

By Waldo Hudson Klapp, director of school of natural resources at Duoc UC

✘ On Mar. 12, 1989, the United States and Canada rejected Chilean table grapes following detection by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of cyanide traces in a shipment at the Port of Philadelphia.

Without a doubt, it was a dark day for Chilean agriculture, creating an automatic disaster. Losses reached close to US\$300 million in those years, not counting the damage done to the national image as a producer and exporter of safe fruits and vegetables.

The incident was a milestone for Chile, however, because it established the importance of tracing the supply chain for foods destined for foreign markets.

In other words, efforts began to establish traceability, or the ability to find and track food for both humans and animals through all levels of production, processing and distribution.

Businesses at that time implemented voluntary systems but in 2005, this became an obligatory management and monitoring process for export with the establishment of the U.S. anti-bioterrorism law and Regulation No. 178 by the European Union.

Thinking of promoting Chile as an agricultural power without considering traceability is now impossible. It is a minimum from which we should start working.

Chile today has all of the tools and technologies to achieve traceability for its agriculture and livestock, enabling the nation to set itself apart from competitors and ensure food safety. But we need to take a step further to turn ourselves into an agricultural power.

Recently, the minister of agriculture said the agriculture industry is short 40,000 workers, especially for temporary work. This shortage of skilled agriculture workers is a reflection of greater need. The lack is evident regarding qualified specialists who could implement and control food product traceability.

After becoming aware of this deficit and consulting a panel of 50 industry professionals, we decided to implement a new major at the university Duoc UC to train agricultural food technicians in quality and safety control. A trained technician will be capable of ensuring product safety, and enforcing norms and hygiene standards required by importers.

Currently, the industry is prepared to offer jobs to anyone trained in this area, a reason why future graduates can count on a very attractive monthly income of around CLP\$450,000 (US\$950) in the first year and up to CLP\$800,000 (US\$1,690) in the fourth year.

Estimates indicate that there are around 6,000 agriculture companies certified and qualified for the export market. These companies will potentially need to hire technicians.

Training efforts aim to enforce the country's sustainability. Businesses have received the university's news well and although no technicians have graduated yet, they are already asking us for specialists. Their reception reaffirms that traceability is an indispensable process that can turn Chile into an agricultural force.

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