

Description of the social enterprise – information sheet

Clisol Agro




clisol
showing quality

A. Identification data	
1. Name of the enterprise	Clisol Agro
2. Location/Address of the enterprise	Paraje La Cumbre, s/n., Tierras de Almería, El Ejido (Almería), Móvil: 620 84 33 85 Fax: 950 40 75 31, Dirección postal: C/ Princesa Sofía, 87, 04712 Balerma (Almería)
3. Website of the enterprise	www.clisol.com
4. Legal organisational form	It is an example of family micro-firm associated to a SAT (Agricultural Transformation Society, which is a hybrid form with characteristics of a cooperative and an investor owned firm).
B. Good practice of the social enterprise	
Aspects that recommend the social enterprise as a good practice in the particular sector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of a new business model combining agriculture, sustainability and tourism Clisol Agro combines the three main elements of the economy in Almeria (agriculture, sustainability and tourism) with the aim of demystifying misconceptions about Mediterranean agriculture under plastic by organizing guided tours explaining the technological and environmental aspects of its facilities. This business idea that helps to improve the reputation of the intensive agriculture practiced in Almeria offers an additional stream of revenues for the family farm company directly, and indirectly, because it serves to market its products to attract potential clients. - Example of successful agricultural company developed by woman entrepreneur Clisol Agro was founded and is managed by Lola Gómez-Ferrón, a woman without advanced academic training that has achieved to break through and lead a sector traditionally dominated –and still - by men. Lola belongs to a family with a large agricultural tradition. Her desire of self-improvement, and her determination and creativity, led her to become one of the major experts in agrotourism and sustainable agriculture at an international level. She has received more than a dozen of awards for her labour as entrepreneurs (e.g., Best Andalusian entrepreneur in 2004 awarded by the Confederation of Employers of Andalusia, Best entrepreneur award granted by the journal Actualidad Economica in 2005, and the tourism promotion award granted by Fitur in 2013 for being pioneer in merging agriculture and tourism). - High quality products: organic products with higher standard features Clisol Agro and its products are positioned as high quality vegetables both in the national and international markets. In fact, its products can be found in the shelves of gourmet and major European supermarkets, those enjoying a clientele with a high purchasing power. All products are fresh and have excellent attributes (taste, color, etc.). One of its products, the pepper Angello (developed exclusively by Clisol Agro in collaboration with Syngenta), has won the best product award granted by FruitLogistica the most important trade fair worldwide of fresh fruits and vegetables. This award points at the pepper Angello as the best new agricultural product in the world in 2012. - Strategic alliances with UK supermarkets chains

Clisol Agro has long-term contracts to sell their products in exclusivity with major UK supermarkets. These contracts are made before production, which offers a guarantee to the company and reduces risk considerably. These contracts also require that the farmer comply with very high quality, food safety and environmental standards.

- **Innovative sustainable practices**

Clisol is a pioneer in agricultural practices that optimize the use of natural resources and favor the conservation and protection of the natural environment. Every process along the product lifecycle is developed in an environmentally-friendly manner: computerized and monitored irrigation system, biologic control (insects and natural substances to combat plagues and carry out the pollination), hydroponic agriculture (recycling 100% of the water), most of the greenhouses plastics are recycled, biodegradable substrate that is transformed into compost at the end of product lifetime, etc.

- **Offer unity and socio-economic development of the agriculture sector in Almeria**

Clisol Agro has pursued from its foundation the unification of the agricultural offer in Almeria to improve the quality of the products, move production processes to more sustainable patterns and to build a good reputation of intensive agriculture under plastic practiced in the province. The idea is that farmers work together as ambassadors of their land and crops. Through technical advice and training about sustainable practices and the integration of new technologies to traditional agriculture to local growers, Clisol Agro has contributed to improve substantially their quality of the products and agricultural processes increasing the added value of the offer. Increasing the added value of the products is important due to emergence of new competitors from countries that produce with cheaper labor and inputs. In addition, the company has contributed to position the area as one of the most popular destinations of agrotourism. Therefore, Clisol Agro has had a large-scale effect on the agriculture sector in Almeria and has fostered the socio-economic development of the area.

