



Safari the next step in Planasa's Mexican venture

FESTIVAL SEASON STARTS EARLY

The international licensing team of Ekland Marketing Company (Emco Cal) is preparing for the third year of its Festival strawberry licensing programme in Mexico.

Festival is heavy yielding and early maturing. It is the first strawberry ready for each shipping season in Mexico – when the prices are highest. Its firmness means it ships very well, and with a long shelf-life. A glossy appearance and excellent taste create a favourable impression with consumers and store buyers, according to Erika Montañez, Emco Cal's licensing executive for Mexico.

The country's marketers and exporters have traditionally supplied fresh strawberries to the domestic market and the rest of North America. "We are starting to see them open new markets. The industry is now airfreighting licensed Festival strawberries to Asia and Europe."

In recent years European Union customs authorities have seized many unlicensed shipments of fresh strawberries, but Emco Cal has developed license programmes for new University of Florida strawberry varieties that carefully balance positive economic incentives with rigorous enforcement against unlicensed shipments.

Montañez is quick to point out that doing business in Mexico has been a "complete pleasure for Emco Cal, with no serious difficulties". *TG*

MICHOACÁN—In 2010 Spanish soft fruit breeder Planasa Group launched Planamerica to develop new berry varieties for Mexican producers. Alexandre Pierron-Darbonne, Planasa's managing director, outlines the progress it has made since then.

by Maura Maxwell



This year you've been very prolific in terms of new varieties. What's the latest news from Planamerica?

Alexandre Pierron-Darbonne: We've just launched a strawberry, Safari, which grows very well in central Mexico. We're also starting to produce strawberry and raspberry plants from our state-of-the-art nurseries in Ciudad Guzmán in the state of Jalisco. Outside berries, we're very excited about a new area of business for us: the production of asparagus plants.

Tell us a bit more about Safari.

APD: Safari is an extra-early high-quality variety that has been specially developed for production in sub-

tropical climates such as Mexico and Florida. It is what's known as an 'infra short day' cultivar, which means it flowers substantially earlier than normal as it requires fewer photo-inductive cycles to provoke flowering.

Designed to be planted in mid-August, it starts to produce fruit in November, with production peaking during December and January. We believe it has the potential to replace the current market leader, Festival, as it produces a superior quality berry and is able to maintain its berry size much better during



January and February, when sizes usually start to be compromised.

You introduced the Adelita raspberry in 2011. How have sales developed?

APD: Interest in the variety has truly surpassed our expectations. The five companies who make up our exporters' club, which we set up to develop and test new varieties on the market, have thrown themselves fully behind Adelita. Last season there were just 10ha under production but, such has been the interest generated throughout the supply chain – from growers to supermarket buyers – that we expect this figure to rise to 150ha this season.

Part of this rapid expansion is down to a new plant propagation

technique developed by Planasa in Spain which enables us to deliver virtually limitless supplies of propagation material within two years of selection.

Mexico wants to capitalise on its berry export potential. How should it do this?

APD: Planasa has invested heavily in Mexico because we believe the country could become one of the world's leading berry exporters in the short to medium term thanks to its ability to produce extremely high-quality fruit from October right through to May.

The past five years have seen an explosion in production and we expect this to continue through the next decade. Along with the climate, Mexico has an abundance

OPPOSITE—
Alexandre
Pierron-Darbonne
is Planasa's MD

of cheap labour and is well served logistically – in short, it has all the ingredients for success.

Up to now, the greatest barrier has been the lack of varieties developed specifically to suit the local climate, but this is gradually changing as more breeders move in to exploit the country's potential.

What other projects do you have lined up for the coming years?

APD: Our blackberry breeding programme is progressing rapidly and we have a number of promising selections lined up which we hope to start trialling from next year. Our objective is to bring the first new varieties to market by 2015 or 2016. Eventually we hope to make Planamerica the number-one berry breeder for the Mexican market. ●

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Adelita



Sabrina



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