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Actions speak very loudly in describing Agromod's quality control

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TAPACHULA, CHIAPAS, MEXICO — Armed with a sharp knife, a tiny woman patiently crouched, stalking each heavily-laden papaya plant like a hungry, prowling, young lioness. She slowly circled to study all options in choosing from the lowest Maradol, which are the first to ripen among the bulbous clusters. All of the fruit was green. But she carefully sought the fruit that was beginning a color break that would perfectly suit the long trail from Mexico's southern tip to very distant international markets.

When she chose her prey, a single fast knife flick released the fruit for the postharvest process.



In the Agromod Maradol papaya plantation in Tapachula, Chiapas, searching fruit that is ripe for harvest, this young woman circles fruit-laden papaya plants very slowly, studying each fruit. A harvest teammate handed the hunter a clean sheet of heavy newsprint-like paper. She wrapped gently the papaya as if swaddling a baby and passed it

to her helper before seeking the next fruit. Her helper then wrapped a second piece of protective paper around the papaya and gently placed it into a foam-padded basket for a ride down “cable via” to the packinghouse. Cable via — the cable train ? is a banana-industry-like cable system designed to efficiently and quickly move fruit a half-mile or more from the field to the perfectly-screened packinghouse.

Small but remarkably strong young men lift the fully packed baskets to hang from the cable. The two men, strapped to pulling ropes, are tied to pull the rolling 20-car train under black shade cloth, to protect harvested fruit from the tropical sun as the cars are discharged in not many minutes for the careful washing, grading and packing process.

This is all part of the quality control process at Agromod S.A. de C.V. The company primarily ships the Blondie brand and produces 2,000 acres of Maradol papayas.

Despite the investment in paper to protect the papayas from plant to packinghouse, as the cable train is discharged, the paper is discarded for recycling to suit food safety regulations, Romero said. There are a fastidious cleaning and grading process in the packing house. One intriguing step is using high-pressure air hoses to blow pinhead-sized snails out of the crevices of either end of the papayas. This avoids otherwise-inevitable problems with USDA APHIS border inspectors.

Agromod is located in Mexico’s tropics, outside of Tapachula, a small city at the southern point of Mexico’s southernmost state, Chiapas. This Mexican extremity wraps around most of the length of Guatemala, and faces its neighbor across a narrow river, the Rio Suchiate.

In nearby Hidalgo, Chiapas, Agromod also owns In Vitro S.A. de C.V., an ultra-modern high-tech micro-propagation plant breeding facility.

This facility partners with producers to breed superior varieties of coffee, agave (for tequila), bananas, cacao and castor oil, as well as papayas. The breeding facility has the capacity to produce up to 12 million plants in its greenhouses.

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