

Mexico adopts measures to prevent tomato virus from spreading

Mexico's agricultural authorities have established a series of actions to prevent the so-called rugose tomato virus from spreading in the country.

The National Health, Food Safety and Quality Service (Senasica), an agency of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (Sader), established phytosanitary measures, such as restricting the importation of seeds for experimental and research purposes, as well as modifying 233 kinds of combinations and requirements for the import of seeds, plants, seedlings, and cuttings of tomatoes, chili, and eggplant.

The virus is known as the Tomato Brown Rugose Fruit Virus (ToBRFV). The first cases in Mexico were detected in 2018 in tomatoes of the saladette variety. It can cause roughness in the fruit, dry some of its parts, and cause the leaves and the stem to have a yellow color.

In Mexico, it is present in 20 states and mainly affects tomato and chili crops in the fields and greenhouses.

This pest is characterized by the development of a light to severe mottle of the leaves, with an occasional narrow appearance. The fruits also present symptoms of brown coloration and yellow spots.

The tomato brown rugose virus is a tobamovirus that is transmitted mechanically through the hands of workers, clothing, tools, and greenhouse structure, as well as work machines, such as tractors in the open field. This type of virus is able to remain infective in seeds, plant remains, and contaminated soil for months and years.

To prevent its spread, Senasica has trained technicians and producers in the states of Baja California, Guanajuato, Sonora and



the State of Mexico. They will soon conduct trainings in Sinaloa, one of the main producers, and Queretaro.

Prevention measures are the main tool to avoid infection, so the Senasica suggests taking care of the processes to prevent direct contamination, using certified seeds, and raising biosafety measures in the production units.

"If producers detect a plant with symptoms, we suggest they remove it from the root to avoid contact with the other plants, deposit it in a plastic bag and burn it. Another recommended measure is to restrict the entry of personnel to areas with positive detections," Senasica recommended in a statement.

According to the 2018 Agricultural Food Atlas, Mexico is the tenth biggest producer of tomatoes in the world with a production of approximately 3.5 million tons per year. 70% of the national tomato is produced under protected conditions and among the main producing states are: Sinaloa, San Luis Potosi, Michoacan, Jalisco, and Zacatecas.

Not only is it the most important vegetable for Mexicans, but over the years its price to consumer has been an important component of the inflation index.

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