seasoned marketing executive with over 25 years of experience driving brand growth and innovation in the CPG and wine & spirits industries. As Senior Vice President of Commercial Marketing at Deutsch Family Wine and Spirits, she led transformative initiatives—from launching award-winning products to building the company's first shopper marketing function. Her strategic leadership has consistently delivered higher ROI, stronger brand equity, and breakthrough campaigns. Susan is also a dedicated mentor and advocate for talent development, known for blending data-driven insights with creative vision.

Melanie Mann
Principal Category Merchant at Whole Foods Market

Melanie Mann is Whole Foods Market's Senior Team Leader for Wine Category Merchants. With a relentless dedication to sourcing wines that weave compelling narratives and uphold impeccable quality, Melanie stands at the forefront of crafting a wine selection that resonates with the values of Whole Foods Market's discerning customers. In her role as the leader of the team responsible for curating all wines stocked in over 450 stores across the United States, Melanie's passion for her work shines through in the diversity of wines available at Whole Foods Market. A pivotal focus for Melanie and her team are production practices, including organic and biodynamic practices, worker responsibility, social responsibility initiatives, environmental impact, and more.

Patrick Mata
Spanish Distributor

Patrick Mata co-founded Olé & Obrigado, a leading importer of artisanal wines from Spain and Portugal. Born in Málaga, Spain, into a winemaking family, Mata launched the company in 1999 while still in college. What began with one winery has grown into a portfolio of over 75 producers, all selected for their regional authenticity, sustainable practices, and quality. Recognized as a driving force in the U.S. wine industry, Mata was named a "40 Under 40 Tastemaker" by *Wine Enthusiast* and "Personality of the Year" by *The Wine Advocate*. Food & Wine also included him among the top 10 importers of Spanish wine.

Clay Risen
Writer and Author at The New York Times

Clay Risen is a reporter for The New York Times with two decades of experience covering the spirits industry. He is the author of six books on whiskey, including "Bourbon: The Story of Kentucky Whiskey," "Single Malt: A Guide to the Whiskies of Scotland," and "American Whiskey, Bourbon and Rye," which has sold more than 125,000 copies across two editions.

Lily Volpe
Head of Marketing & Brand Strategist at MGX

Lily Volpe is a brand strategist and independent consultant with over 25 years of experience in the wine & spirits industry. She began her career at Deutsch Family Wine & Spirits, leading the U.S. launch and brand strategy for [yellow tail] and later serving on the executive team responsible for new product development, company strategy, and consumer research. More recently, as MGX's first Head of Marketing, she spearheaded the company's rebranding and repositioning, building the foundation for its next growth phase and unifying its divisions under a cohesive identity as a trusted logistics partner to the industry.

2

Food

2.1.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Challenge conventional wisdom: contrarian ideas often bring the greatest opportunity.

Contrarian ideas can create opportunity, primarily when anchored in product quality. For example, tinned products, once seen as a commodity, can be repositioned as premium if taste delivers.

Recommendation #2: Do something novel for your space, such as packaging, storytelling, positioning, product, or route to market.

Novelty works best when anchored to practicality. Chef partnerships, co-branding, and smart placement (e.g., olive oil with secondary placement in the produce section) attract new consumers and help them see new use occasions. Retail realities still matter: don't disrupt planograms or ignore size constraints.

Recommendation #3: Launch bullets before cannonballs: start small; test and refine ideas, products, fit, and messaging to develop a winning formula before investing in expansion. Failing in large-scale US retail is very expensive.

Launching in the US is only the first step to success. Making sure products sell is an iterative process. Small tests (e.g., 3-5 SKUS in a few markets) allow refinement of pricing, packaging, and messaging.

Recommendation #4: Niche-in at the beginning: find the group with whom your product resonates and build out from there.

Breadth can dilute resources, whereas focus builds targeted momentum. Brands have found success by focusing on building goodwill and awareness with early adopters who spread the brand by word of mouth and validate expansion.

