

LIMES

Mexico building export image

The country's lime suppliers are presenting a new commitment to sustainability as they tap further into demand across Europe, Russia and the Middle East

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The Mexican lime industry is garnering a solid reputation as a quality and consistent supplier as the nation continues to step up its efforts to meet the most demanding market requirements. And with a growing focus on social and environmental sustainability, Mexico is now shaping up as a significant force to reckon with in the future.

"Global demand for citrus is enormous, especially those fruits which are produced according to the latest world trends in terms of working in harmony with the environment and the protection of local communities – in other words social and environmental responsibility," explains Susana Gómez Vaillard of Mexican producer-exporter Citricola Couturier Hermanos.

"The quality and consistency of Mexican limes is well above that of other producing nations," she continues. "This has provided the basis on which to grow and harness our competitive edge every year."

Today Europe absorbs roughly 30 per cent of the production of Mexican Persian limes, according to Ms Gómez, making it an extremely important and interesting destination, which is why many Mexican suppliers are doubling their efforts to ensure they satisfy Europe's wide range of tough demands.

In 2009 Citricola CH completed the process of certification in social responsibility to complement existing standards and by May this year the company hopes to add LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming) accreditation to its growing list of accolades. Export-wise, the group is keen to tap into demand among emerging consumer markets in eastern Europe, Russia and the Middle East.

"In 2008 we acquired two new lime groves in Martínez de la Torre in the state of Veracruz which has increased Citricola CH's total planted area with citrus to 3,000ha," explains Ms Gómez. "Because of this expansion, this year we will be able to export a greater volume of limes to Europe and eastern Europe as well as begin shipping for the first time to Russia."

Mexico could double its production of Persian limes over the next three years as part of a new project to improve fruit quality and plant productivity in the country's Yucatán Peninsula.

So far, some 6,000ha of groves have been planted with certified citrus seedlings by the Xamantún nursery in Campeche, according to a report by local newspaper *Diario de Yucatán*, with total planted area expected to rise to 15,000ha in three years' time.

"Campeche has the potential to export citrus and having a producing nursery in the area will help to advance this goal," said José Guadalupe May Chablé, who heads up the Xamantún nursery.

Already 3,000ha have been planted with Persian lime groves, of which 1,500ha are expected to produce 19,500 tonnes of fruit over the next few months worth some US\$41m and benefiting around 1,000 growers.

Citricola CH exports roughly 250 containers of limes between the months of May and January to markets across Europe including the UK, France, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Italy and Spain, as well as Hungary, Poland and Greece since 2008. The Middle East is another area of interest for the company after traders in Dubai expressed an interest in receiving fruit by sea following a recent airfreight trial.

Although limes have not emerged completely unscathed from the impact of the recession, Ms Gómez says demand remains fairly robust in Europe. And with the weather looking set to



Mexico exports 30 per cent of its Persian lime output to Europe

play in favour of producers in 2010, the season is looking rather promising.

"In 2008, Mexico experienced a record year in terms of lime exports," she explains. "All of this was made possible by solid European demand, an increase in output and good quality on arrival. That said, 2009 was not a record year due to the recession in Europe and a prolonged period of drought in Mexico, followed by a marked rainy season, which made it difficult to establish a regular export programme."

"But 2010 could turn into another year of growth," Ms Gómez continues. "The groves are developing well and the crop forecasts are strong. More growers are adhering to the latest standards and Mexico as a whole continues to consolidate its position on existing markets as well as develop a presence in others. All of this combined makes us feel optimistic for the year ahead."

With exciting plans for market expansion, a close commitment to sustainable production practices and the recent increase in planted area, Ms Gómez is confident Citricola CH is also on the right path to success as the new year unfolds.

"Our company has exported citrus to Europe since 1995 and we have many reasons to be optimistic," she points out. "A company's value is a commitment and this makes us strive to maintain our position no matter whether we find ourselves in difficult times."