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# DOCa Rioja announces leadership transition as José Luis Lapuente steps down after 27 years of service

Pablo Franco Sarría appointed to lead the organization as it enters a new phase focused on sector growth and innovation

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The Governing Board of the Rioja Qualified Designation of Origin (DOCa Rioja) has approved a significant change in its leadership. José Luis Lapuente, who has served as Secretary-General and Director for 27 years, will step down from his position effective September 1. The decision was made during a plenary session as part of a broader institutional renewal within the organization.

Lapuente, who is approaching retirement age, cited personal reasons for his departure. Both he and the board agreed that he will continue to provide sectoral and strategic advice to the Presidency for an estimated period of three years. At the end of the session, Lapuente addressed the board, stating that he faced a crossroads between advancing his retirement or taking on new challenges. He expressed gratitude for his long tenure and said he now wishes to dedicate more time to his family.

Raquel Pérez Cuevas, President of the DOCa Rioja, thanked Lapuente for his nearly three decades of service. She highlighted his dedication and leadership, noting that his efforts have been crucial to the growth and prestige of the Rioja wine sector. Pérez Cuevas acknowledged mixed feelings about his departure, celebrating his achievements while expressing regret at losing part of his daily involvement. However, she emphasized that his expertise would remain valuable in his new advisory role.

This leadership change comes as DOCa Rioja embarks on a new phase under recently appointed presidential leadership. The new administration aims to bring management closer to registered members and increase the value provided to them. It also plans to redefine the direction of the sector with a work program focused on strengthening Rioja’s position and reputation.

To fill the soon-to-be-vacant Secretary-General and Director position, DOCa Rioja launched a selection process managed by a specialized talent recruitment firm. The process attracted several high-level candidates from both inside and outside the organization. After evaluating finalists, the committee of commission presidents unanimously selected Pablo Franco Sarría for the role.

Franco has been with DOCa Rioja for eight years and has served as Director of the Control Body since 2017. He holds a degree in Food Industries Engineering with a specialization in wine production, a master’s in Viticulture, Enology, and Wine

Marketing, and an MBA from a recognized business school. He also completed a business management program at Georgetown University. Franco brings over 20 years of experience in the wine sector, including technical and management roles at wineries and other regulatory councils.

During the plenary session, Pérez Cuevas described Franco as tireless, innovative, and business-minded, with a close working style that has helped him understand the needs of DOCa Rioja's members. She expressed confidence that he is well-suited to lead the organization through upcoming challenges.

Franco said it is an honor and a great responsibility to be named Secretary-General and Director. He acknowledged that taking on such a role can be daunting but said it fills him with respect and excitement. Franco stated that he enjoys working in this field and is committed to giving his best in this new stage, aiming to achieve significant progress for both DOCa Rioja and the region it represents.

The transition marks an important moment for DOCa Rioja as it seeks to build on its legacy while adapting to new industry demands. The organization is recognized internationally for its quality standards in wine production and plays a key role in Spain's wine sector. The leadership change is expected to influence its strategic direction over the coming years.