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Fortune Growers boosting the prospects of smaller Mexican growers

By

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In conjunction with Mexican government agencies and other stakeholders, U.S.-based Fortune Growers is materially involved in advancing the fate of small- to medium-sized growers in Mexico.



Fortune Growers, which is headquartered in Elgin, IL, and works with many different large-scale growers, is attempting to help smaller growers by addressing the logistics challenge of getting their product from the fields in Mexico to the grocery shelves in the United States. Recently the company hosted a webinar with several of these stakeholders analyzing the issue, discussing tools that can be utilized and proposing solutions.

The business goal is to help smaller growers survive and thrive, and ultimately keep them and their workers at home in Mexico, which is the societal goal of both Mexican and U.S. officials.

Luis Solarte, president of Fortune, said while the idea is to increase trade between the two countries, it also gives access to this market to the smaller growers. The Fortune president noted that the Texas International Produce Association has been a major driver of the increase in trade, as its members are leading the way.

TIPA President Dante Galeazzi participated in the webinar and revealed that 240,000 truckloads of fresh produce have passed through the Texas border from Mexico to the United States in the last year, with 190,000 crossing at the Pharr, TX, entry point.

He said his organization is excited to be working with Fortune and the Mexican government to bring best practices and food safety understanding to all growers, large and small. He noted that harmonization of food safety protocols among all three nations of the original North American Free Trade Agreement as well as the recent update is an attainable objective.

“We are excited to be part of this first step,” said Galeazzi.

The webinar revealed that there are several challenges to be addressed. Solarte is a backer of SENASICA, which he described as Mexico’s equivalent to the Food & Drug Administration in the United States. He intimated that SENASICA does not have the same robust reputation of the FDA but that it should. He indicated that smaller growers can be taught best practices and be certified by SENASICA, making their product exportable to the United States. He said Fortune has been working with smaller growers on these issues and will continue to do so.

The webinar pointed to work being done by the Mexican government to establish consolidation centers, or agrologistics parks, throughout Mexico where smaller growers can bring their product, aggregate it with others and compete on a larger scale. Government officials said several of these are already up and running, with more in the works. Solarte noted that Fortune is involved in establishing such a center in Mexico near the Pharr entry point.

These agroparks have already made a difference. Mexico officials said one such park has already sold more than 81,000 tons of tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers. Another has consolidated growers producing on 823 hectares. Still another agropark project is in the works in the state of Nayarit, which one official called “a sleeping giant.”

These parks are designed to give access to smaller growers but also introduce the economy of scale to the process by reducing product costs and creating efficiencies.

In addition, a Mexico agency involved in agriculture and rural development has launched an internet-based platform to allow growers to directly sell their product to buyers without using an intermediary or a middleman. Agriculture officials in Mexico say this can eliminate or reduce brokerage fees, making it more profitable for small and medium producers to compete.

The free app AgroOferta can be downloaded on any mobile device via Google. The Google webpage describes it as follows: “AgroOferta is a free digital platform for interactive consultation for computers and mobile devices, in which national and international producers and buyers can easily and safely locate agricultural, livestock and fishery products and access their characteristics, availability and prices first-hand without intermediaries.”

The webinar participants encouraged buyers on the U.S. side of the border to download the app.

Solarte noted that the goal is to leverage the online app, the agoparks, the desires of U.S. and Mexico officials, and the needs of the produce industry to help better serve Mexico’s cadre of smaller growers.

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