**How Goya Became One Of America's Fastest-Growing Food Companies**

VP Peter Unanue, CEO Bob Unanue, and VP Joe Perez have moved Goya's marketing mainstream. // David Yellen for Forbes

The headquarters of Goya Foods, the largest Hispanic-owned food company in the U.S., hardly smacks of innovation–it’s a low-slung brick building hiding out in industrial Secaucus, N.J. The most striking thing in the otherwise drab lobby is [Eva Longoria](http://www.forbes.com/profile/eva-longoria/) posing on the cover of Latina.

But the fraying magazines and gurgling fish tank front an accelerating enterprise with numbers that would make any startup smile. Though Goya has been serving Latinos in the U.S. for 77 years, President and CEO Bob Unanue had the simple but powerful idea a couple years ago to market key products–adobo seasoning, low-sodium beans and yellow rice–directly to non-Hispanics.

The result? After nearing the $1 billion sales mark in 2010, Goya’s revenues hit $1.3 billion in 2012, sources say, making it one of the fastest-growing food companies in the U.S. “We like to say we don’t market to Latinos, we market as Latinos,” says Unanue, who acknowledges the success but won’t discuss the numbers. His billionaire family still fully controls the business, and 15 family members work at the 3,500-employee company today.

When Prudencio Unanue Ortiz, Bob Unanue’s grandfather, founded Goya in New York City in 1936, the world was not so open to Hispanic cuisine. Unanue, who came to New York by way of Puerto Rico after emigrating from Spain, bought the Goya name from a Moroccan sardine-importer for $1, in part because he liked the association with the artist Francisco Goya, and also because he figured it was a lot easier to pronounce than his own surname (Oooh-NAN-oooh-way). He started out selling olives and olive oil to Spanish immigrants, first in his storefront and then distributing to bodegas throughout New York and New Jersey.

After World War II brought waves of Puerto Rican immigrants to New York, he added yucca, plantains and pigeon peas to his product line. When the 1950s brought the Cubans and the 1960s the Dominicans, Unanue added black beans, guava paste and coconut–and distribution across the East.

By the early 1980s “Goya was just sitting pretty as the Hispanic market started growing,” says John Stanton, a professor of food marketing at [St. Joseph’s University](http://www.forbes.com/colleges/saint-joseph-s-university/) in Philadelphia. “Then what happened in the U.S. was American consumers started wanting to eat slightly more traditional Hispanic foods.”

Marketing in English (to target both 2nd-generation Latinos as well as the broader market) captured some of this burgeoning group. Yet it wasn’t until 2005 that Bob Unanue and his brother Peter, the vice president of the company, hired Grey Group’s Wing agency in New York City to explicitly reach out to non-Latinos. New ads show an African-American mother stirring Goya yellow rice and a blonde, blue-eyed mom seasoning chicken with adobo. The result? “At the end of 2012 we gained an extra percentage point in the households where the campaign was,” says Alvaro Serrano, the Goya marketer overseeing the work.

They’ve done it without alienating their traditional consumers. Goya enjoys a 25% market share among authentic Hispanic food brands (the category excludes fakers like Taco Bell), according to Neilsen. By 2015 Latinos are expected to make up 17.8 percent of the American population and wield $1.5 trillion in buying power.

The advertising campaign has reached South to Florida, and will slowly expand westward. While Goya is the strongest brand along the Eastern seaboard, it has challengers in American West, where Mexican companies have moved north of the border for a piece of the American market. Goya is currently building a distribution facility in Texas to more cheaply bring its American-made Latino products to a huge chunk of the Latino population: Mexicans and Mexican-Americans living in Texas and California.

As the ad campaign expands across the country, the company’s revenue numbers should grow nicely. “If Goya or any other Latin-American brand is able to penetrate into the non-Hispanic consumer market, it will be really easy for them to double in size,” says Nacho Hernandez of online specialty Latino retailer MexGrocer.com. “It’s just a much larger market, period.”

**This article is available online at:**[**http://www.forbes.com/sites/erincarlyle/2013/05/08/how-goya-became-one-of-americas-fastest-growing-food-companies/**](http://www.forbes.com/sites/erincarlyle/2013/05/08/how-goya-became-one-of-americas-fastest-growing-food-companies/)