

After a year of efforts from private industry, the Colombian government has decided to include fruit growers in its Program of Productive Transformation (PTP), with the goal of raising seven of the country's crops to world class export status.



The deal reached between the Colombian Horticultural Association (Asofrucol) and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism (MINCIT) aims to lift the profile of the papaya, pineapple, mango, strawberry, avocado, onion and chile pepper industries to respond to strong global demand.

"The program aims to generate a public-private alliance through which a series of initiatives are generated and that will enhance the opportunities that each sector has," said Asofrucol private manager Marisol Vargas in conversation with [www.freshfruitportal.com](http://www.freshfruitportal.com).

The PTP is divided into three sectors: services, manufacturing and agribusiness, with the latter focused on improving the fruit and vegetable sector.

The PTP's methodology for horticulture falls under four key areas, which are legal (phytosanitary laws, procedures and exports); human capital (training and education for each sector); infrastructure and sustainability (road and port infrastructure, logistics centers, technology); and "strengthening" (promotion and innovation).

"We have identified that the country has a series of conditions that are very favorable for the determined products with excellent quality and performance," Vargas said.

To better understand the industry's opportunities, a study was conducted by consultancy

LKS Scoop, which is part of international group Mondragón.

"Basically, the objective of the business plan is to identify all the strategic lines in which we have to work to make the sector world class," she said.

The consultancy carried out the study for eight months and established five phases to define and prioritize for Colombia's products to start improving on the export front.

"International and national advantage analyses took place where five fruits and two vegetables were prioritized: avocados, especially the Hass variety which is the most traded as fresh in the international level. However, there could also be a place for Colombia's native or creole varieties.

She said strawberries could either be for the frozen or fresh markets, while mango growers could focus on two industries - fresh exports including the varieties Keitt, Tommy Atkins and eventually Kent, and the industrial market utilizing other varieties. The manager mentioned key papaya varieties would include Solo, Tainung, Hawaiian and Golden.

The executive mentioned the courses of action defined in the plan's strategy would carry over the next 15 years.

She said the goal was to make Colombia one of the world's top eight avocado exporters by 2030, and on the path to do this the goal is to have 8,000 hectares of the Hass variety planted by 2020, generating 10,000 direct jobs. Likewise, it is also hoped the mango industry will be among the top 8 shippers in the world, with 20,000 hectares planted by 2020 and new methods to reduce seasonality.

This golden ranking is also in mind for chile pepper growers, who ought to reach fresh production of 29,000 metric tons (MT) by 2020.

The goals are even more ambitious for strawberries, with plans to be among the world's top five exporters of the fruit by 2030. Vargas hoped the industry would achieve 12,000 hectares of the berry by 2020, leading to more than one thousand direct jobs, along with plans to reduce post-harvest losses by improving handling and cold chains.

Perhaps the boldest aim is to place Colombia's papaya industry in the world's top three for exports, with 6,000 hectares cultivated and methods to overcome disease issues.

Hopes are high that the cultivated area dedicated to onions will reach 17,000 hectares by 2020, and that exporting will begin.

Photo: [www.shutterstock.com](http://www.shutterstock.com)

[www.freshfruitportal.com](http://www.freshfruitportal.com)