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## José Luis Calvo

Grupo Calvo

Three generations of the Calvo family have created one of Europe's leading food businesses, which has a global presence and an international reputation for excellence. Founded in 1940, Grupo Calvo is today one of the biggest fishing and fish processing and distribution businesses in the world. Now overseen increasingly by the third generation, the group has prospered against a background of strong values, such as placing its stakeholders at the center of its business.





“It is these four concepts that truly reflect our family values: people, commitment, quality and innovation.”

**José Luis Calvo,**  
Honorary Chairman,  
Grupo Calvo

Small, family-owned grocery stores based in out-of-the-way towns often give rise to hugely successful businesses with a global presence. And this is the case with the Spanish company Grupo Calvo, which is today a multinational fishing, processing and distribution company based in the northern Spanish town of Carballo in Galicia. Jointly managed by the second and third generations of the Calvo family, Grupo Calvo is a testament to the hard work and innovation of its founder Luis Calvo Sanz, his descendants and all its stakeholders.

Grupo Calvo is best known today for its three big brands – Calvo in Spain, Gomes da Costa in Brazil and Nostromo in Italy. Through these brands, the group sells its seafood products, which are mainly based on mussels, sardines, squid and tuna. As part of its vertically integrated business model, Calvo is engaged in fishing – as well as processing and distribution – and operates a fleet of seven tuna trawlers together with a number of support boats. The group is one of Galicia’s main employers, with more than 800 members of staff.

Although the group’s official start date is 1940, the business goes back even further. Entrepreneur Luis Calvo Sanz saw an opportunity to grow a business after inheriting a warehouse store from his father in 1908. As a teenager, he set up a new store with the brand “Son of J. Calvo” in Carballo and sold a number of products such as beans, olive oil and wine to local merchants. Later, he got the idea of selling canned meat, and this is where the canning part of the business began to take hold. Later, Luis took his canned meat and beans business a step further and, in 1940, opened a factory to turn out his products in sufficient quantities. And this marked the official start of Grupo Calvo. Twelve years later, Luis’s eldest son José Luis Calvo joined the business. José is still an integral part of the company and sits on the board of directors.

### Innovation starts early

Through its innovations, such as building one of the first tuna-canning machines (in the late 1950s) and going on to develop other technologies, the Calvo Group grew rapidly

from the 1960s onward. And during this period, the group also focused more on tuna production and distribution, which is now at the core of the business. After Luis died in 1980, José took over and, from then on, Calvo opened more factories in Spain and abroad for processing tuna. In 1993, Calvo bought the Italian brand Nostromo and, in 2004, the Brazilian group Gomes da Costa. Through these acquisitions and developments in other parts of the world, Grupo Calvo became a truly multinational food business. And in 2006, the third generation began to take a more active role in the business, with Manuel Calvo García-Benavides, José’s nephew, taking over as CEO.

José says that being a family business has been crucial to the success of Grupo Calvo. “I think that being a family business from the outset has enabled us to remain true to strong values and a strong corporate culture that have helped us make important decisions and navigate in all types of water,” he says. “We have a clear sense of our origins and, although today we are an international group, we began as a grocer’s shop. We also know what we do well: produce high-quality preserved fish, a healthy and nutritious food that is a staple in the shopping basket of many households.”

Asked about the particular values of Calvo as a family business, José says these have evolved, but they are very much connected to the community the business grew up in. “Obviously, my father did not set up the business and then sit down to write out the values and corporate culture he would promote,” he says. “These came about as a result of his own family values and probably those of the small Galician town where we originated – values such as effort, the desire to do the right thing, respect for others and curiosity.”

### The four concepts

He adds: “Some time ago, as part of internal analysis, we asked ourselves what guided us as a company and what values we shared with our employees, partners, customers and community. We came up with four concepts that underpin how



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In 1952, Luis Calvo Sanz's eldest son José Luis Calvo joined the business. José is still an integral part of the company and sits on the board of directors.



Grupo Calvo is best known today for its three big brands – Calvo in Spain, Gomes da Costa in Brazil and Nostromo in Italy.

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José Luis Calvo

we treat and relate to one another. It is these four concepts that truly reflect our family values: people, commitment, quality and innovation.”

Calvo has been good at instilling these values in the business at all levels. José says this has been done by way of example. “I believe this created the foundation for our deep-rooted identity and culture,” he says. “As we grew, and the number of collaborators and work centers in Europe and America increased, we implemented a fully integrated, people-oriented management and corporate culture deployment plan.”

Governance at the company is overseen by a board of directors, which is made up of 10 members. Six of those are from the family – both the second and third generations are represented – and the four other members belong to a minority shareholder. In addition, family shareholders meet twice a year to keep abreast of all relevant events, says José. “We have the advantage that, in our family, all decisions are made collectively – a principle passed on to us by our parents.”



Under José’s management and various acquisitions and developments in other parts of the world, the Calvo Group became a truly multinational food business.

But how does a business such as Grupo Calvo maintain the entrepreneurial zeal of its extraordinary founder Luis? How does the company take this beyond the second generation and into the third and beyond? José says that developing talent at all levels is key to continuing Calvo’s entrepreneurial journey. “Developing initiative and talent is paramount for success,” he says. “This has always been the case, but in today’s ever-changing world in which everything happens so fast, past experience and success play a much smaller role. Grupo Calvo management comprises both professionals who have grown with the group and people who joined the business as it expanded and branched out internationally. We incorporated customized training courses long ago, which our employees receive throughout their professional career.”

There is no doubt that future generations of the family and staff of the group will appreciate this commitment to professionalism and training. And, of course, the commitment to entrepreneurship. The strong set of values, set against Calvo’s well-rooted local connections, should also provide the strength for Calvo to succeed for many years to come. That is something the Calvo family can take pride in.

## José Luis Calvo

Honorary Chairman

Company name: **Grupo Calvo**

Generations: **Second and third**

Founded: **1940 in Carballo, Spain**

Industry: **Fishing and fish processing**

Employees (2016): **5,122**

Revenue (2016): **€575m**