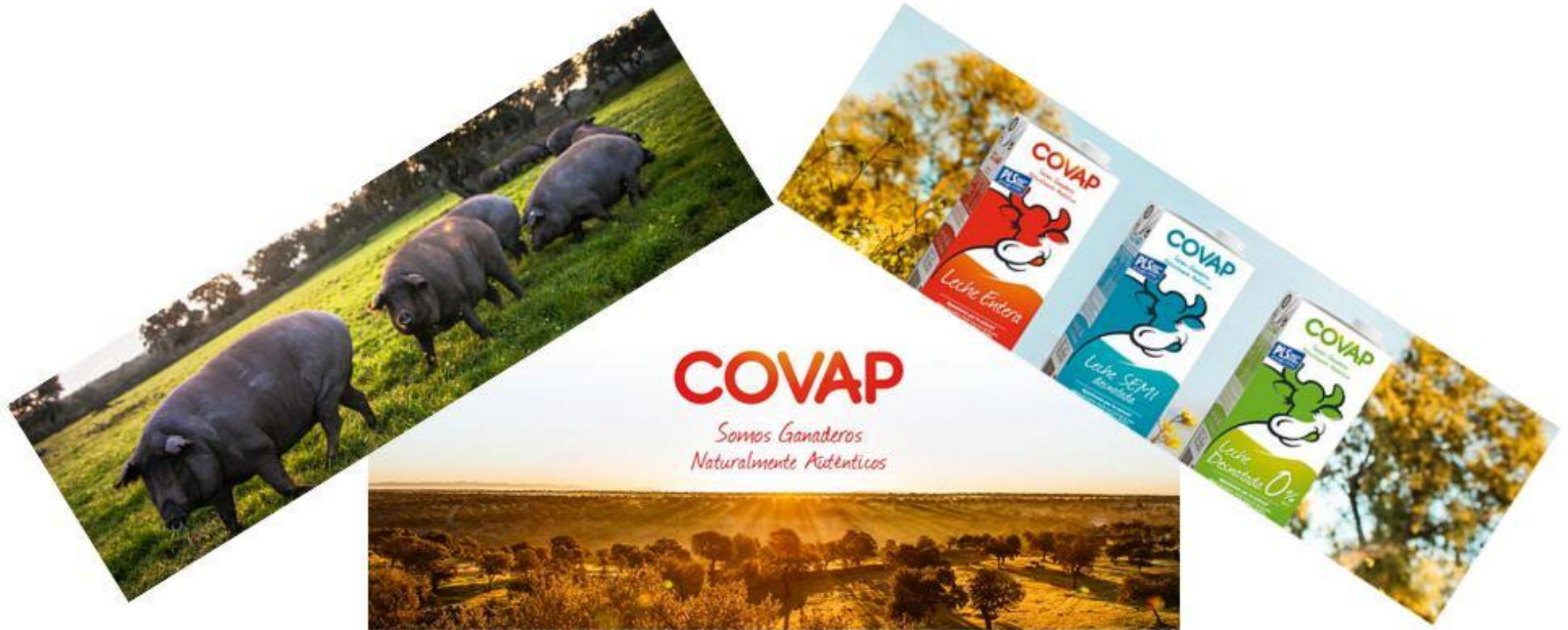


Description of the social enterprise – information sheet  
COVAP (Cooperativa Ganadera del Valle de los Pedroches)



