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Divine Flavor's 12-month grape plan reaches maturity

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Divine Flavor LLC, a longtime table grape grower-shipper rooted in Sonora, in recent years has aggressively spread its operations along the Pacific coast.

As those vineyards matured, Divine Flavor, based in Nogales, AZ, will be able to consistently fulfill its year-round grape program. Divine Flavor's sales team will be offering fruit from Peru, Chile, Jalisco, Sonora and Baja Norte.

Among produce buyers, "everyone wants value, and everyone wants specialty grapes too," said Carlos Bon Jr., Divine Flavor's sales manager. The firm can offer both with its "big, big portfolio. We have arrived at the point that we're a one-stop shop."



At the Ica, Peru Divine Flavor ranch Agricola Don Ricardo, Fabrizzio Segura, the production manager, shows Gummyberries and Cotton Candy specialty grape varieties. In Divine Flavor's fifth season of partnering with table grape producers in Peru and Chile, those alliances "have turned out really well," according to Michael DuPuis, who is the firm's quality assurance and public relations coordinator.

The South American partners were carefully chosen by Divine Flavor because all involved share business principles committed to social responsibility, food safety, sustainability and other such productive philosophies. These allies are growing and packing — under the Divine Flavor brand — the same high-flavor, high-quality varieties that Divine Flavor is producing in Mexico.

Bon added that "Divine Flavor" is not so much a grape brand, "but a promise that what the retailers buy will make the world better" because of the inherent principles.

The clear understanding and acceptance of corporate philosophy and production approaches "allows us all to work on the same page," DuPuis said.

On Jan. 30, DuPuis spoke to *The Produce News* on the heels of a South American swing to visit those grape industry affiliates.

"We are creating a program that is very strong for the market and the consumer," DuPuis noted. Customer feedback for Divine Flavor's South American fruit this year "has been tremendous."

Some of the special, new grape varieties produced in Peru and Chile are Jellyberries, Gummyberries, Cotton Candy, and Muscat Beauty. "This year is interesting," DuPuis added, because "we're starting Autumn Crisp, which will be available next season in volume and quality."

Bon said the five-year learning curve working with South American partners showed that "it's not exactly the same" when producing the same varieties in geographically diverse growing areas. Now, with years of experience, "we feel absolutely confident that we know what to do and how to do it. We feel one and the same with our partners. We have the same focus on flavor and quality."

Bon said Chilean and Peruvian Jellyberries that arrived into the port of Philadelphia on Jan. 29 "were as good as what we produce in Mexico. We are able to replicate what we're doing in Mexico."

Bon said his meetings with retail customers underscore that Divine Flavor's specialty varieties "bring incremental sales to them. They tack on to grape sales volume. They'll have better results from their

financial perspective. It's a win-win-win for the consumer, retailer and us."

Bon added, "It's important to mention how much value the specialty grapes bring to the market when having them at specific times of the year. We are looking for solutions to help our customers have better results."

Bon said, for example, that when Divine Flavor customers can merchandise the new Autumn Crisp variety in the summertime, those retailers become leaders in the grape category, "which is a huge advantage."

Bon underscored that Divine Flavor's reach in the table grape business has stretched to harvest 51 weeks a year. "I think that is pretty awesome."

He said there is one week in July — between Sonora and Baja — when the firm will be shipping only from inventory.

Divine Flavor's timetable has Baja shipping from July to November and Peru on tap from October into early February. The Chilean deal begins in small volumes in late January and rolls into the end of March or early April. This winter, Divine's Chilean deal hit volume "a little early," which was in the last week of January, as Peru's shipments were nearing a seasonal end.

Bon noted that this April will mark the first time that Divine Flavor's new Jalisco vineyards will be producing commercial grape volumes, beginning harvest in the first or second week of the month. "This comes at the time of year when good grapes are hard to find."

This spring from Jalisco, "We'll have big volume and good quality," he said. In 2019, Divine Flavor's Jalisco vineyards supplied only Mexico's domestic market as volumes were small.

In Jalisco, Divine Flavor grows only its specialty varieties. These include Sweet Celebration, Sweet Globe, Autumn Crisp, Cotton Candy, Jellyberries and Gummyberries.

Divine Flavor's largest table grape volume comes from several farms in Sonora. That shipping period generally runs from early May until early July.

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