Recommendation #5: Develop a tailored route to market: having a product available for purchase in the US is not enough to drive sales; create granular plans by channel, by geography, and by segment.

Brands increase their probability of success by defining category fit, pricing, and channel priorities before launch. Distribution partners can help, but are more focused on execution. Adapting formats for the US market and ensuring regulatory compliance are essential.

Recommendation #6: Choose your partners carefully: successful companies recognize their core competencies and choose experienced local US partners, e.g. design, importing, marketing, distribution, and brokerage.

The US food business is relationship-driven; professionalism and consistency matter. Choosing the wrong partner can stall or even derail momentum, while the right partner can accelerate growth by opening doors and shaping strategy.

2.2.

Summary of case studies

Review of our food case studies (1/2)

Company	Category	What they did	Insight	Origin
[illegible]	Supplements	Redesigned product and packaging; sought specialized partners for regulatory compliance and feedback from retailers	What works in another country may not work in the US - need to be willing to iterate	Colombia
COCONUT CULT	Coconut Yogurt	Created a novel niche in a crowded shelf space with extremely high probiotic content and relatable social media	Lean in to authenticity and emotional connection with the brand to drive scale	US
[illegible]	Tinned Fish	Introduced Iberian premium tinned fish and seafood with brash branding in the previously staid segment	Even in the most seemingly traditional categories there is room for innovation	Spain & Portugal
GRAZA	Olive Oil	Used packaging to simplify purchase based on functional use case, while bringing a premium product to mass market	Put yourself in the mind of your consumer and how they interact with your product in real-world settings	Spain

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Review of our food case studies (2/2)

Company	Category	What they did	Insight	Origin
NYrture NEW YORK NATTO	Natto	Made the best natto available in the US (outside Japan), focused on premium artisanal niche	Embrace constraints of artisanal production as strategic advantages	US
pri	Manuka Honey	Introduced manuka honey to the US and maintained its position by emphasizing product quality and introducing lower price points	Refresh go-to-market approaches and marketing strategy periodically based on evolving market conditions	Australia & New Zealand
SPRING & MULBERRY	Chocolate Bars	Created product sweetened with dates, resonating with consumers focused on avoiding sugar and non-caloric sweeteners	Find ways to adapt your product to align with your target segment while staying true to the original brand promise	US
three trees	Plant-Based Milk	Redefined a premium nut milk that is refrigerated with no additives, instead of prior shelf-stable products with additives	A values-driven brand can outperform with discipline, focus, and excellent execution	US

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2.3.

Insights from Advisory Council

The US food market can be a land of opportunity but also a minefield of complexity and costs. Entry costs are high, consumers are fickle, and buyers are overwhelmed with options. Success does not come from one formula but from a combination of clear strategy, patience, and adaptability. The following six recommendations draw from our case studies and our panelists' industry experience to highlight different approaches that have worked for brands in the US.

Recommendation #1: Challenge conventional wisdom: contrarian ideas often bring the greatest opportunity.

Conventional wisdom in food is often treated as inviolable, e.g., canned foods are a commodity product. Yet history shows that the biggest breakthroughs can come from bending those rules. Emerging brands have done this, from Fishwife positioning tinned seafood as premium to Graza putting olive oil in plastic bottles, when conventional wisdom was that premium olive oil must be in glass. The plastic squeeze bottle allowed Graza to focus its marketing on the tangible benefit of being easier to use, without mess, and play to restaurant chefs' use of olive oil in squeeze bottles.

For foods from Spain, challenging convention means balancing familiarity with authenticity. Buyers and consumers need an anchor point to recognize what they are purchasing, but once that's established, the product can surprise them with a twist: a distinct flavor, a cultural story, or a new format. Importantly, packaging or novelty alone cannot sustain success. Taste and quality remain enduring differentiators.