A. Identification data	
1. Name of the enterprise	COVAP (Cooperativa Ganadera del Valle de los Pedroches)
2. Location/Address of the enterprise	Headquarters are located in the small town of Pozoblanco, Los Pedroches (Córdoba), Calle Mayor, 56, 14400, Pozoblanco (Córdoba)
3. Website of the enterprise	<a href="http://www.covap.es">www.covap.es</a>
4. Legal organisational form	Cooperative Society of Andalusia (SCA)- Cooperative of first degree/tier
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"> <li>• <b>An inter-regional successful model of internal growth</b> (internal growth is generally difficult)                      COVAP, a dairy and meat cooperative, is governed by the cooperative first principle of voluntary and open membership that has enabled it to expand rapidly not only within its own region but also along three other regions or “autonomous communities” as they are called in Spain: Córdoba, Badajoz and Ciudad Real. This approach to membership has become over the years one of the main pillars of the competitive advantage of the cooperative since it is not limited by political borders. As a result, greater size has allowed COVAP to reach an economy of scale in order to compete successfully in a globalized market.</li> <li>• A successful example of <b>adding value to livestock products</b> by vertical integration                      The cooperative controls all the phases of production, from inputs to the processing phase, which allows adding value to its products and obtaining higher margins and offering and getting prices for members. In recent years, COVAP has gone further in the integration along the supply chain by incorporating the phase of distribution to reach final consumers. The cooperative has a long-term contract with an important Spanish supermarket chain to produce the milk of the retailer brand and has created six of its own stores in different Spanish cities to sell meat products. In addition, COVAP offers online shopping. Integration activities improve profitability by adding value but also by reducing costs.</li> <li>• <b>Governance practices:</b>                      The cooperative is totally oriented to the members. COVAP involves them integrally and actively in decision-making, provide them with training and technical support to improve their products and processes and provide them the inputs needed to develop their economic activities at a lower price. A significant portion of benefits are re-invested back into the cooperative to keep improving its operations and the services offered to the members (50% as opposed to the legal requirement of 20%).</li> </ul>

- **Fostering rural development in a poor zone of Spain**

COVAP is located in a Spanish area traditionally characterized by poverty, limited economic alternatives and depopulation (population density of 16 hab/km<sup>2</sup> compared to the averaged 90 hab/km<sup>2</sup> in Spain). Its success is also worthy of merit because the area is characterized by strong natural deficits (limited rainfall, low fertility land and lack of irrigation) and infrastructure (no highway or train station), unlike the lush pastures of the North of Spain which also have developed transportation and logistics. Given this landscape, the economic activities of COVAP are of vital important for these small towns where the cooperative is the engine of socio-economic growth in the disadvantaged region. Since its foundation, COVAP has improved the lives of the population and increased the socio-economic wealth of the area.

- **Development of Quality Brands and Green certification (Sustainable Dairy Award)**

Their own brand, COVAP, is positioned as a quality brand in both the national market (especially in the local market) and in the international market. The cooperative pursues a differentiation strategy by selling added value products. In addition, its dairy products are certified by a green certification (PLS – sustainable dairy product) that guarantees the quality of the product, its Spanish origin and that the product has been developed respecting the natural environment, which also increases the added value of the product.

- **Substantial re-investment of benefits to fund I+D+i and add value and improve member services**

I+D+i and innovation activities are also funded by the significant re-investment with the aim of improving member’s processes (efficiency, productivity, time reduction, etc.) and products (quality, new products, etc.).

**C. Context:**

1. Year of Founding	1959
2. Context of start-up – problem that the enterprise was set up to solve, economic social rationale	The last years of the 50s were characterized as especially dry (shortage of rain). This episode of drought (common in the Mediterranean Spain) led to a drastic reduction of natural pastures, challenging the survival of livestock farms of the area (sheep, Iberian pigs and cows). The only available option to overcome the difficulties was the acquisition of foodstuff in areas less affected by the severe drought. Such temporary crisis triggered a dozen famers to acquire jointly the needed animal feed. Such strategy was intended to bypass unnecessary intermediaries and lower the acquisition price. Along the same lines, they decided to market their products together in the slaughterhouses of Madrid and Irún (Guipuzcoa). These successful strategies of joint acquisition and sale led cattle breeders to repeat the experiences in successive years. These initial operations were the seeds of the creation of COVAP in 1959. The cooperative had initially the support of 22 cattle breeders.

