

# SPANISH LINKS



When good-quality, fresh chorizo proved hard to find here, Mariano Vivas-Sabido turned a Spanish family tradition into a tasty new business

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Every year Mariano Vivas-Sabido's family headed back to his father's home town in León in northern Spain to make chorizo – a very social occasion involving the whole village. Mariano has vivid memories of watching and helping in the day-long process which began with slaughtering the pigs.

Nothing went to waste. Blood drained from the animals was saved for blood sausage, the hams were prepared for curing, and the intestines stuffed with minced pork, salt, garlic and herbs to make chorizo (pronounced cho-ree-thaw). Even the pig bristles were saved for use in paintbrushes.

Three years ago, Mariano and his Kiwi wife Mary moved to New Zealand from Spain with their two daughters. In Barcelona Mariano managed photo shops, but his frustration at being unable to source good-quality, fresh chorizo here led him to set up his own chorizo company, Mariano's Spanish Goods.

Here, in a registered community kitchen in Christchurch, his chorizo-making seems a solitary experience by comparison, but he sticks with the traditional family recipe, mixing the minced pork by hand and allowing it to rest so the flavours develop.

"I normally do lots of 10 kilos, so it's easy to manage. You can see what you are doing and it puts more air in the meat."

Although new to the food industry, Mariano has always been a keen cook. He comes from a family of seven siblings, and was the only boy to spend time in the kitchen with his mother.

"Chorizo was always hanging in the house with salami and hams. It's something you always have after school or in your lunchbox. When my mother cooked soups and lentils she would cut a piece of chorizo and add it for flavour."

The little bowls of garlic, salt and paprika on Mariano's business card illustrate the simplicity of his chorizo recipe. These are the only ingredients he adds to minced pork from free-range pigs and he explains that the resulting chorizo is a lot milder than many Kiwis are used to.

"They get confused between spicy and hot. It's quite a spicy flavour but it's not hot. Maybe in future I will make another hotter version."

"The paprika is different here so it's a different flavour and sometimes they add too many spices," he says. Paprika, made from dried red peppers, is the key to chorizo and, unable to find suitable paprika here, Mariano imports his own supplies from Spain, mixing sweet and smoked varieties to get just the right balance of flavours.

He removes the lids from two large jars of smoked and sweet paprika and urges me to take a sniff. The deep reddish orange colour and distinctive aroma is quite unlike anything I have ever bought.

The texture of his chorizo is quite different, too, because he minces the pork just once. "One comment I get from people is 'this sausage is very meaty', and I say 'yes, it's just meat, what do you expect in a sausage?' People notice the different texture and they discover something new."

**From top left:** Mariano serves a market customer. Ous al Plat, an egg and chorizo breakfast dish. Mariano and Mark Banfield of Banfields of Beckenham Butcher, who supplies Mariano with Murellen pork meat and also sells the chorizo.



Filling the sausage casings is a bit of an art, and Mariano perfected the technique through trial and error, readily admitting he didn't always turn out the flashiest looking sausages in the early days.

"The casing is very delicate to work with and breaks very easily. You need to develop a skill and I'm getting there."

Cured chorizo is trickier to make here because of the fluctuations in temperature and humidity. As no one else was making fresh chorizo commercially, Mariano



Mariano uses free-range pork and minces it just once. Filling the casings is an art, which he has had to perfect in order to produce uniform sausages.


amount goes a long way – Mariano says a little chorizo makes an exceptional addition to stews, pasta, salads, pizza and, of course, paella.

Mariano enjoys eggs and chorizo for breakfast (brown the chorizo, break in the eggs, and spoon the olive oil and chorizo juices over the eggs as they cook), and chorizo tortilla is a favourite with his daughters (add beaten eggs to browned chorizo, then turn and cook the other side, before serving). Ous al plat (eggs on the plate) is another popular breakfast dish – whole eggs cooked in a type of cheesy chorizo omelette, then grilled until golden.

Experiments with a venison chorizo are on the cards, but because it is such a lean meat, he says he will probably need to add pork as well so it's not too dry. And he has plans to make butifarra, a traditional Catalan sausage.

"Normally it's just pork, salt and pepper and from there you add whatever flavour you want. You can add red peppers and it will absorb the flavours. It's a good base to cook with."



But whatever Spanish delicacies emerge from Mariano's kitchen, he will be following his mother's motto. "She always said to me, 'whatever you do, you must do with love.' If you don't put a bit of love in, it's a completely different chorizo." 

decided to concentrate on that, initially selling at a local farmers market.

Now his fresh Spanish sausage is catching on further afield, with orders from gourmet stores such as Mercato in Christchurch, Moore Wilson in Wellington, and Farro Fresh and Sabato in Auckland.

Praise from top Kiwi chef Peter Gordon added to his confidence that the chorizo would find a ready market. Mariano had come across a Gordon recipe that called for fresh chorizo and emailed him seeking permission to copy the recipe for his farmers market customers. Gordon agreed, sampled some on a flying visit to New Zealand and gave it his stamp of approval.

As authentic fresh chorizo was not previously available here, Mariano has had to educate his customers on how to use it. He says it needs about seven minutes to cook in the pan or on a grill. It also freezes well. Like other quality ingredients, a small