Recommendation #2: Do something novel for your space, such as packaging, storytelling, positioning, product, or route to market.

Novelty draws attention, but only when it's tied to real consumer use. A tin of seafood may intrigue at retail but not in fine restaurants, where US customers expect freshly prepared food. By contrast, brands that introduce novelty with context (through chef partnerships, co-marketing, or new placements in the grocery store) often succeed. Graza olive oil partnered with Ithaca Hummus and Firehook Crackers, creating new occasions that helped consumers incorporate olive oil beyond cooking. Whole Foods gave Graza a secondary placement in produce, connecting it directly to fresh use cases.

Compelling storytelling resonates with the consumer by appealing to something they care about, such as values of the group they identify with (see below examples of niche groups), inspiring them to purchase the product.

For producers in Spain, novelty might mean festivals and events that tie products to moments of celebration or special packaging. Brands have succeeded by being novel but not ignoring retail realities: shelf height and category conventions matter. Novelty works in mainstream channels when it is different enough to catch and hold consumers' attention, but not so exotic so as to place itself out of reach.

Recommendation #3: Launch bullets before cannonballs: start small; test and refine ideas, products, fit, and messaging to develop a winning formula before investing in expansion. Failing in large-scale US retail is very expensive.

Brands can be tempted to go big quickly, but premature scale can cause brands to fail. Getting on-shelf at a retailer is only the first step; what matters is sales on-shelf. Without consumer education, sampling, and promotional support, products can fail to sell. Successful expansion usually follows iteration and learning.

Launching "bullets" (small, controlled tests, at a lower cost) allows brands to refine their positioning. Three to five SKUs, focused on one or a handful of markets, gives enough data to adapt packaging, adjust pricing, or reposition a product within the store. Regular reviews at three months, six months, and annually help assess progress. Successful brands commit resources for a "cannonball" expansion (a larger cash outlay) only once their bullets are hitting the target—once the brand has refined its product-market fit, including its packaging, core consumer profile, and value proposition to these consumers.

Recommendation #4: Niche-in at the beginning: find the group with whom your product resonates and build out from there.

"You can't be all things to all people at once." - Jennifer Sussman, Chef's Warehouse

Breadth can dilute resources; focus allows for building traction with its core proponents. Some of the most successful market entries have begun with niche strategies such as focusing on a single metro area (e.g., New York City) or entering through independent specialty retailers where hand-selling is possible. Brands can find niche groups by demographics, ethnicity, lifestyle or dietary choices, or in unexpected places, such as among followers of a celebrity or social media influencer.

Niche entry creates control and allows brands to build goodwill with early adopters, whose word of mouth is the strongest and most effective method of marketing. Relationships also develop more easily in niche environments, where founders and teams can connect directly with retailers, distributors, and consumers.

Starting niche is not a limitation: it is a strategy to stage growth, earn credibility, and lay the groundwork for expansion.

Recommendation #5: Develop a tailored route to market: having a product available for purchase in the US is not enough to drive sales; create granular plans by channel, by geography, and by segment.

“Strategy is putting yourself in a position where you’re going to win.” -Brian Scott, GFI

Some common pitfalls for brands are to confuse a plan for a strategy and to rely on their partners to formulate a strategy. Distributors can help ensure product stays stocked on shelves, but they do not create a brand’s strategy. That responsibility lies with the brand/producer. A tailored route to market requires clarity on where the product belongs, what price point it should hit, and which channel will be prioritized first.

For foods from Spain, tailoring often means adapting formats to US expectations. For example, an item sold frozen in Spain may succeed in the refrigerated section in the US. Size, color palettes, and packaging claims may all need to be adjusted for the US market. Compliance is critical: USDA approvals, tariffs, and labeling requirements can derail timelines (and be quite costly) if not adhered to. Retail cycles also differ: large retailers may review categories once every one or two years, while independents can bring in products throughout the year.