3. What are the Main Activities of the entity?	<p>Agro industrial and commercial activity. There are three main economic activities (Business units):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dairy products sales (milk, butter, cream and cheeses): it is the most important business unit in terms of sales (195,3 million euros in 2013)</li> <li>- Animal feed sales: it is the second business unit in terms of sales (85 million euros in 2013)</li> <li>- Meat products sales (Iberian porcine, ovine and bovine) (72.4 million euros in 2013). Within this business units Iberian pork products are the most sold (29.7 million euros in 2013).</li> </ul> <p>In addition, the cooperative generates income through other secondary activities such as the elaboration of prepared meals and the sale of wool (6 million euros in 2012).</p>
4. Who are the Main stakeholders (i.e. members, clients, producers, etc.)?	<p>- Cooperative members and collaborative members, Public Administrations, Universities and research centres, employees, Supermarket chains and distributors and the local community</p>
5. Geographic coverage with respect to: i) to production of services and/or goods and ii) market/consumers or beneficiaries, clients, etc.	<p>i) Livestock farms are spread along different Spanish regions: Córdoba, Badajoz and Ciudad Real</p> <p>ii) COVAP sells their products in the national and international markets, although most of the sales come from the national market. They sell their products in 30 different countries in Europe (e.g., Italy), America (e.g., Canada, Peru, Mexico, EEUU, Chile, Brazil, Venezuela) and Asia (e.g., China). For example, it is main exporter of Iberian pork in the USA).</p>
<b>D. Ownership Structure</b>	
1. What is the ownership structure of the entity: i.e., does the entity have shareholders, owners/members, donors, trustees, investors, etc.?	<p>Different types of members: ordinary members, inactive members and collaborative external members. There are 8000 external members that collaborate with internal members. No outside investors. Growth investments are, and have always been, based on the effort of the cooperative members.</p>
2. If membership, is membership open or closed? Is exclusivity required?	<p>Open. Yes.</p>
3. Is a capital contribution required? If so, how much? Is equity capital unallocated or individualised?	<p>Yes, capital contributions are required, depending on activity type.</p>
4. Describe in a few words the voting distribution (e.g. one member-one vote; proportional to equity contribution; proportional to use, etc.).	<p>In relation to use, according to formulas set out in bylaws.</p>
5. Describe in a few words the main benefits for members or owners.	<p>Better prices, more control over business, synergies with other divisions within cooperative, more stability, access to R+D</p>



6. Indicate any main changes in ownership over the lifetime of the entity.	Extensive member growth.
<b>E. Governance</b>	
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).	<p>Governance is composed of the General Assembly (members) and the Board of Directors. Each member has one vote.</p> <p>The Board of Directors is composed of the president, the vice-president, the secretary, a second vice president and 9 “vocals” or representatives. The vocals are meant to be representative of the different activities of the cooperative and are voted by such sector. The board chooses to supplementary vocals.</p> <p>The Board chooses the General Manager of the cooperative, who is a professional manager and the salary is decided by the board and approved by the members. The General Manager attends the board meetings with the right to speak but not to vote.</p> <p><b>Governance principles:</b></p> <p>Voluntary and open membership: members can voluntarily join the cooperative independently of regional or political borders. Accession is voluntary and open for all willing members if they meet technical and economic requirements—the capital contribution is 1,500 and then depending on the activity (sheep, cow, marketing, production, slaughter, etc.) the members must pay additional yearly fees.</p> <p>Autonomy and independence principle: the cooperative has autonomy from public authorities. Decision-making is based on the profitability and welfare of the members.</p> <p>Transparency principle: transparency management and regular information for the members.</p> <p>Democracy principle: the cooperative is democratically managed. Members are actively engaged in decision-making</p>
2. Is there an entity or process for oversight of the board?	General Assembly
3. Are there external independent board members?	No
4. Are there term limits for board members?	No—the initial term is 4 years, but re-election is allowed.

5. What is the gender composition of the board? **Gender composition: 21% (2013). In the last years the cooperative has developed a policy that aims at promoting equality between men and women.**

2013	Men	Women	Total
Manager	9	5	14
Technician	70	30	100
Sales person	42	20	62
Administrative	35	32	67
Personal production	291	31	322
Total	447	118	565

6. Describe management and board salary/ compensation policies and how they are decided/determined? Not available, but they are decided by the General Assembly.

**F. Profit/ benefits/ surplus distribution policies**

1. Describe briefly the distribution policies and procedures for profits / benefits / surplus  
 1. Under the cooperative law, once the obligatory funds\* and taxes are paid, the cooperative then is in the position to distribute the benefits in accordance with the bylaws and according to the agreement of the General Assembly every year. The benefits may be distributed i) to members in function of the cooperative activity carried out by each member, ii) to the voluntary reserve fund or iii) to increase the obligatory funds.

