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**Divine Flavor moves to Sonora as grape deal heats up**

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By

Tim Linden

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[Divine Flavor](#) finished off its Jalisco table grape deal in early May and was just beginning to harvest its Sonoran vineyards as May finished its second week.

“The quality in Sonora looks outstanding,” said Carlos Bon, vice president of sales for the Nogales, AZ-based company, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. “We got started with the organics and will soon start packing our conventional grapes also.”



Bon said the company was in a little bit of a hurry to get the organics going as there have been limited supplies of organic grapes for several months. Speaking of the entire Sonoran crop, he is extremely optimistic that Mexico will deliver a robust crop with plenty of promotable volume, excellent flavor and good berry size.

While there is plenty of buzz about the sheer volume of the Sonoran deal this year — projections in

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the neighborhood of 25 million cartons exported to the U.S. — and the impact it will have on the market, Bon said Divine Flavor is laser focused on delivering the best grapes every day, providing exceptional customer service, and then repeating that the next day. He said patience is the key to meeting that standard. “Every variety will reach its maximum flavor if you can be patient,” he noted.

He said there will be very good supplies from late May until about July 20, with many different varieties enjoying their turn on the center stage. And while he admits there will be challenges in harvesting and marketing such a large crop, he is not interested in discussing those concerns. Bon said Mexico always has some issues — this year lack of labor is at the top of the list. “We are paid to deliver answers not problems — and that is what we are going to do,” he said. “We always come through and that’s because we always have a back-up plan. We erase the headaches and provide solutions to our customers.”

This year, Divine Flavor expects those solutions to include many opportunities for retail promotions throughout the season as aggressive pricing is predicted throughout the month of June.

With regard to labor issues, Michael DuPuis, quality assurance and public relations coordinator for the company, said the Divine Flavor’s well-entrenched social responsibility programs help it secure labor when others might struggle. The company’s production is Fair Trade certified and it offers many social and human development programs for its workers and their families.

Bon promised grapes packed under the Divine Flavor labor “will be of excellent quality and reasonably priced.” He said the company will have a complete lineup with many of the newer varieties to choose from, but he boasted that the company’s proprietary Jellyberries and Gummyberries are among his personal favorites in terms of flavor.

Turning his attention to the Jalisco production that had just wrapped up, Bon called it a very good season. He said this is only the third year the company has been selling grapes from Jalisco, which is not the traditional grape-growing region. “We have learned a lot in the last couple of years. The quality this year was exponentially better than the previous year. The Autumn Crisp was the best grape I have ever had. We are very excited about our Jalisco deal.”

With an earlier start date by about a month, Jalisco is bringing Mexican table grapes to the U.S. market a bit earlier, competing with production from Chile and Peru at the later stage of those deals. Jalisco offers the potential for helping to fill the April-May grape shortage that occurs from time to time, including this year. Divine Flavor’s Jalisco production has increased from 400 to 1,500 hectares over the past three years.

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## About Tim Linden |

Tim Linden grew up in a produce family as both his father and grandfather spent their business careers on the wholesale terminal markets in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Tim graduated from San Diego State University in 1974 with a degree in journalism. Shortly thereafter he began his career at The Packer where he stayed for eight years, leaving in 1983 to join Western Growers as editor of its monthly magazine. In 1986, Tim launched Champ Publishing as an agricultural publishing specialty company.

Today he is a contract publisher for several trade associations and writes extensively on all aspects of the produce business. He began writing for The Produce News in 1997, and currently wears the title of Editor at Large.

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