Recommendation #6: Choose your partners carefully: successful companies recognize their core competencies and choose experienced local US partners, e.g., design, importing, marketing, distribution, and brokerage.

“You do business with your friends” -Alejandro Espinal, AF International Inc

Relationships are the backbone of the US food industry. Brokers, distributors, and buyers are not interchangeable; they are service providers who commit time, resources, and credibility to a brand.

One path is to assess partnerships not only on reach but also on alignment. A good broker brings ideas and knowledge, not just access. A reliable distributor helps navigate compliance and packaging expectations. But even with partners in place, founders can choose to remain the spokespersons. Professionalism (e.g. polished websites, strong messaging, consistent follow-up) signals seriousness and builds trust. While expensive, attending US food shows can be an efficient way to meet potential partners face-to-face to assess whether to work together or continue working together.

In food, friendships are built through consistent execution, honest communication, and showing up. Choosing the right partners — and being the kind of partner that others want to work with — is central to long-term success.

Conclusion

Breaking into the US market is not easy, but the opportunity is significant. Brands have succeeded by challenging conventional wisdom, offering novelty, and focusing tightly, or tailoring their route to market. Still others have built success through careful partnerships.

For foods from Spain, the lesson is not that there is one correct path. Rather, these six recommendations highlight strategies that have worked for others and provide inspiration for approaching the market. What unites them is focus, authenticity, and consistency: staying true to the product and testing before scaling.

As Brian Scott of GFI stated, “Strategy is putting yourself in a position where you’re going to win.” Brands need to take responsibility for their own strategy and success, as no one else understands their business or is as invested in its success as the brand itself and its team. For producers willing to do the groundwork, the US market can reward that effort.

3

Wine

3.1.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Be true to your story– and tell it

Consumers seek authenticity and brands that reflect their values. Producers can succeed by showcasing heritage and translating the unfamiliar with comparisons to better-known products.

Recommendation #2: Do something novel, surprising

Novelty can break through the noise in a crowded market, but it works best when surprise is balanced with practicality. Distinctive labels, limited edition products, or surprising pairings spark interest without losing credibility.

Recommendation #3: Niche-in at the start

Targeted entry in selected metros, channels, consumer segments, or use cases allows concentration of effort and faster learning. Narrow wins can also help build credibility for expansion.

Recommendation #4: Invest in trade education

On-trade influencers e.g., bartenders and sommeliers, can be the most effective when they understand and believe in the product to sell it to consumers. Tasting events, in-person training, and pairings can give trade audiences the firsthand experience needed to be successful.

Recommendation #5: Leverage your regional groups

Regional groups and trade commissions can amplify impact by connecting wine to culture and heritage, energizing consumers. Tourism and media sponsorships can also extend reach.

Recommendation #6: Invest in your marketing channels wisely

Marketing can be effective without needing a massive budget. Some of the most impactful ways are to have clear product labeling and a simple yet professional online presence.

3.2.

Summary of case studies

Review of our wine case studies (1/2)

Company	Category	What they did	Insight	Origin
NONINO	Amaro	Capitalized on the trending "Paper Plane" cocktail to educate trade and drive growth and enthusiasm	Meet consumers where they are by embracing cultural moments and on-trade trends	Italy
Buffalo Trace	Bourbon Whiskey	Used deep heritage and scarcity-driven premiumization to position bourbon as a luxury product	Heritage and limited availability can be powerful tools to elevate traditional products	US
Day Drinking by Little Big Town	Canned Wine	Made wine casual, flavorful and accessible with the backing of celebrity founders Little Big Town	Packaging, tone, and flavors can reframe category norms and unlock new use occasions	US
IVDP, IP	Port Wine	Trade association acting to combat trends of declining market share in the US with coordinated marketing	Pooling resources in a heritage segment can amplify impact and be more efficient than working alone	Portugal

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Review of our wine case studies (2/2)

