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Divine Flavor 2018 plantings to increase grape production by 53 percent

April 27, 2018

HERMOSILLO, SONORA, MEXICO — “Every January, I feel nervous about the amount of grapes we have” for the Mexican grape deal, Carlos Bon, Jr., admitted.

But as Bon starts making grape sales contracts each February, “I feel nervous that we don’t have enough. That is the main reason we keep growing!”

Already a very large producer of grapes, Bon, who is the sales manger of Divine Flavor LLC, said the firm this February and March launched a huge planting program that will increase the firm’s grape acreage by 53 percent.



At Divine Flavor’s Pesqueria vineyard, Carlos Bon, Jr., demonstrates the effectiveness of plastic shade covering, vs. open field. The grape vines on

either side of the plastic cover are the same age and same variety. Obviously, the protected variety is flourishing. A close look at the photo reveals that the open-field vines closest to the cover are more vital than the plants further away. About half of this growth will be in new growing areas, Bon added. This production is coming in Baja, CA, 60 miles from Divine Flavor's sleek vegetable operation in Ensenada. Furthermore, Divine Flavor is aggressively planting grapes in Jalisco this year.

The other half of the new production is being planted in Divine Flavor's grape production base, Sonora.

"This will allow us to expand our season and be a year-long supplier once we add partnerships with Peruvian and Chilean growers," Bon noted.

"This is not something that has never been done before. It has happened before in other countries. The difference is we're not just selling grapes. It is a strategic partnership with Southern Hemisphere growers to grow the best varieties and specialties to have them on the shelf for a very long time."

He emphasized that Divine Flavor's huge expansion "does not include one single vine" of established varieties, such as Flame, Sugraone, Perlette or Summer Royal.

Instead, all Divine Flavor's new production is "high-flavor, specialty varieties." All the new production will be organically produced.

He noted that this vast planting of specialty varieties will not have a negative impact by oversupplying the grape category.

Bon said these varieties don't cannibalize the sales of older grape varieties. Instead, because of different tastes, shapes and colors, they add to retailers' grape sales.

Bon indicated that the new plantations' infrastructures will be consistent with the staple Grupo Alta pattern that Divine Flavor has used in its ultra-modern Culiacan and Ensenada vegetable operations. In a tiny nutshell, Grupo Alta places a priority on many philosophical bases, beginning with social responsibility.

Bon said that his uncle, Alan Aguirre, Sr., who today is the chief executive officer of Divine Flavor, and Bon's late father, Carlos Bon, Sr., conducted grape trials in Jalisco 20 years ago. "It never quite fully worked," he said.

Bon credits subsequent grape production efforts in the tropics of Petrolina, Brazil, and Piura, Peru, for leading to insights making-possible modern-day production in Jalisco.

"They showed us how to grow grapes in the tropics." Beyond that, "There are other factors, with new varieties that are better-suited to those conditions."

Now, he said, grape production in Jalisco "allows a six-week head start" on most Mexican production.

Bon indicated that in Jalisco and Baja, there will be minor volumes of Divine Flavor grapes produced in 2019. Both areas are "fully organic and focused on specialty varieties."

Bon playfully refers to "Alta California" when he speaks of grape production in California's San

Joaquin Valley. The reference translates as “upper” California, as opposed to Baja (lower) California in Mexico.

But, whatever the name, Divine Flavor is planting grapes in what was once a wine-producing region in Baja California. Conditions there are very much like the lower San Joaquin Valley.

So, why plant in Baja?

“Baja is our missing link to a year-round season. From Sonora, we ship from May to the beginning of July. Then, we stop until Peru starts in December. But, that gap from July to November will be filled from Baja.”

He noted a key factor: “Our number one varieties’ licenses are limited to the country, not to our growing regions. So, all our new, specialty varieties in Sonora can go to Baja.”

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