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RCF/Crespo adjusting production, product line to meet demand

By

John Groh

March 1, 2023

El Grupo Crespo is seeing a good start to the 2023 Mexican mango season, with excitement about a large, high-quality crop and a new item in its lineup: organic dried mangoes.

Nissa Pierson, who handles marketing for the company's Crespo organic and RCF conventional mangoes, said favorable weather in southern Mexico is leading to optimism for this season's crop.

"Fruit set has been really good, and there are expectations for a really big crop this year," she said. "You don't really know until you get into the actual regions, but we know there have been major bloomings and a good portion of bloom into set and a good portion of set settling into maturing fruit."

Pierson said the larger crop may give the impression that the season is starting earlier, but that is a misconception.

"One of the things we get asked a lot is if the season is starting earlier," she said. "In actuality, the fruit is not starting early, rather there is increased production as demand grows."

She further explained that the Peruvian mango deal traditionally runs until March, and there wasn't a pressing need for early fruit from Mexico. Plus, demand for mangoes within Mexico is very high at the beginning of the season, as much of the early fruit is consumed by the domestic market.

"Demand continues to grow for mangoes, so there have been more plantings in southern Mexico," said Pierson. "Over the last five years, people have been taking Mexican fruit earlier. As a result, El Grupo Crespo continues to increase acreage in the south because of the rising demand for both organic and conventional fruit."

Pierson said the climate in southern Mexico is especially favorable for growing mangoes.

"We started Ataulfos in late January and Tommy Atkins at the beginning of February," she said Feb. 16. "There are a lot of different micro-regions in the south, so it is conducive to growing different varieties. No one has a long history of growing large and diverse quantities in the south, because it was never needed before."

She said a lot of the U.S. mass-market retailers will start to pull from Mexico starting in mid-March, which is when most of the larger programs start, as Peru finishes. And the larger programs are larger than ever.

"In terms of demand and size, we'll have to see how things unfold," said Pierson. "But I think RCF/Crespo is in a great position, because we are the grower, packer and shipper, and because we

have the full infrastructure and supply chain, we have a better chance of pushing through regardless of any problems that come along.”

Pierson said the growth El Grupo Crespo/RCF has experienced comes from two sides: growth of the industry and growth as a company.

On the industry side, she said growth has come as a result of consumers having regular access to mangoes at a good price. “There is a reason mangoes are the most consumed fruit in the world, they bring people a great deal of joy,” she said. “And as more consumers get access to the fruit, they buy them and sales increase. It’s a simple equation.”

As a company, El Grupo Crespo has seen growth by working in direct partnership with its retailers, wholesalers and processors to obtain and provide not just mangoes but a clear line of communication and information flow as it pertains to mangoes.

“We work with our partners to get all the commodity education from orchard to table,” she said. “These micro relationships in the industry are a way to shoot the arrow directly into the target -- the direct route is always the most successful in terms of supply chains. We customize each region or retailer, and hone the program to meet their specific needs.”

For example, she said retailers on the East Coast might have different preferences than those on the West Coast. And retailers in the middle of the country may require different information, such learning to not store mangoes in the cooler.

“These are things that the industry as a whole knows, and we talk about the importance of it, but it can be difficult to drive home these messages to the exact people you need to reach,” said Pierson.

It is this type of expertise and commitment to the category that sets El Grupo Crespo and RCF Distributors apart from other mango growers, according to Pierson.

“There are very few companies that service their commodity with the same expertise we bring to mangoes,” she said. “The Crespos are experts in growing and packing, and we’ve combined that with the commodity education and culinary expertise, creating a really potent program that our customers want to be a part of.”

That expertise and willingness to try new things has led El Grupo Crespo to branch out beyond fresh mangoes with their organic dried mango line.

“We launched in both grocery and produce departments at end of last summer, so it’s still new, but it’s been very successful so far,” she said. “One of the strong suits of the program is that it is a direct program, so you have the fruit, you dry it and send it to the retailers. Quality is great because it’s not sitting in warehouse in New Jersey or L.A. for a year.”

Pierson said the organic dried program currently includes an Ataulfo SKU and a regular dried mango SKU, but Ataulfo con Chile y Limon will be added this summer.

“Also this summer, we are offering our more specialty mangoes,” she said. “In our industry, we have the problem of not having diverse PLUs for the new varieties. But we created a new specialty tag with UPCs that will roll out this summer.”

Pierson credits the Crespo family for its innovation and vision. The family founded its first farm in

1961 in Sinaloa, first growing chili peppers. When mangoes were first commercialized in the 1980s, the Crespos were there and their packinghouse Empaque Don Jorge has been around since. At first, they shipped mangoes all over the world, but today the focus is on the North American market.

Roberto Crespo Fitch, the patriarch and founder of the business, passed on and today his wife and children run the family business.

“I think the main reason they were able to accomplish all they have done is because of the family’s avant-garde, forward-thinking philosophy,” said Pierson. “They have this wonderful mix of Mexico’s traditional and modern values — family, community and culture — that’s married to modern systems and thinking. They have always been at the forefront of new: new varieties, new packinghouse machines, even organics. They were one of the first to go into organics around the time the organic movement started to ramp up in California. They have a way of catching on to things that are moving forward, but they still keep family and community as an integral part of the mission. They don’t change who they are — they are very humble and work very hard.”

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