Company	Category	What they did	Insight	Origin
	White Wine	Created a category for a little known French wine, Picpoul de Pinet, by educating trade and focusing on on-premise placement	Use strategic trade placement to gain recognition and build demand	France
MAKER	Canned Wine	Repositioned canned wine as a premium, terroir-driven product amid anti-can bias	Lead with quality and transparent sourcing to address negative perceptions	US
THREE SPIRIT	Non Alc	Carved out a premium, wellness-driven niche with products crafted to mirror the moods people typically seek from alcohol	Understanding the "why" behind consumption patterns can open space for innovation	UK
WÖLFFER ESTATE	Wine	Elevated wine as a lifestyle product through aspirational branding and category expansion for a younger audience	Connecting to lifestyle and identity builds long-term brand affinity, especially among younger consumers	US

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3.3.

Insights from Advisory Council

The US is one of the most dynamic and challenging wine and spirits markets in the world. Every year, more and more entrants appear, yet only some achieve staying power. Competition is fierce, shelf space is limited, and consumer attention is fragmented. Still, opportunity exists for producers from Spain who can bring authenticity, quality, and imagination—and present these in ways that resonate with US buyers and consumers.

There is no single path to success. Different strategies have worked for different companies, and what proves effective for one may not be right for another. What follows are six areas where brands have carved out opportunities: being true to their story, doing something novel, niching-in at the start, investing in trade education, leveraging regional groups, and choosing marketing channels carefully. These are not rules, but sources of inspiration of how wines and spirits from Spain can find their place in the US.

Recommendation #1: Be true to your story– and tell it

"Consumers have a desire to connect to brands that reflect their values" -Susan Kilgore, Deutch Family Wine & Spirits

In today's market, a compelling story is not an afterthought, but a central part of how consumers and the trade make choices. Only a few decades ago, heritage and backstory were rarely discussed outside of specialist circles. Today, the average consumer wants brands that reflect their values, and trade buyers want narratives that help them connect products to consumers.

For wines and spirits from Spain, the opportunity can lie in translating deep heritage into stories that feel clear and relevant in the US market. Varietals that may be unfamiliar to American drinkers can be introduced by comparison to better-known grapes. Regional traditions can be positioned as both authentic and contemporary, connecting long histories to modern occasions.

Storytelling and authenticity do more than share history; they give buyers and consumers a reason to remember, and a reason to choose.

Recommendation #2: Do something novel, surprising

Novelty can be the spark that breaks through the noise of a crowded shelf. With so many wines and spirits competing for attention, doing something unexpected can create the opening for a buyer to place an order or a consumer to pick up a bottle.

Novelty does not mean gimmickry. Effective use of novelty balances surprise with practicality. For example, a packaging design might be distinctive, but still needs to conform to shipping and shelf requirements for size.

For producers from Spain, novelty might involve presenting a varietal with a bold new label, creating limited runs tied to cultural events, or developing partnerships with restaurants that introduce wines to consumers in surprising pairings. The goal is to add delight without undermining utility and credibility.

Novelty works best when it keeps one foot planted in the familiar, while extending the other into the unexpected.

Recommendation #3: Niche-in at the start

The scale of the US market makes it tempting to aim for breadth from day one. Yet costly broad launches can spread resources too thin, leaving products without the support they need to succeed in any one place. In contrast, some of the most successful entrants have begun by targeting narrow segments, whether defined by geography, channel, customer base, or use case.

Niche strategies allow for concentration. Some brands will choose a few priority geographic markets and focus all their attention there, hand-selling into independent accounts and investing in trade relationships to slowly build credibility. Others focus on a single channel, for example, restaurants in metropolitan areas, where tastemakers can influence consumer perceptions. Still others define their niche by customer profile, tailoring everything from pricing to packaging toward one group before expanding.

