

A northern Chilean table grape grower has offered his facilities to be used as a distribution center for the post-flood Atacama relief effort, as well as a military precinct and refuge for hundreds of people left stranded.

Jaime Prohens Espinosa has taken a leadership role in supporting recovery around the areas of Apacheta and Los Loros, and says charity work from around the country has been "incredible".

"When you see people suffer it takes you out of any context. It's the first time in my life that I've participated like this in a direct way," he told www.freshfruitportal.com.

"In a tragedy like this, materials recover but there are no words for the human side. Personally, it impacts me a lot."

He said that after the flood hit his Apacheta property on March 24, his operation and the community were left isolated with access to roads, electricity and water all cut off.

"Afterwards we tried to open up the pass to the town of Los Loros, because the truck of one of our refrigeration workers was stuck in front of the mud, so with a truck we managed to get him out and take him down there," Prohens said.

"Then we returned here and our field administrator Fernando Barraza told me one of our workers who has been with us many years had serious problems in her house, but that she didn't want to leave it or her things.

"So I went with my vehicle to her house and it really made an impression on me - she would take out one bucket of water but another three would come in."



Jaime Prohens Espinoza



Instances like these continued with the Prohens team picking people up from around the zone, and they eventually formed a camp at the facilities of some 80 people.

"Some of them lost everything. Fernando and I went to visit the town and a school teacher was in charge of managing the people, and you could see he was very upset. We saw there were kids and the elderly sleeping on the floor on top of newspapers and cardboard, so there I took the decision to take mattresses to the school so people could have at least the minimum level of comfort.

"We have a tank of potable water so we made constant trips to the town with it. It was like this for three days, and on the fourth day the military arrived and things changed; issues of food and water were resolved, and everything started to get more organized.

"For the use of my facilities, I don't have a deadline. We must take all the time that is needed."

Click [here for more stories](#) relating to recent floods in northern Chile and their impact on the country's produce sector.

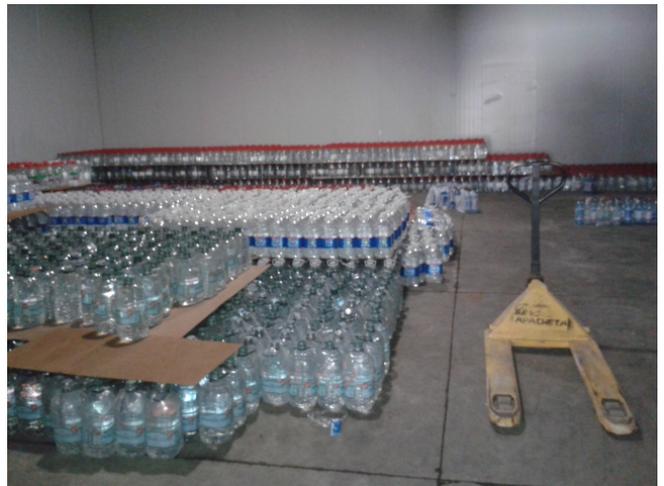
When the flood hit the company had two days' worth of grapes of good quality to be harvested, but Prohens had to neglect that fruit. The grapes still in storage were sent to another distribution center when the road was opened up, making way for supplies that came by way of the non-profit 'Desafío Levantemos Chile', which loosely translates as the 'Let's lift up Chile Challenge'.

"The following week we had a group of 22 people come with the mission of restoring the kindergarten. When there is a catastrophe of this magnitude, they said the first thing you have to attend to is the safety of the children because they suffer more than an adult.

"You can see it - yesterday a few clouds formed and many kids started to panic, because they thought it would rain again and they would live the same story again."

He said the kindergarten restoration took 1.5 days, before a group of specialist architects, builders and engineers came to make the finishing touches.

Prohens said his days now were divided between working on the business in the morning, and helping the community as much as he can in the afternoon.



"I am giving accommodation to almost 250 people between here and Los Loros; we could have given them more, but there's a camp that's completely lost, buried in 1.5 meters of mud."

Prohens approach to his farm damages is indicative of just how bad the impacts have been for other growers.

"Thankfully I just had damages to vines in one zone...a maximum of 25 hectares have been damaged," he said, with a plan to recover part of the land this year and the rest in the future.

"Thankfully I didn't have any damages to the irrigation system.

"Next season will be normal. We will aim to carry it out as normal and minimize the damage."

For importers looking to support the relief effort in the Atacama region, Prohens recommended they contact '[Desafio Levantemos Chile](#)' to see how they can help.



www.freshfruitportal.com