C. Context:

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| 1. Year of Founding | The company was founded in 1993. At the beginning the company was only focused on the sustainable agriculture business unit. The integration of the sustainable agro tourism business unit took place some years later. |
| 2. Context of start-up – problem that the enterprise was set up to solve, economic social rationale | Agriculture in Almeria has always been recognized as the major economic engine for economic growth in the province. The agriculture practiced in Almeria is intensive and developed under plastic (in greenhouses) as in other places along the Mediterranean sea. This type of agriculture has received a lot of criticism both in and outside of Spain. Greenhouses are commonly seen as a negative for the landscape and tourism, and the use of plastic as harmful for the natural environment. In addition, intensive agriculture had a bad reputation in Almeria, a deserted zone, because of the misconception of water intensity use. Given this |

landscape, Clisol Agro was founded with the aim of demystifying misconceptions and rectifying the poor reputation. The company combined three important economic pillars in Almeria: agriculture, tourism and the natural environment. Through visits to its facilities and greenhouses, Clisol Agro demonstrates the application of technological developments to traditional practices to develop a sustainable agriculture. Other of the main goals of Clisol Agro is bringing adults, and especially young people and children, closer to the nature, and to know the origin of the food they eat. In addition, Lola Gomez Ferrón has pursued from the beginning the union of farmers. An integrated offer makes the agriculture of Almeria more competitive and improves its image.

3. What are the Main Activities of the entity?
- The economic activity of Clisol Agro can be broadly divided into two business units:
- **Sustainable agriculture:** production and sale of organic vegetables (2 hectares). Clisol agro produces 9 varieties of tomatoes and other vegetables (2 types of eggplants, tricolor peppers, zucchini – under request-, and 2 types of cucumbers). All the processes are totally environmentally-friendly (product stewardship practices)
The company has two types of production greenhouses and an experimental greenhouse. The greenhouse with traditional (sanding) soil is typical from Almeria because it allows water efficiency (avoids water evaporation because the sand covers the soil and fertilizer/manure). They produce peppers and cucumbers. The hydroponic greenhouse system (artificial soil) produces tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, eggplants and zucchini. Both of them are totally automated as explained in the section on innovation.
But it is important to note the experimental greenhouse, which is very unusual in the case of a single family farm. The experimental greenhouse has 2 hectares and it is used to test seed varieties, photosensitive and biodegradable plastics, substrates, hydroponic systems, etc. R+D+i is a crucial task for survival in terms of environment, the economy and thus the social conditions of the Almería farmer.
 - **Agrotourism:** guided visits to different types of greenhouses in several languages (Spanish, English, French and German). Visitors received information and knowledge on the history of the agriculture in Almeria, sustainable practices and technologies applied, etc. In addition, at the end, visitors can enjoy a tasting of different tomatoes produced in their greenhouses.
The company is located close to a touristic area of “sun and sand”. The origin of the idea came after noticing that many of these tourists had curiosity on visiting greenhouses and many were coming to see the greenhouses of the area by their own. Lola Gómez Ferrón thought that it could be a great idea to organize visits as another profitable business unit of the company and at the same time fulfill the goal of improving the image of the agriculture practiced in Almeria.
Clisol Agro also offers training to other agricultural producers and agricultural experts on how to