This approach provides both control and learning. Concentrated launches allow for closer observation of what resonates, more direct feedback from trade partners, and the ability to adjust quickly. Once momentum builds in the initial niche, that success becomes evidence to distributors and larger retailers or food service accounts to carry the brand.

By narrowing the focus early, brands can create the foundation for broader growth later.

Recommendation #4: Invest in trade education

Trade education is one of the most important, and often overlooked, elements of success in the US spirits and wine market. Sommeliers, bartenders, distributors and retail buyers are the gatekeepers. If they do not understand the product, they cannot sell it. If they are not excited about it, consumers will never discover it.

Their education can work best when it is simple, direct, and engaging. Comparing complex or unfamiliar varietals to familiar grapes or styles can make the unfamiliar accessible. Tasting events, pairings, and in-person training can give trade audiences firsthand experience so that they can, in turn, push the product in front of more people.

However, relying solely on partners to grow sales is risky. Producers that invest in their own presence, for example, by sending in-house brand representatives, are more likely to build the advocacy needed for success. Trade partners supplement a brand's sales, not substitute.

Recommendation #5: Leverage your regional groups

"The best event I've seen was a food, wine, and music festival in Brooklyn; live music, 100 tables pouring Rioja" -Patrick Mata, Olé & Obrigado

Regional identity is one of the most powerful advantages for wines and spirits from Spain. It can provide a collective story that is larger than any individual brand while also giving consumers a sense of place and connection. Regional groups and trade commissions can amplify this advantage by pooling resources and building platforms that individual producers could not create alone.

Events can be a centerpiece of these efforts. A memorable example was the Rioja Wine & Tapas Festival, held in Brooklyn, New York. It was a playful experiential event with live music, open-fire cooking of paellas and grilled meats, and deeply tied to regional identity. Such events build excitement not only for individual producers but also for the broader category of Spanish wines, as there remains a significant opportunity for introducing American consumers to Spain's varietals.

Tourism is another tool. Regions that connect wines and spirits to travel experiences often benefit from lasting consumer associations. Portugal's wine sector, for example, has seen growth tied to the dramatic increase in tourism in recent years. Sponsorship of television and film has also proven powerful –think of how Italy and Thailand benefited from HBO's The White Lotus.

The lesson is that regions can differentiate themselves, not only through quality, but also by collectively marketing their culture and encouraging tourism to their region.

Recommendation #6: Invest in your marketing channels wisely

Even with strong stories, novelty, and trade support, brands need visibility to convert interest into sales. Marketing provides that visibility, but resources are finite and investments must be made carefully.

Package design should be considered carefully. On crowded retail shelves, labels are often the only way that brands have to communicate with shoppers, ideally doing the work of advertising, storytelling, and education all at once. Strong design can signal heritage, communicate flavor cues, and even simply stand out visually.

Beyond packaging, a professional digital presence signals seriousness to both trade and consumers. Buyers expect polished websites and clear messaging. In today's digital world, it isn't enough to rely on organic search results to be noticed. Investment in influencers and independent reviewers, whether on Youtube, Tiktok, or traditional media, is crucial to building visibility and credibility. . Word of mouth from trusted voices can be more powerful than expensive ad campaigns.

Marketing also applies to trade relationships. Sharing press clippings, providing educational content, and staying connected to buyers can build goodwill. At its heart, marketing is about building friendships, with trade, influencers, and consumers.

Conclusion

The US market can be a challenging arena for wine and spirits, but it also can be extremely rewarding for brands that find a winning approach. There is no single formula. Some succeed by telling compelling stories, others by surprising consumers with novelty, and others still by focusing tightly at the start or investing deeply in trade education. Regional promotion and thoughtful marketing further amplify these efforts.

The opportunity for a brand will lie in choosing a combination of strategies that best align with individual strengths, resources, and ambitions. Authenticity, clarity, and consistency matter across all six recommendations, but the path forward will differ for each brand.

With patience and strategy, wines and spirits from Spain can build a lasting place in the American market.

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