2. Are members/owners liable for losses of entity? Describe how liability is shared.  
 \*The contribution to the obligatory reserve fund is 20% of the benefits from cooperative business and 50% from business with third parties. Also a 5% contribution must be made on the benefits of the cooperative business to the “social fund” which is the Cooperative Education and Promotion Fund.  
 The bylaws of COVAP stipulate that the contribution to the Obligatory Reserve Fund is 50% instead of the 20% required by cooperative law, and that 5% is given to the fund on Cooperative Education and Promotion.  
 2. Up to 50% of losses may be taken from the Obligatory Reserve Fund. These losses can then be amortized over the following 7 years. Members are liable up to the amount of their capital contributions, depending on the % of operations, services and activities of each member.

### 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 main changes occurred in time.
- Differentiation strategy: manufacturing of their products and promoting quality to market added value products. Their own brand, COVAP, is positioned as a quality brand in both the national market (especially in the local market) and in the international market.
  - Vertical integration strategy: COVAP has integrated all the production phases of the products it sells: livestock production, stores and manufacture and processing. The production and store phases produce lower margins than the sale of processed products. Therefore, the main goal of following a vertical integration strategy has been adding value to the products they sell to increase the profitability of the members. Moving this strategy further, in recent years the companies is trying to get closer to the final consumer (forward vertical integration): contracts with distributors, creation of their own stores and offering online shopping. In addition, vertical integration has led to a substantial reduction of production costs.
  - Quality management strategy to protect the brand: COVAP has implemented a rigorous quality management system focused on food security and traceability. This system is periodically audited and is certified by an external prestigious certifying company (ISO 9001). The main goals are to guarantee the products quality to promote a good brand image, and improve the facilities of the members in terms of efficiency, productivity and quality processes. The members have to meet rigorous quality controls. In addition, all the products that sells COVAP are certified: dairy products (IFS higher level), feeding products (animal feeding certification) and meet products (IFS higher level and BRC among others).
  - I+D strategy: innovation (I+D) is another pillar of the production strategy of the cooperative. COVAP promotes continuous innovation to improve production processes and the development of new products, particularly so given that the Spanish industry is very competitive. The company does in-house I+D through its I+D department and Tecnocovap, a limited liability society, created to do research on new technologies to improve production processes of the members' facilities and own industrial processes of the cooperative. In addition, COVAP has external innovation collaborations with other companies of the sector, universities and research centres.
  - Internal growth strategy: growth by adding new members instead of resorting to external investors or merger and acquisition processes. Membership is open to all interested members independently of political borders, which has led to rapid growth and to the achievement of economies of scale. Having a large size is essential in the food industry because it is a globalized and competitive market.
  - Main changes-After its founding in 1959 with 22 members, it opened up its membership (novel at the

time) and experienced rapid growth and offering more services to members, crossing provinces and regions (which have different cooperative laws and subsidies). In 1962 they opened up an animal feed factory, which was improved in 1975, 1986 and 1992, allowing member less expensive quality inputs. In 1965 COVAP began excess milk pickup, which started its dairy business. In 1974 it was the first to package milk in plastic bags and in 1981 in UHT bricks. In 1981 they offered consulting services to members in feed, genetics, etc.) and also all inputs necessary for their members. 1986 saw a period of successive business area growth and in 1995 they started their own credit section. In the 90's attention was paid to the sheep and lamb sector with centers to fatten lambs. In 2000 the international department was set up. After some difficult periods in the milk sector, in 2001 it opened one of the most modern dairy installations in Europe (340 M liters a year). In 2001 they also opened a center for fattening baby pigs. In 2003 they began the sheep and goat milk activities. All of these services made them an invaluable partner for the members. In 2006 and 2007 there was a discussion of changing from a cooperative entity, but the membership maintained the cooperative form. In 2007 they built a new animal feed factory. In 2010 they obtained the necessary regulatory homologation to export Iberic pork products to the USA market.

2. Describe briefly the relation between the business strategy and the social mission of the enterprise.

The economic activity generated by COVAP is the main engine of an area with limited economic opportunities suffering from depopulation. The cooperative is the main source of income for the surrounding population. The business strategy of the cooperative is based on the improvement of the profitability of their members and the quality of life of the residents. They provide continuous technical support, training and advice to improve their production processes and products to make them competitive and superior to the competition (more added value and efficiencies), to increase their incomes and create economic wealth in the area. Environmental conservation is also important as animal welfare is closely tied to grazing lands. In addition, through the creation of foundation the cooperative organizes cultural and sport activities for the community.



