

Florida-based produce company Crystal Valley Foods says that the Guatemalan produce industry has become "more sophisticated" over the last several years.



Marketing director Katiana Valdes said Crystal Valley Foods, a member of the Guatemalan Produce Trade Association (GPTA), first started importing from the country 20 years ago.

"They have excellent food safety and good manufacturing practices and because of this, and the climate, the quality of fruits and vegetables that comes from this region is top-notch," she said.

"Guatemala has become a key production area for counter-seasonal fruits and vegetables. It is the primary growing region for melons in the winter for the North American market, as well as a large percent of the Asian vegetables imported in the winter months."

She added that Guatemala's variety of microclimates allows for a variety of fruits and vegetables to be grown there year-round and throughout the country.

"The country is also a short ride away from U.S. ports so it helps to get product here faster and at lower costs," she said.

The company grows French beans, English peas, baby corn, sugar snap peas, snow peas, tomatoes, peppers, baby squash, and baby carrots in the Central American country, and is one of the biggest importers of many of these products.

Valdes said that Crystal Valley Foods's Guatemalan berry program continues to grow, and it is working with a variety of new growers and importing rising blackberry volume.

Southern Specialties vice president of business development Charlie Eagle also believed the country had a lot to offer.

"Several factors position Guatemala as a significant supplier to the U.S. For example, excellent growing conditions, several microclimates, rich volcanic soil, abundant clean water, and the experienced labor force," he said.

"Trade with Guatemala has many advantages and one that stands out is the cold chain management capabilities."

Southern Specialties was incorporated 1990, but members of the company's executive team have been involved with production and importing quality produce from Guatemala since the early 1980s, according to Eagle.

He added that Southern Specialties has made "significant investments" in the infrastructure of Guatemala's farms and facilities that enable the company to meet the stringent standards of the U.S. and Canada.

Southern Specialties imports a range of produce items, including French beans, snow peas, sugar snaps, heirloom and other specialty tomatoes, radicchio, baby vegetables, limes, blackberries and papaya.

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