



Francisco Fernandez Alvarez-Castellanos: IFEAT Preview—the Spanish Aroma Chemical Industry

Francisco Fernandez Alvarez-Castellanos spent 40 years in Spain's aroma chemical industry before retiring in 2005. He will speak during the International Federation of Essential Oils and Aroma Trades conference in Barcelona taking place November 6–10 (www.ifeat.org). Recently, Alvarez-Castellanos spoke with P&F magazine about the industry's past and future.

P&F: Can you briefly describe the origins of the Spanish aroma chemical industry?

Alvarez-Castellanos: In the 1920s some companies in the essential oils business took a further step by undertaking the fractionated distillation of some of them in order to isolate the major aroma chemicals. They also [began] the production of some esters and basic turpentine derivatives.

P&F: About how large is the Spanish industry?

Alvarez-Castellanos: There are eight companies, but only three are independent; the rest are subsidiaries from major multinationals. My estimation of the sales is between €250 million and €300 million.

P&F: How have the types of materials produced by this industry changed over the decades?

Alvarez-Castellanos: As I said before, the first aroma chemicals were those isolated from oils: anethole, thymol, etc., but good chemists and engineers scaled up new processes for the production of pure alcohols, esters and many new molecules for the F&F industry based on their own research programs. Sometimes these programs were developed with the financial help of the Spanish government.

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P&F: What sorts of technologies are changing the industry today?

Alvarez-Castellanos: As in many other fields the impressive progress of computer technologies has played an important role in the research and production development of chemicals. In the last 30 years, the industry has moved from primitive GC analysis computers to the current sophisticated tools for automatic quality control. New engineering materials and technology have also made it possible to achieve new targets.

P&F: What are the biggest challenges facing the Spanish industry?

Alvarez-Castellanos: Obviously the competition from raw material [producing] countries with relatively low labor costs and good technologies is a major challenge. Another one is to be able to respond quickly to the legal and social environment changes—keeping a good flexibility while being cost-competitive.

P&F: What are its greatest opportunities?

Alvarez-Castellanos: The Spanish aroma chemical industry has established, throughout many years, strong cooperation links with the main F&F companies. It has been always reliable in terms of quality and service in addition to having shown a great flexibility in adapting productions to customers' requirements. This is a valuable asset which is still present in current relationships.