3. Please describe briefly the strategic partners or alliances that the enterprise has.
- Innovation collaborations with other companies of the sector, universities and research centres to develop I+D to improve food industry processes and products (e.g., founder of the Research and Quality centre of the Valle de los Pedroches, the technological corporation of Andalucía CTA, etc.). It is a patron of the Basque culinary center and collaborates with the University of Mondragón in the Basque country.
  - Collaboration with other food companies of the area to establish a certificate of denomination of origin for the Iberian ham (quality certificate)
  - Distribution agreement: long term agreements with different distributors. For example, COVAP is the supplier of milk of an important family owned Spanish Supermarket chain (Mercadona). COVAP produces the milk for its white label (Hacendado): 70% of the milk produced by COVAP is for the white label, while 30% of the milk is sold under de COVAP brand.
  - Creation of a joint-venture (Lactiver Corporación Alimentaria) to increase the milk production capacity. COVAP's production capacity was insufficient to meet the milk volumes demanded by Mercadona. It then cooperated with another cooperative from the Basque country IPARLAT—a good example of cooperation amongst cooperatives.
  - Collaboration with foreign companies and governments to sell their products and share technology and know-how.
  - Agreement with a prestigious restaurant chain to provide catering services and the creation of a gastrobar.
4. Please describe briefly the methods and practices of communication/relationships with Stakeholders (members, community, donors, NGOs, etc.).
- COVAP is focused on the development of long-term and well-managed relationships with its stakeholders (distributors, employees, universities, research centres, etc.). Recently, the cooperative has improved significantly its website in order to make easier for stakeholders to gather information on their activities. In addition, COVAP has started to elaborate annual reports (2011 – 2013), demonstrating a dedication to transparency.
- Members:**
- Members are actively involved in the cooperative. They are part of decision-making (can raise proposals) and are permanently informed. In 2013, the company created the department of “member care” and a periodical journal with the most relevant news on the activities of the cooperative for the members.
  - The cooperative provides a great support to the members to improve their facilities and economic activities. There is a technical service that provides advice on feeding, genetic improvement, quality requirements etc. In addition, it offers financial and security services to update their facilities.

- The cooperative is the only supplier of the members (exclusivity requirement). COVAP supplies them with all the inputs necessary for developing their economic activities at a lower price.
- In turn, the cooperative sells all the members' products seeking to achieve the maximum profitability.
- The new website offers a section to make easier the contact with the members

**Public authorities:**

- Although COVAP has autonomy from public authorities, the cooperative has received their support in form of subsidies.
- Collaboration in fostering I+D and the improvement of processes and product of the food industry in the area.

**Clients:**

- The new website has developed a section for clients to contact the company and leave their comments
- Forward vertical integration to get closer the clients and understand their needs
- Development of the Business intelligence software to get information on clients and determine their degree of satisfaction and loyalty.

**Employees:**

- Development and implementation of a code of conduct and sustainable practices (integrity, effort, commitment and excellence)
- 86% of the employees have long-term contracts (permanent contracts prevail over temporary contacts)
- Transparent and two-way communication
- The company promotes the close coordination between departments
- Job opportunities through internships of graduates
- Continuous training

5. Innovation and key performance factors

COVAP has an internal I+D department divided in the three main business units: primary, dairy and meat production.

I+D activities are mainly focused on developing product and innovation processes in the food industry. It is one of the main pillars of the cooperative, and a substantial percentage of the benefits of the cooperative are reinvested in I+D. COVAP is involved in two European research projects.

Innovation for quality maximization: improvement of the processes (efficiency, productivity, time reduction, etc.), improvement of the quality of the products and development of new processes and products consistent with traditional lines but adapted to new tendencies.

