



Colombia could end the year with 23.7% more avocados

The Hass avocado is one of the most promising stars of Colombian agriculture, to the point that it is seen as one of the examples to follow in order to diversify their exporting matrix. At the beginning of the year, according to businessmen's reports, prices of this fruit in Europe had gone from US \$16 to US \$4 per box. In the second part of the year, however, everything is under control again, and estimates from the Ministry of Agriculture say that there will be a 23.7% growth in fruit production in 2018.

According to the Ministry, this year the country will have 15,350 hectares planted with Hass avocado, i.e. 15% more hectares than in the area last year. As a result, and because the crop's productivity is expected to grow from eight to nine tons per hectare, the country is expected to produce 95,250 tons.

The leading departments in the production of hass avocado are Tolima, Caldas, and Antioquia (with 28,197, 21,209, and 18,917 tons, respectively); while the departments with the most productivity are Antioquia, Tolima, and Risaralda (with 10.6, 10, and 9.2 tons per hectare, respectively).

Rodolfo Ahumada, the commercial director of Pacific Fruits International, said that this improvement in fruit production will coincide with a market that has already recovered from the price crisis. "Colombia ships 95% of the avocado it produces to Europe. The behavior of prices was negative because of the Peruvian season, which flooded the market and led to a decrease in prices, which we had not seen in five years. Things already normalized and, when we start our peak season in October, there won't be any competitor that puts pressure on prices, as only Chile will be in the market and they don't have the same volumes," he said.

In addition, Ahumada said that producers are opening the US market, and are gradually improving their exports to North America. Last year, only one farm was authorized to sell to that market; currently three farms have permission of the ICA to do so and, according to the manager of Pacific Fruits, there are currently 15 plantations in the process of getting this certification.

The success of the Hass avocado is also being replicated in other avocado varieties. The Ministry expects total avocado production will amount to 403,184 tons, which implies there will be a growth of 7.25%. The area devoted to this fruit is expected to grow by 7% and amount to 73,986 hectares, while productivity is expected to reach 10 tons per hectare, one more than those achieved last year.



These numbers consolidate Colombia as the fourth biggest producer of avocado worldwide, with 7% of the world's production, only behind Mexico, which produces two million tons, Peru (643,443 tons) and the Dominican Republic (487,272 tons).

The plans for Asia and the Middle East

The commercial director of Pacific Fruits said that they were currently evaluating exporting Hass avocado to a couple of additional destinations in the Middle East and Asia Pacific. "We are currently working on the opening of two new markets: Singapore and Saudi Arabia. Asian purchases are growing. They are demanding avocados and are paying adequate prices. They are in need of a different avocado, one that can arrive well to that destination after a 30-day trip," he said.

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