



# CHEESE MAKING IN AYACUCHO, PERU

**Gabriel Reaño met with Danny Bautista Cisneros, an engineer specializing in the food industry and the main architect of a Regional Government project in Ayacucho aimed at giving dairy farmers a professional status and reported on improvements made in cheese production in Ayacucho. Gabriel tells us about that visit.**

Practical Action's Technical Enquiries Services introduced me to Danny Bautista; we went to meet him so that he could show us the primary result of the project: the cheese plant. The trip to the outskirts of the Cachi river basin in Ayacucho is along a dirt track all the way. We travelled in a special van, as there is no public transport capable of taking us there quickly enough. The ground was damp from the rain and the tires skidded frequently, but the driver was unfazed. We were accompanied by Danny Bautista Cisneros, our contact, determined to achieve our purpose of visiting the cheese plants that would convert a previously informal and precarious activity into a professional concern, both in terms of economic value and product quality.



Danny Bautista is 40 years old and proud to be an engineer specializing in food industries. He has worked with the Ayacucho Regional Government and was the ideologist of the project entitled "Improving the competitiveness of agricultural development in the Cachi irrigation area", which lasted from 2008 until 2010. He believes that the people themselves are responsible for their own development. "If we don't do it ourselves, nobody will help us" he remarked before giving us the usual political spiel: "the governments of Toledo and Alan

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Garcia did nothing for Ayacucho. Fujimori saved us from terrorism and he also did many works. No-one has come here since”.



One cannot help feeling empathy and even admiration when listening to Danny Bautista. He is an entrepreneur who does not sit around waiting with his arms folded. He is a rightful dreamer. In fact, this is one of several projects he has worked on in an effort to develop nearby areas and he has faith. “I want to continue working in various parts of the country. I feel capable of doing so”.

### **In search of help**

Good intentions are not enough to put a project like Danny Bautista’s into practice in Ayacucho. It is hard work that begins by approaching the authorities and, after the implementation, ends by monitoring the beneficiaries who often give up. Danny Bautista knew that his message to both the Mayor and the peasants to be trained had to be convincing. “One has to be sincere”, he said “we cannot make any worthless promises and we must give them clear information”

Danny had always noticed that livestock activities in the Peruvian Andes were unpredictable and were not developed to their full potential in Ayacucho. “For example, I knew that the cheese prepared here was very tasty. I have given some to various friends from other areas and they were delighted. However, the presentation is poor and there was virtually no variety.” Danny Bautista thought that with some hard work and some support from private companies, dairy products in general and cheeses in particular could improve.

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After several meetings, his project plan was approved by the Ayacucho Regional Government. In good time, help appeared from entities like Caritas, ADRA Peru, MINAG or the Belgian Technical Cooperation Agency, who mainly helped with training and technical assistance in the farms.

#### **Cheese plants: takeoff**

The project's greatest achievement was the implementation of cheese plants in three communities (Manzanayocc, Alpachaka and Cusibamba), planned and implemented jointly with the local population who provided labour. The project also helped equip the plant with special laboratory materials, ideal for obtaining quality products.



Before the cheese plants existed, cheeses were made in improvised areas that obviously accounted for the poor quality of the final product. "Producers worked in their homes", said Danny Bautista, "using inappropriate equipment that did not ensure consumer safety. "The

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conditions were also poor for marketing purposes, as the product was often left in the open for a long time before being transported to the city”.

The arrival of the cheese plants marked the arrival of professionalism. Danny Bautista told us that “cheeses were often confiscated because they lacked the approval of a Health Authority, which adversely affected not only the merchant but also the producer, as the products were often delivered on credit.” One of the benefits of the cheese plants was their ability to comply with the requirements of the “Milk Regulations” that established essential hygiene measures, good quality and an appropriate production process.

### Getting to know the plants

The noise of the van’s engine stopped; we had reached our destination. We would shortly be visiting the various cheese plants in the town of Alpachaka and we were in for a pleasant surprise. It is hard to believe that we were greeted by a producer dressed in white like a surgeon, asking us to put on an apron and a mask, when previously the workers gave no consideration to the hygienic condition of their product. Looking at the milk-purifying machines and the moulds that convert the cheeses into standard products, it is unbelievable that a short time ago they were “shaped by hand and in all different sizes”.



The cheese plants we visited all had the same structure: two or three rooms in which the cheese manufacturing process is divided, one cold room for working with the dairy products, and a plant manager dressed in white. One of them is Ronald Huamani, who told us that before working in the cheese plant he had no idea how to make cheese. “I was trained and now I am familiar with the subject”, he said in a tone of voice that will always sound humble.

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Ronald Huamani, who is 30 years old even though he looks 18, showed us the entire cheese manufacturing process. He finished with the red packaging of the product which is no different aesthetically from the weighted cheeses in supermarkets. He even stamps a “Pasteurized Cheese” seal on them.

### Relationship with Practical Action

We made contact with Danny Bautista through the Technical Enquiries Service implemented by *Practical Action* with a view to providing detailed information to various consumers who did not necessarily have any relationship with the areas in which the organization’s projects are implemented. Danny contacted Giannina Solari who is in charge of the service, seeking information on dairy processing. “I received a prompt reply”, said Danny. “I was given various very explicit primers on dairy products, particularly yogurt and cheese. The information contained in the primers was fundamental for training producers. Based on this information they were able to learn how to work with their products. They even increased the variety of their products. They used to make only fresh cheese before, now we have several other types.”

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To better illustrate the action, Danny Bautista showed us a flip chart on the wall of the cheese plant that Ronald Huamani works in, which describes the dairy product production process. “We obtained all this information from the primers provided by *Practical Action*” he remarked, and we felt we were involved in something big.

#### **The fruits of the project and what comes next**

Danny Bautista is satisfied with what has been achieved so far. He has built up the capacity of micro dairy producers, improving their cheese plants with a final product that “ensures commercial and hygienic quality”. As a result, “the cheeses are well accepted in the local, regional and national markets.”

Danny Bautista told us that one of his future plans is to “form producers’ associations” in order to gain access to services more competitively and acquire products at lower prices. “These associations”, said Danny, “will be in charge of managing the cheese plants in the future.”

It is not all rosy, however. “There is still a lot to do”, remarked Danny Bautista. The project has ended and now it is up to the beneficiaries themselves to continue developing what has been achieved so far. “More support is needed to continue growing; I am sure that what we have achieved so far is not even 25% of what we can do here. Some inputs are needed to increase production and what two can produce now ten were producing in the same time period. Obviously more training will be needed to continue improving the producers’ skills. It is evident that despite knowing nothing about making cheese before, they are now producing quality products. Imagine what they could do with better inputs.”

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Danny is a man of faith and even though he knows that since the project has ended he is no longer directly responsible for obtaining aid, he will think of something or create some plan to continue along the lines that have made sense of his profession and his life, after all: to improve the standard of living of his people.

This document was written by Gabriel Reaño of Soluciones Prácticas in 2011.

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