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Grupo Alta hits 30-year milestone

What started off as a 60-hectare project of table grapes in 1991 has turned into one of the largest agricultural companies in all of Mexico. With more than 11 different farms and over 10,000 hectares of growing land throughout Sonora, in addition to new projects in Jalisco and Baja, Mexico, Grupo Alta is celebrating 30 years of business, marking a major milestone for the grower.

Very soon after the company was begun, the vision was very clear — to grow the freshest, best-tasting products for consumers around the world. When the company was founded by Enrique Camou Mendoza, Carlos Bon Echavarría and Alan Ricardo Aguirre Ibarra, they knew they had the opportunity to be the pioneers of their time due to the success they earned at their first farm, La Cuesta, which then produced Flame and Perlette table grapes. Although it took roughly 12 years, and navigating through the challenges, the ground had been established for the future of the company.

In 1992, after Grupo Alta had become more established, the company principals knew if they wanted to grow the best fruits and vegetables, they would need to take swift actions of creating solid social programs within their organization, which focused on hands-on training for cultivation, labor compliance, comfortable working conditions for the farm collaborators, and other points. This course of action led the company to become the first grower in all of Mexico to be Fair Trade certified, a social compliance standard highly recognized worldwide in the industry.

“Social responsibility has and always will be more than a certification for our company,” said Alan Aguirre, president and CEO of Grupo Alta. “Our farmers, collaborators and staff are the heart of the company, and this is certainly one of the most contributing factors of our 30-year company achievement in producing fresh and healthy produce full of flavor, which has been produced in an organic and sustainable manner.”

Prior to earning its Fair Trade certification, Grupo Alta had always kept their priorities focused on social responsibility. The company had initiated their own social program, Foundation Alta which was created internally around 1995, slightly before the Fair Trade movement began in Germany around 1997. It was in 2005 when the Foundation Alta wheels started moving (literally), and the company started providing a variety of amenities such as mobile clinics that go from farm-to-farm offering farmers medical services, dental work, and vision care. Although, the main principles, aside from medical and dental options, focus on the well-being and social development of each of the employees and collaborators at each of the farms. For Foundation Alta, the key is to build self-esteem, so each person feels proud and confident in the work they do, exceeding the norm in Mexican culture. It was these principles which created a ‘Disney-like’ environment and kept their work collaborators returning each growing season.

In the mid-1990s, Grupo Alta began investing in organic production, becoming the first organic producer in all of Mexico. At the time, and before organics were considered a trend in U.S. retail, the company knew if it wanted to have longevity and stability, it would also need to focus on what is being restored to the plants and soils rather than only relying on what the plants produced for them. Since then, Grupo Alta has and continues to be the leading supplier of Mexican table grapes for markets across North America.

After years of success supplying North American retailers and certain regions of Asia, England, and

Latin America, Grupo Alta wanted to create a bigger identity to reflect its core philosophy of quality and flavor. This identity came to life in 2007 with the birth of the brand Divine Flavor, which represents the growers and other farm companies across Mexico and South America. Now, Divine Flavor acts as the company's marketing arm and distribution center headquartered in Nogales, AZ and now has warehouses in San Diego, McAllen, and Philadelphia.

Shortly after Divine Flavor was established, Grupo Alta began growing multiple grape varieties such as Cotton Candy, Jellyberries (a purple concord grape), Gummyberries (an exclusive and premium red seedless) and other high-premium green seedless varieties. At this time, and after years of being a well-established grape producer, Grupo Alta had the experience and reputation to grow these grape varieties to help differentiate Divine Flavor as unique brand in the marketplace. In addition to helping contribute to Divine Flavor's product line, Grupo Alta began producing other products such as tomatoes, cucumbers and watermelons.

Grupo Alta's experience in the grape growing industry has given them the opportunity to exclusively participate in private and governmental grape breeding programs which has greatly complimented their programs to growing newer and sweeter grape varieties.

To help further grow the organic product selection for Divine Flavor, Grupo Alta joined forces with other farm ventures to create organic greenhouses in Baja, Mexico (known as Alta C1 Organics) using Alta technologies and infrastructure, which had been successful in the founding ranches of Sonora. From this, the company Viva Organica was formed and is now the lead specialty organic grower for Divine Flavor, with additional locations in Culiacan and Sayula, Mexico.

Over the past 30 years, Grupo Alta has set an example of what it means to be a successful agriculture company in today's industry. Its achievements have led to the production of millions of pounds of produce since its first shipment in 1991, doing so in a responsible, sustainable and organic manner.

"It is a major accomplishment to reach 30 years in this industry, and we are proud of each person, staff member, supplier, and customer who has helped us get this point in our company history," said Aguirre.

"Our company was built from family and is filled with inspiration from all of them," Aguirre continued. "Grupo Alta stands for passion, loyalty, solidarity, respect and social/environmental responsibility. For as long as we are a company, it will be our mission to produce with excellence and give our customers and their consumers a first-class experience with the products we grow."

Photo: Alan Ricardo Aguirre Ibarra, president, CEO and founder of Grupo Alta.

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