



Collaboration for sustainable production of vegetables



The Mexican Vegetables Project



How it all started

The Mexican Association of Protected Horticulture A.C. (AMHPAC) represents more than 6,000 hectares (ha) of protected horticulture out of a total protected horticultural area of some 15,000 ha in Mexico. The main crops grown under protected conditions in Mexico are tomatoes, bell peppers and cucumbers. They are, in fact, Mexico's three most important crops, mainly grown for export although domestic consumption is also a significant factor. AMHPAC associates are found in 25 Mexican states but the main growing area is in the north-west of the country where shadehouses are the predominant horticultural system. In other areas of Mexico, mainly in the Central Region, AMHPAC associates also grow vegetables under glass and in high-tech plastic greenhouses.

Vegetable farmers in Mexico are confronted by a wide variety of food safety requirements, mandatory certifications, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency tolerances, Maximum residue levels (MRL), U.S. Food and Drug Administration guidelines and the like. As a result, a group of AMHPAC associates expressed an interest in obtaining Safe Quality Food (SQF) certification. It was at this stage that AMHPAC contacted Bayer CropScience to discuss the idea of a Food Chain Partnership. Besides seeing benefits for its associates in implementing good agricultural practices (GAP), AMHPAC thought that such a partnership would be supportive in the SQF certification process, particularly with respect to fulfilment of the agrochemicals requirement in the certification process. For this reason, a Food Chain Partnership agreement was signed with the SQF representative and Bayer CropScience to ensure the latter's participation in the SQF certification process.

Eric Viramontes, AMHPAC Executive President, explained: "The SQF guidelines are the ones we are looking for as an organisation in order to satisfy and ultimately promote the adjustment of the food chain. In this respect, the Food Chain Partnership agreement with Bayer CropScience represents a step forward in order to be successful."



Who is involved

AMHPAC has some 250 associates representing a large number of vegetable producers, including some international companies. The high quality of their produce and the fact that they can bring vegetables to market all year round place these producers in the upper tiers of the market for both exports and domestic consumption. They produce greenhouse vegetables, 60% of which are exported. The most important market is the USA, partly because of its proximity and partly because of the high, year-round demand for fresh vegetables.

Bayer CropScience Mexico provides AMHPAC associates with support in the SQF certification process and improving production processes through technical training, GAP training, information and services such as empty container management. This support is provided with the aim of helping the associates to fulfil the demands of foreign or local customers. Bayer CropScience's experts in Mexico have the know-how on crop protection and an innovative portfolio of products well-suited to protected horticultural production systems.



César Campaña
Chairman of the Board of AMHPAC

What we aimed to achieve

This Food Chain Partnership project has a number of goals:

- Offer sustainable solutions to farmers based on the knowledgeable use of Bayer CropScience products in protected horticultural production systems
- Support the development of Mexican protected horticulture, mainly with regard to exports
- Provide added value for the farmers through fulfilment of safety requirements
- Support the certification process

AMHPAC advises farmers that SQF certification is the best way of satisfying their customers' demands for high-quality vegetables that are certified as safe and available at competitive prices. However, farmers are naturally free to choose other certification systems and some go for Primus GFS, Mexico Calidad Suprema or Global GAP/ Mexico GAP.

The integrated approach

Bayer CropScience drew on its R&D and business resources to come up with recommendations for crop and pollinator protection products that are best suited to the AMHPAC associates' protected horticulture systems. With its innovative product portfolio, Bayer CropScience's experts advised an integrated pest and disease management applying products like Movento®, Belt®, Oberon®, Previcur Energy®, Consento® and Scala® that are well positioned within the overall scheme.

Training was also an integral part of the plan and Bayer CropScience conducted courses on Maximum residue levels (MRLs), the safe use and management of crop protection products, integrated pest management, post-harvest management, resistance management and technical topics. The courses were tailored to the specific needs of the various groups of farmers.

AMHPAC associates already carry out some mandatory analyses (e.g. for residues) to satisfy their customers' requirements. However, Bayer CropScience has also supported several associates with cholinesterase analyses, a mandatory worker safety requirement mandated by various certification systems.





What we achieved

Through an on-going dialogue with farmers Bayer CropScience was able to identify their needs and at the same time build up an excellent relationship with AMHPAC staff. AMHPAC associates who have worked with Bayer CropScience greatly appreciate the support provided in satisfying the requirements of purchasers, importers and certification bodies. And they have recognised the quality, efficacy and utility of Bayer CropScience products for their spray programme within the scope of an integrated pest and disease management programme.

César Campaña, AMHPAC Chairman of the Board, pointed out: "For us farmers it is extremely important to promote standards that bring order into the market. The safety and quality of our produce and the traceability of our processes are elements that are promoting a reform of the industry. Farmers who don't follow such practices are bound to disappear."