	produce more sustainably, on the latest innovations in the sector and on exports. In addition, Clisol Agro organizes workshops for children to improve their knowledge on agriculture and on the natural environment.
4. Who are the Main stakeholders (i.e. members, clients, producers, etc.)?	Clients (consumers, other farmers, students and schoolchildren, tourists and sector experts), the general public, Syngenta (a seed company), providers, supermarkets (e.g., Mark & Spencer), Coexphal, tour operators, the media, trade organizations, etc.
5. Geographic coverage with respect to: i) to production of services and/or goods and ii) market/consumers or beneficiaries, clients, etc.	i) All the vegetables are produced in the greenhouses located in the small town of Balerma in the province of Almeria ii) Agriculture: the tomatoes and vegetables produced by Clisol Agro are sold in the national market and in European supermarkets (e.g., Mark & Spencer). Agro tourism: tourist visitors are mainly from Spain and other European countries (Denmark, Germany, UK, Sweden, Belgium, Austria, etc.). Occasionally, Clisol Agro has also received visitors from America and Asia. There is not a specific profile of visitor. Visitors vary from students and schoolchildren, to conventional tourists or groups of farmers or sector experts. The visits are adapted to their profile.
D. Ownership Structure	
1. What is the ownership structure of the entity: i.e., does the entity have shareholders, owners/members, donors, trustees, investors, etc.?	Family owned farming enterprise, which is a member of a SAT.
2. If membership, is membership open or closed? Is exclusivity required?	N/A
3. Is a capital contribution required? If so, how much? Is equity capital unallocated or individualised?	N/A
4. Describe in a few words the voting distribution (e.g. one member-one vote; proportional to equity contribution; proportional to use, etc.).	N/A
5. Describe in a few words the main benefits for members or owners.	N/A
6. Indicate any main changes in ownership over the lifetime of the entity.	N/A

E. Governance	
1. Describe the governance structure of the entity (board, management, committees, etc.), number of members and method of selection (appointed or elected and by whom).	Not applicable.
2. Is there an entity or process for oversight of the board?	Not applicable
3. Are there external independent board members?	Not applicable.
4. Are there term limits for board members?	Not applicable.
5. What is the gender composition of the board?	Gender composition in the company is quite balanced. In fact, the manager and public face of the company is a woman, Lola Gómez Ferrón.
6. Describe management and board salary/ compensation policies and how they are decided/determined?	Not applicable.
F. Profit/ benefits/ surplus distribution policies	
1. Describe briefly the distribution policies and procedures for profits / benefits / surplus	Not applicable.
2. Are members/owners liable for losses of entity? Describe how liability is shared.	
G. Strategy: highlight approaches adopted to address the identified challenges	
1. Describe briefly the business strategy looking at aspects like: main products/services, market niche, market share, quality and pricing/costs and <u>main changes</u> occurred in time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiation strategy: Clisol Agro competes with high quality and added value products (organic products) resulting from innovative and sustainable practices. • Diversification strategy: the offer of the company is diversified into two main business units: vegetables production and agro tourism. In addition, the company obtains revenues from the organization of workshops to provide technical support and advice to other local grower, sector experts and educational programs to school children. • Export strategy: collaboration with European supermarket chains to sell their products. The contracts are developed in advanced, who offer a guarantee. • Marketing strategy based on the promotion of its products in their own facilities and greenhouses and

