

California-based Driscoll's plans to phase out its sourcing of the public blackberry variety Tupi in Mexico over the next eight years, replacing it with sweeter cultivars in sync with an expanding surface area. 

Driscoll's Blackberry CMx supply manager Gerardo Cruz tells *www.freshfruitportal.com* he sources from around 3,000 acres - more than one seventh of Mexico's blackberry production - of which 40% of purchases are Tupi.

"We sell Tupi to the whole world, but the new varieties have a higher brix and are being accepted very well, and in that way we can differentiate ourselves from the competition," he says.

"The average brix of Tupi blackberries is around 10° but our varieties Catherine and Dasha are above 13°.

"We have a variety substitution program that is planned for eight years, in which we expect to find a Driscoll's variety that can replace Tupi, and change it."

The company plans to grow its Mexican blackberry surface area to 5,000 acres by 2018. Cruz says around 70% of current production is in Los Reyes, Michoacán, but most new plantings will be in the state of Jalisco, where Driscoll's already sources the fruit from Ciudad Guzman, Jocotepec and Mazamitla.

"We are mainly moving toward Jalisco. The fields in Michoacán are already very saturated and we are possibly seeing risks of monocultures with just blackberries, so we are looking at bigger areas with more land available and water.

However, the catch is that Los Reyes has an "exceptional climate" in the winter period.

"We don't have frosts in the area of Los Reyes and have favorable weather. We have some problems in Jalisco and a bit in Jacona, Michoacán where we can have frosts and a bit of hail, but our growers have a program where we invite them to cover with tunnels, in a semi-protected system to ensure the harvest for our clients."

The manager adds that Mexico's biggest advantage is a climate and geography that allows it to produce fruit when the United States is short on supply.

"We produce in form in October, continuing through to February, when the United States still hasn't started its harvest. A lot of times we expect to produce until April or May.

"The United States finishes its season at the start of September and we have been trying to produce in that month , but unfortunately, Mexico also doesn't have fruit because of the rain, causing problems for the fruit due to fungus and high water content.

"There was too much rain this year. It rained 40% more than usual with a lot of floods. Fortunately, the part of Michoacan was not so affected, and Jalisco was a bit but we had the fortune that the zones where we grow were not impacted."

He says the company ships 80% of its blackberries to the United States, while the rest are sold in Europe (10-15%), Asia (2-5%) and Mexico (5%).

"Today there is a program from the company toward China, and that's our main objective in Asia to promote sales. We have been sending blackberries to China for two years now, to Hong Kong."

Photo: Driscoll's

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