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**Surety of supply drives Divine Flavor**

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By

Tim Linden

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In the world of fresh produce where Mother Nature plays a starring role, the team at [Divine Flavor](#) is devoted to eliminating supply gaps and creating a seamless transition from one production area to the next for their customers.

“We have increased production across the board; not just to grow our volume but to smooth out supply gaps from one district to the next,” said Carlos Bon, senior vice president of sales for the Nogales, AZ-based grower-shipper-distributor. “We are very focused on collecting data to accurately project our supplies three weeks out, which is what retailers are looking for.”



Carlos Bon

In fact, Divine Flavor is currently in the beginning phases of working with AI startups to use that technology to better predict upcoming yields. “We are just in the initial stages, but we are exploring what this data can do for us as AI evolves and the technology expands,” he said.

Bon said the company has already expanded its production areas to smooth the gaps, trialing new areas every year to determine what mix of geographies works best to create an endless flow of product in a predictable pattern.

He revealed that in years gone by, Divine Flavor was worried about overlapping production from districts as it did not want to create an oversupply situation. Today, it is focused on managing the

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overlapping production with the elimination of gaps for its U.S. and Canadian customers as its main concern.

Toward that goal, the company has developed core customers in the Mexican market to help alleviate any supply surpluses.

Alan Aguirre Camou, Divine Flavor's chief marketing officer, said it is a trial-and-error proposition that involves a learning curve to determine which varieties work best and what is the best timing for each crop and each area.

The two company executives noted that changing climate patterns have also played a big role in establishing continuous supply.



Alan Aguirre Camou

Production from the Culiacan area of Sinaloa in West Mexico used to start in earnest in December and then continue with strong volume through the spring. Bon said that for the past few years, industry folks would judge the Sinaloa area using past production dates and note that it was late again. "For a while, every year has been late," he said. "It's no longer late anymore; now it's normal."

He believes the timing has shifted at least three weeks later with peak production no longer even possible in December. "Right now, we are starting towards our peak," Bon said on January 3. "The old timing isn't coming back."

He added that the deal has also lengthened with April and May still offering good volume as spring turns to summer. Camou added that the Central Mexico deal, which covers the majority of Divine Flavor's volume needs during the summer months, has also gone through changes. Again, with trial and error, examining case studies and constant communication with growers, the company has built a new supply chain that includes more growing districts and more production.

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“We have become much more structured. We used to be in this war fighting with sticks,” Camou said. “Now we are fighting with guns.”

It has done this by increasing the districts in which it grows product. Bon said each commodity and each variety is different and requires its own metrics to produce the desired result, which is continuous supply. “Roma tomatoes is one of the more difficult crops,” he said. “We will literally be sourcing tomatoes from six different (Mexican) states for the summer months.”

As a general rule of thumb, West Mexico is the production leader in the winter and spring with Central Mexico carrying the load in summer, and fall production mostly originating from Baja California. Bon said the November/December time period is the most challenging now that West Mexico doesn’t really get going until January.

**Divine Flavor specializes in a handful of commodities. Bon said Bell peppers and Roma tomatoes are its “warhorses” with beefsteak and grape tomatoes, cucumbers, mini peppers and squash, especially organic squash, also being very important commodities. During the late spring and summer months, Divine Flavor is also an important player in the table grape business with strong volume of both conventional and organic grapes. Again, diversity of supply is a key factor with production coming from Jalisco and Sonora in Mexico and also from California in the summer.**

Surveying the current supply, Bon said “no news is good news” meaning there have been no issues that have hurt production. “So far, everything is going according to plan. We are expecting very good supplies throughout the winter and spring from West Mexico,” he said.

While the company does get requests from buyers to source other products from time to time, Bon said Divine Flavor is content being a specialist in the aforementioned items it does well. He noted that they also want to be able to differentiate themselves from their competition with variety, flavor and their surety of supply. He noted that the company is vertically integrated, which is a key component of its success. Having its own production is a key part of the equation.

[Tim Linden](#)



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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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