	<p>through the participation and attendance to trade fair, conferences, and diverse international and national events.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovation and proactive environmental strategy: development of innovations to improve continuously their products and processes in terms of quality and environmental impact. • Strategic alliances strategy: the company has key strategic alliances and collaborations with important stakeholders.
<p>2. Describe briefly the relation between the business strategy and the social mission of the enterprise.</p>	<p>The social mission of the company is completely integrated into its business strategy. Through visits to the facilities and greenhouses of the company, attendance to trade fairs and conferences where the company sells their products and media, Clisol Agro has helped to improve the reputation of the agriculture practiced in Almeria (under plastic) worldwide. In addition, the firms have participated actively in the training of other local growers to improve the quality and added value of the sector in the zone. Clisol Agro has also get involved in different trade organizations in order to foster the unification of the offer in Almeria and develop initiatives in favor of a more sustainable agriculture.</p>
<p>3. Please describe briefly the strategic partners or alliances that the enterprise has.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaboration with TUI a European tour operator to attract visitors from Europe. Both companies have joined efforts since 2012 to create different touristic packages to show the agriculture production model and sustainable practices in Almeria. These touristic packages are shorter than conventional vacation packages, usually from 3 to 4 days, that include transport, housing and agricultural visits (greenhouses, I+D+i centers, seedbeds, etc.). - Strategic alliance with Syngenta Growing System to develop a seed for peppers. It is a new variety of peppers that can be eaten as snack (smaller size, sweeter, crunchy, with an intense red color and without pips) developed by researchers at Syngenta and grown exclusively in the greenhouses of Clisol Agro. This variety of pepper (Angello) is only produced in Israel, but with lower quality. It has won the best product award from Fruitlogistica (the most important fruit and vegetable trade fair worldwide). - Strategic alliances with gourmet UK supermarkets to sell their products in exclusivity. For example, the pepper Angello produced by Clisol Agro is commercialized only by Mark & Spencer supermarkets. These peppers that are positioned as high quality and the target market is consumers with a higher purchasing power. - Strategic alliances (in process) with gourmet supermarkets in other European countries such as Nordic countries, the Netherlands and Germany to sell in exclusivity the pepper Angello. - Collaboration with other local producers and local cooperatives to promote a better image of Agriculture in Almeria, to improve the quality of the agricultural products of the zone and to booster offer unity. - Member of important sector associations such as COEXPHAL (Asociación de Organizaciones de

	<p>productores de frutas y hortalizas de Almería), Confederación Empresarial de la provincia de Almería, Cámara de Comercio, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaboration with media. For example, collaboration with the BBC to make a documentary on the intensive agriculture in greenhouses practiced in Almeria "Europe's salad bowl" presented by Dallas Campbell (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8SqSdSHSdBUw) - Collaboration with the University of Almeria and other educating centers such as Centro del Instituto de investigación y formación agraria where Lola Gómez Ferrón teaches some classes. - Strategic alliance with a distributor that allows Clisol Agro to sell their products through an online platform. The distributor has been carefully chosen because a good logistics company is very important when delivering perishable products.
<p>4. Please describe briefly the methods and practices of communication/relationships with Stakeholders (members, community, donors, NGOs, etc.),</p>	<p>The company uses different channels to communicate with their stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A comprehensive website that offers continuous information on the company activities and includes a platform for communication - A blog with news and videos of the company - Social networks: facebook (https://www.facebook.com/clisol) and twitter (https://twitter.com/clisolagro) - Visits to the facilities and greenhouses - Attendance to trade fairs, national and international conferences, workshops, etc. (Fitur, Fruit Logistica, etc.) - Meetings with sector experts, local producers and institutions - Word-of-mouth - Long-term relationships with distributors and supermarkets
<p>5. Innovation and key performance factors</p>	<p>Innovation activities and I+d+i are core elements of the business strategy of Clisol Agro. The company stands out for different types of innovations management, process and product innovations.</p> <p>Management innovations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clisol Agro has developed a new type of business model that integrates agriculture, tourism and sustainability. The categorization of the greenhouses as touristic elements is an innovation itself that has enabled to make profits, improve the image of the agriculture in Almeria and reach potential consumers. <p>Process innovations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Online sale: <p>It was one of the first companies in Almeria selling their products online. The agriculture sector is traditionally characterized by long chains of intermediaries until the final consumers are reached. Orders</p>

must be multiples of 5 kg and it is delivered in less than 24 hours.

- Marketing Innovation

Promotion of the products in origin, that is, directly in the greenhouses. This offers the client the opportunity of knowing better the healthy and sustainable origin of the products (the aroma of the plant, observing how a bumble bee pollinates a flower, etc.) which increase the connection of the client with the company, and then the willingness to buy the products.

- Innovative environmentally-friendly processes along the product life cycle

The company has developed innovation along the product life cycle to promote more sustainable practices in its two different types of greenhouses: a traditional and I+d+i greenhouse.