Examples of innovations:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chocolate milkshake free of lactose which was the winner of innovation award</li> <li>- New packaging for milk. Better performance based on aesthetic and efficiency criteria.</li> <li>- Automatic and robotic warehouse</li> </ul>																												
6. Human resources - personnel	No. of employees: 565																												
- No. of employees	- Employees average age: 41																												
- No. of volunteers	- Qualification: 45% are graduates																												
- No. of members	No. of members: 15,045																												
	- Members: 7,000 (4,500 are active)																												
	- Collaborative members: 8,000																												
6.1. For Work Integration social enterprise - vulnerable employees if the case (i.e.), work integration plan/programmed used and management structure	Development and implementation of a code of conduct and sustainable practices (integrity, effort, commitment and excellence)																												
<b>H. Outcomes: results achieved and lessons learned</b>																													
- Yearly social and economic results – every 5 years since start-up, and/or the last 3 years	Livestock (of members): 30,000 dairy heads, 20,000 bovine heads, 75,000 Iberian porcine heads and 150,000 ovine heads (it is the largest livestock farming operation in Spain)																												
- Assets (raw numbers)																													
- Capital (raw numbers)																													
- Production																													
- Turnover /sales																													
- Profit/loss																													
- Social benefits - describe the benefit to members (membership), indicators used to evaluate the enterprise.																													
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I. Describe in a few words the broader social / environmental impact in your community – spill-over effects, in the last 3-5 years.

**RURAL DEVELOPMENT: COMMITTED TO THE PROSPERITY OF THE REGIONS WHERE IT OPERATES**

Creation of jobs and economic opportunities for inhabitants of the places where the cooperative operates. The cooperative has created 565 jobs and helps to improve the quality of the production of dairy products, meat, etc. This is important because there is no industrial development (beyond COVAP) and the zone is characterized by high rates of depopulation. The facilities of COVAP are located in very small towns that survive thanks to the support and wealth generated by the cooperative. Thanks to continuous innovation and I+D activities, the cooperative has improved the quality of the products and increased their added value despite the natural deficit of the area (limited rainfall, low fertility land and lack of irrigation) and lack of infrastructure (no highway or train station).

**IMPROVEMENT OF PEOPLE'S LIFE**

Corporate Social Responsibility activities: COVAP owns the Ricardo Delgado Vizcaino Foundation (founder of the cooperative) with the aim of organizing cultural, educative, training and sport activities for the population of the areas where the company operates. For example, COVAP has created the CowKids group to foster a healthier nutrition through the organization of different activities and games.

**COMMITTED TO PROTECT THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT**

COVAP is committed to preserve grasslands and natural resources of the territory. With this purpose they have developed a environmental policy that consists in:

- Optimization of natural resources consumption, especially water and energy
- Waste management to prevent pollution and contamination
- Continuous improvement of environmental management system
- Legal requirements compliance and anticipation of the law.

**Green certificates:**

- Products certified by the PLS label (Sustainable Dairy Product) that guaranteed the quality of the product, its Spanish origin and that the product has been developed respecting the natural environment, which also increases the added value of the product. This green certification has been developed by several dairy product produces (including COVAP).
- ISO 14001 (environmental management)



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

Award for its business trajectory (2013); Award for its cooperative trajectory (2013) granted by the BBC; Agrifood excellence award (2013); Andalusian research award (2011)

#### Contact info

**Address** Headquarters are located in Pozoblanco, Los Pedroches (Córdoba): Calle Mayor, 56, 14400,  
**Email** <http://www.covap.es/web/seccion/pagina/contenido/plantillas/empleo-contacto.php?s=93>  
**Webpage** [www.covap.es](http://www.covap.es)

#### Attachments if available in English

1. **Annual reports 2011-2013** (<http://www.covap.es/web/seccion/pagina/contenido/plantillas/listado-noticias.php?s=70&sp=89>)

#### REFERENCES

- COVAP (2011-2013): Annual reports, Pozoblanco, COVAP
- Gómez-Limón, J.A., Fruet-Cardozo, J.V. y Hidalgo-Fernández, A. (2014). *COVAP, un modelo de éxito crecimiento interno*, en Tamaño y competitividad: experiencias y crecimiento en las cooperativas agroalimentarias (ed. Arcas-Lario, M. y Hernández-Espallardo, M.), Almería, Cajamar.

#### LINKS

- [www.covap.es](http://www.covap.es)
- [http://www.diariocordoba.com/noticias/cordobaprovincia/covap-presenta-proyecto-optimizar-explotaciones-lacteas\\_955956.html](http://www.diariocordoba.com/noticias/cordobaprovincia/covap-presenta-proyecto-optimizar-explotaciones-lacteas_955956.html)
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- <http://www.covap.es/web/seccion/pagina/contenido/plantillas/desarrollonoticia.php?s=5&sp=89&id=180>
- <http://www.covap.es/web/seccion/pagina/contenido/plantillas/desarrollonoticia.php?s=5&sp=89&id=178>

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