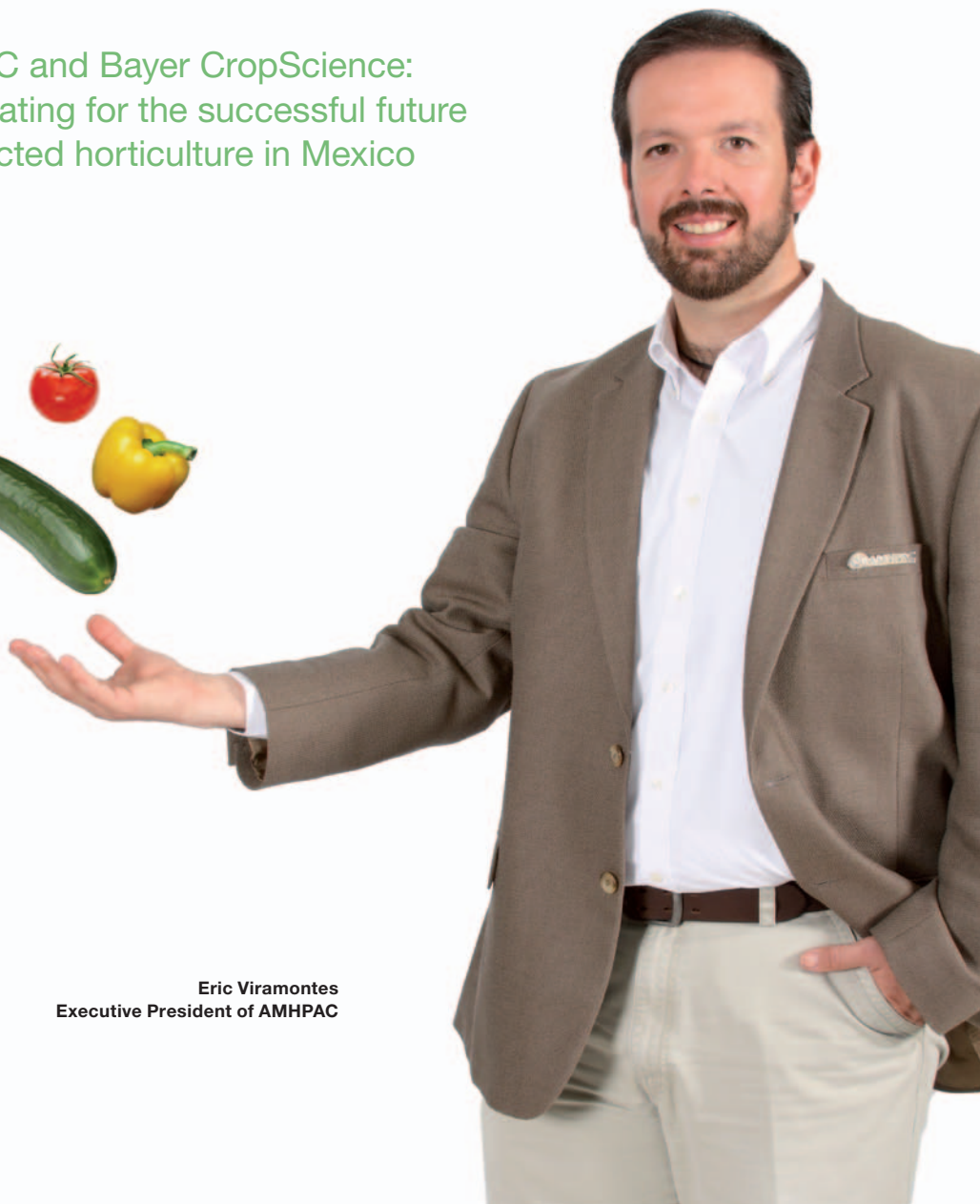
Next steps

The contract between AMHPAC and Bayer CropScience will be renewed for another period of two years. Here, the focus will be on supporting other groups of associates in satisfying the food safety requirements of their customers (importers, retailers and supermarkets). Since all the parties involved are very satisfied with the results achieved so far, this Food Chain Partnership is a successful on-going project for the future.

AMHPAC and Bayer CropScience:
collaborating for the successful future
of protected horticulture in Mexico



Eric Viramontes
Executive President of AMHPAC





Consumers are becoming increasingly conscious of the need for healthy nutrition. Food Chain Partnerships help to supply consumers with high-quality fresh produce, which forms the basis of a healthy diet. But such partnerships can only succeed if they involve every player in the food chain – from the farmer and processor to the exporter or importer and retailer. Bayer CropScience has the global experience and cutting-edge expertise to create a successful partnership at every level.



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