The I+D+i greenhouse is completely automated and monitored which allows nutritional, irrigation and climate management through a computer system that guarantees the quality of the plants and improve resource efficiency (water, energy, inputs). They installed the first evaporator of agricultural water (Heliosec) in Andalusia developed by Syngenta. This method transforms the excess water into a solid material that is totally recyclable. This greenhouse is based on a hydroponic system that allows recycling 100% of the water. In addition, the company uses a biodegradable substrate of coconut that is transformed into compost at the end of its lifetime.

The traditional greenhouse has an irrigation and nutritional system and uses a sanding soil typical of Almeria that enables saving water. Sand is put on top of the farmland which avoids the evaporation of a great volume of water. This is important taking into account the semiarid climate of Almeria (water scarcity).

Clisol Agro is also a promoter of the biologic control. The company uses insects and natural substances to combat plagues and carry out the pollination, which avoids chemical pesticides and improves worker quality of life. They breed their own insects and have also found a creative method to capture and reproduce those insects that are still alive at the end of the season as to reutilize them for the following year.

Product innovations

The company develops its own seeds varieties. An example is the Angello, a variety of pepper developed in collaboration with Syngenta described above.

6. Human resources - personnel

- No. of employees
- No. of volunteers
- No. of members

From 1 to 10 employees

Lola is responsible for the company management and organization of the visits. She is also responsible of most of the commercial and marketing activities of the company (trade fair, conferences, etc.) and she has also written a book for children on sustainability and agriculture.

Her husband is responsible for the supervision of the agricultural production.

	<p>The workforce in the greenhouses and in the seedbed fluctuates along the year. The company also has three guides who carry out the visits in English, French and German.</p>
6.1. For Work Integration social enterprise - vulnerable employees if the case (i.e.), work integration plan/programmed used and management structure	Workshops and different initiatives developed to improve the training of women that work in the agricultural sector.
H. Outcomes: results achieved and lessons learned	
- Social benefits - describe the benefit to members (membership), indicators used to evaluate the enterprise.	<p>Production</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agriculture: 2 acres - Agrotourism: Clisol Agro attracts a great volume of visitors annually. The company competes with the best Andalusian monuments and it is placed in third position in the national ranking of companies visited (23,000 visitors in 2008 and 9,000 in 2012). [Financial /production data is not available]
I. .Describe in a few words the broader social / environmental impact in your community – spill-over effects, in the last 3-5 years.	<p>Environmental impact</p> <p>The philosophy of the company is the reduction of its environmental impact along the life cycle of the company from less impactful seeds development to the recycling or reutilization of waste. In addition, the company uses a computerized system that allows reducing the consumption of resources such as water, energy and inputs. Every single detail in the production system is thought from a sustainable point of view. Clisol Agro also stands out for the use of biological control, that is, the use of insects and natural products to fight plagues instead of using pesticides. But, the positive impact of the company goes beyond its limits. The company has contributed actively in the improvement of the practices from the whole area of Almeria and even worldwide, having a positive impact on the protection of the natural environment worldwide.</p> <p>Social impact</p> <p>The activities of the company have had a large-scale impact in the improvement of the agricultural sector in the province of Almeria. Clisol Agro has contributed to improve the offer -and promoted its unification- and its image, which has increased the export volume. The increase of added value and environmental requirements compliance enable competing successfully in international markets in front of countries that can produce vegetables and fruits at a lower price (lower labor costs and input costs). Clisol Agro has contributed to make the agriculture offer of Almeria more competitive and stronger.</p>

J. Discussion Points: questions readers may want to consider and to discuss about it

1. What business organization may be useful to an entrepreneurial farmer? How can cooperatives or similar organisations help agricultural entrepreneurs?
2. Is a multi-functional approach a viable or desirable option for farmers?
3. What difficulties do women farming entrepreneurs face and how can cooperatives help them?
4. What is the role of innovative leaders in the cooperative community?

Contact info

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LINKS

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- <http://www.andalucia.org/es/turismo-cultural/visitas/almeria/otras-visitaciones/clisol-agro/>
- www.eldiario.es/andalucia/vernadero-recibe-visita-turistas-Almeria-El-Ejido-Lola-Gomez-0_105689679.html
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