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Pharr Bridge volume growing for even stronger future

By

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The outlook for fresh Mexican produce imports is positive. Growing numbers in fruit and vegetable crossings and the value of fresh products continues to increase through the Pharr International Bridge, according to Luis Bazan, the bridge's director.

When Bazan spoke with The Produce News in late February, south Texas growers were in the process of assessing damage from multiple days of freezing, which commenced on Valentine's Day. Bazan expressed a sincere sympathy for those growers, but dinner tables will continue to be served, which translates to higher demand for similar products from Mexican growing areas that didn't experience the freeze.

"Even without this unfortunate situation, our number of produce crossings this spring could be upwards of 15,000 shipments per month, which was our average last year," he said. "We should continue to be the leading port of entry into the spring and early summer. Last year, even with the pandemic, we were still above normal."

Bazan said it is too early to tell how long the Pharr Bridge volume peak would last into this coming summer.

The bridge paved an entry for millions of pounds of avocados prior to Super Bowl, and avocados and berries are the largest value items entering Pharr.

Tomatoes, Bell peppers, pineapples and papayas were other major-volume commodities crossing into Pharr, and citrus volumes are increasing.

Many of these products are grown in Tamaulipas, which abuts south Texas, as well as Veracruz, on Mexico's southern Gulf coast. Other districts near the Yucatan are also shipping up the eastern coast to Pharr.

Of course, substantial volumes are also coming from Culiacan and other west Mexico growing areas, via a relatively new and very fast transcontinental highway.

To handle the expanding growth, the City of Pharr, which owns the Pharr Bridge, joined with economic and political allies to successfully lobby to expand the bridge.

On Dec. 31, former President Donald Trump issued a presidential permit for construction of a second bridge paralleling the original Pharr International Bridge. Bazan said the second bridge will expedite safe and secure trade between the U.S. and Mexico by increasing truck throughput and reducing wait times at the border.

Planning and conceptual designs are now underway in the U.S. and Mexico.

“When designs are finalized, we’ll start construction at the end of 2021 or beginning of 2022, once the IBWC and its counterpart in Mexico agree on the design,” Bazan said. “It will take 14 months to build the entire span, which is three miles in length, plus an additional three months to build the cross-over/switching lanes. This will be an added benefit for customers and all end-users, as these special lanes will assist operators with traffic control during contingencies and in case of emergencies.”

He noted that overall bridge improvements have been underway in Reynosa, which is the city at Mexico’s end of the bridge, since 2017. There have been extensive infrastructure improvements there, such as the modernization of Mexico’s port of entry, which have paved the way for increased cross-border trade and more companies looking to either invest in Pharr or cross their shipments through Pharr.

This second bridge span will give Pharr a competitive advantage by adding additional lanes to completely separate trucks and cars, dedicating specific lanes for empties, full cargo, certified cargo, and passenger vehicles, thereby adding capacity and reducing wait times.”

The City of Pharr indicated: “With this permit, Pharr will now have an official gate-to-gate FAST lane, or set of FAST lanes, from Mexico to the United States.”

According to the city, “the Pharr Bridge is a leading crossing point for receiving Mexican produce into the United States, crossing over 65 percent of the nation’s produce, and counting.”

Bazan said Pharr Bridge will be exhibiting at the 2021 Viva Fresh Expo, booth #312, “I am looking forward to Viva Fresh this year.” He added that he’s pleased to see the trade emerge from the pandemic to personal interaction.

Photo: Luis Bazan, director of the Pharr International Bridge, outside the bridge’s office building in Pharr, TX.

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