

September 21, 2005

[LaTienda.com](http://LaTienda.com), a family-owned gourmet Spanish food retailer based in Williamsburg, VA is pleased to announce that on September 15th the USDA and the Spanish government approved Jamónes Fermín as the first producer of Jamón Ibérico eligible to export to the USA.

La Tienda intends to fly in the first Ibérico products as soon as they are available. This means that American gourmets may be able to enjoy Ibérico pork loin (lomo), chorizo and other Ibérico sausages before Christmas, if all goes well. But it will be another year till the shoulders ('paletas') will be available, and nearly two years till Americans can enjoy the full Ibérico hams ('jamónes'). The traditional, bone-in 'pata negra' Jamón Ibérico take twenty-three months to cure, and the producer will be hanging them to cure in the mountain air later this week, so that these hams should be available to the US market in the fall of 2007. When these hams finally arrive, the price for the best ones is likely to be around \$1,000 per ham. More than 300 aficionados have already placed \$199 deposits for the hams with LaTienda.com, securing the right to [buy an Ibérico ham](#) as soon as they are available.

This is a very satisfying day for the Harris family, owners of La Tienda. Patriarch Don Harris remarked, "My wife Ruth and I initiated the quest for Ibérico ham in 1997 when we first visited the fabled ham town of Jabugo in western Andalucía. Through the ensuing years, our entire family has blanketed western and southern Spain meeting the farmers and potential producers of this coveted product."

Jamón Ibérico is perhaps the finest of all hams, as much a national treasure to Spain as caviar is to Russia, truffles are to Italy, and Kobe beef is to Japan. Jamón Ibérico hams are the pride of Spain, and Spaniards consume the most of the annual production in their own country. Some producers even have waiting lists of several years for their best products.

The unique flavor of Jamón Ibérico comes from the pigs themselves and from the way they're raised. The rare Iberian black-foot pigs ('pata negra') live only in Spain, where they have foraged for acorns in the cork oak forests of western Spain for millennia. This diet of acorns contributes to the flavor of the ham, and causes their beautifully marbled meat to be high in heart-healthy mono-unsaturated fat, giving the ham beneficial qualities similar to olive oil. This quality is apparent to the naked eye: thin slices of jamón glisten on the plate as the golden fat melts with room temperatures rises above 70 degrees F.

Don Harris fell in love with Spanish cuisine in the 1960s and was stationed in Spain as a Navy chaplain in the 1970s. He launched LaTienda.com with his wife and three sons in 1996. The family operated company was the first to introduce jamón serrano over the Internet to the families of America, and they have been on a quest to bring jamón ibérico to America for more than eight years.

These hams could not be imported and sold in the US without a Spanish slaughterhouse and processing plant that met USDA standards, but for years Spanish producers were reluctant to make the investment to get USDA certification. The only Spanish meat products exported to the U.S. now are made from animals slaughtered at USDA-certified

plants outside Spain. That includes [Jamón Serrano](#), a country ham that is similar to Italian prosciutto.

“Our goal has been to secure a firm commitment from at least one Spanish company to produce Jamón Ibérico for the U.S. market. This has proven to be a far more complicated process than the one followed by La Tienda when we brought the first Jamón Serrano to homes across America. But our patience has paid off.”

“Our trip this last June was particularly satisfying,” Mr. Harris continued, “In addition to visiting respected producers, my sons Tim, Jonathan and I were the guests of leading scientists at the University of Cáceres, who have dedicated their academic lives to the study of and appreciation for these unique animals. They introduced us to some frisky “teen-age” Iberian pigs that were playing at the waterhole at a finca (ranch). More than scientists, they were gourmets, and treated us to an incredible feast which began with plates of glistening jamón ibérico.”

In the past twelve months, members of the Harris family have visited Spain four times in their effort to import the best Jamón Ibérico, as well as the first. La Tienda expects that a handful of other Spanish producers will have USDA-approved production facilities within the next few months.

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